

# **Globalising the Haitian Revolution in Black Paris: C.L.R. James, metropolitan anti-imperialism in interwar France and the writing of *The Black Jacobins***

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## **Abstract**

This article will focus on the black Trinidadian Marxist historian C.L.R. James and how his exposure to French as part of his colonial education and sojourns and researches in interwar France shaped the writing of his anti-colonial classic, the monumental account of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins* (1938), which not only helped ‘globalise’ that revolution but also the French Revolution. Much of James’s archival research was undertaken in France, yet James also engaged with contemporary French revolutionary historiography and metropolitan anti-imperialism in ‘Black Paris’ outside of the archives, and he met many critical Francophone Pan-Africanist figures including Léon-Gontran Damas, Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté and Auguste Nemours. This article will explore such intellectual relationships and Pan-Africanist networks and examine how they illuminate wider issues relating to empire, race and resistance in France during the 1930s, amidst a context of economic crisis and the rise of the ‘Popular Front’ government.

## **Keywords**

C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, Haiti, France, Black Paris, Pan-Africanism, anti-imperialism

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Eighty years after its first publication in 1938, the status of C.L.R. James's masterful history of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, *The Black Jacobins* as an anti-colonial masterpiece is assured. In 2016, the work topped a *Guardian* list of 'the top ten books of radical history', with Sheila Rowbotham summarising the work and its importance:

James, an exploratory Trotskyist who loathed imperialism, racism and class power in equal measure, writes graphically about the 1791 slave rebellion in the French colony of San Domingo [Saint-Domingue] (later Haiti) led by Toussaint L'Ouverture. With calls for the French revolutionaries' liberty and equality to apply to the colonised, they overcame the whites who enslaved them, a Spanish and a British invasion and then the army sent by Napoleon Bonaparte. The memory of this revolt and of its historian have proved resilient. When I mentioned L'Ouverture and James to a Haitian cab driver in New York I was given a free ride!<sup>1</sup>

In the field of British imperial and commonwealth history, the work also made Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr's 2014 selection of 'ten books that shaped the British Empire', with Aaron Kamugisha hailing its place in 'the making of the modern Atlantic world'.<sup>2</sup> The work – alongside the classic *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) by Eric Williams, James's Trinidadian compatriot and one-time student - revolutionised scholarship on race, colonial slavery and abolition. Both works fundamentally challenged the intellectual foundations of a long-standing invented British nationalist tradition of imperial

‘humanitarianism’, which justified the expansion of European power with the myth that slavery really had been abolished through a ‘moral crusade’ waged from above by European states after campaigning work by philanthropic parliamentary politicians like William Wilberforce. In *The Black Jacobins*, James – himself the great-grandson of enslaved people in the Anglophone Caribbean – did more than give ‘slaves an agency’ as James Walvin has written; he made the self-activity of the enslaved themselves central to the story of emancipation from slavery and the slave-trade, rather than lauding those he called ‘the “philanthropy plus five percent” hypocrites in the British Houses of Parliament’.<sup>3</sup>

The late great Jamaican cultural theorist Stuart Hall, in his 1998 discussion of how James came to write *The Black Jacobins*, stressed the importance of James’s campaigning anti-colonial activism as a Trinidadian nationalist and his raising of ‘The Case for West Indian Self-Government’, the title of a 1933 booklet by James. As Hall put it, ‘what is riveting ... is the way in which the historical work and the foregrounded political events are part of a kind of seamless web. They reinforce one another.’<sup>4</sup> Clearly there was the plight of occupied Haiti itself, under American military domination from 1915 until 1934.<sup>5</sup> Hall also had in mind the way in which James – a British West Indian colonial subject - was ‘fired’ by the arc of heroic Caribbean Labour Rebellions which swept the British West Indies from 1935 onwards as ‘those workers involved in the sugar industry, in oil, and on the docks – the most proletarianized sectors – became conscious of their power’.<sup>6</sup> Though James himself – like Williams – had made the move from Trinidad to Britain in 1932, unlike Williams, James had thrown himself into political activism during the tumult of the 1930s, becoming a leading theorist of both the international Trotskyist movement but also the militant Pan-Africanist movement in Britain. James put his historical consciousness and knowledge of the Haitian Revolution to the service of trying to help ideologically arm the various liberation struggles across the African and Caribbean diaspora – and the impact of not only the Caribbean labour

rebellions of the 1930s but events such as Mussolini's war on the people of Ethiopia, the Copperbelt mineworkers strike in what is now Zambia, and the Spanish Civil War helped shape the writing of *The Black Jacobins* as a revolutionary classic.

Though it had its roots in colonial Trinidad, in a fundamental sense, *The Black Jacobins* itself was then written and emerged out of the 'counter-culture' and racialised space and place of 'Black London', part of a sort of golden age of black publishing in Britain in the mid-to-late 1930s which, as Carol Polsgrove has examined, saw works appear not only by James such as *World Revolution* and *A History of Negro Revolt* but also by other Pan-Africanists such as the Kenyan nationalist Jomo Kenyatta (*Facing Mount Kenya*) and the black Trinidadian socialist George Padmore (*How Britain Rules Africa* and *Africa and World Peace*).<sup>7</sup> As Marc Matera notes in his superb recent work tracing 'the rich social and intellectual world' of 'Black London', the imperial metropolis was 'a site of African diasporic formation, intellectual production, and political organizing where the larger context of empire represented the generative common ground for African and Afro-Caribbean intellectuals' and artists' imaginings of a global black community'.<sup>8</sup>

Yet as well as emerging out of 'Black London' and shaping and to a degree also 'shaking' the British Empire, Charles Forsdick has suggestively noted *The Black Jacobins* should also surely 'be read as one of the early literary traces of Black Paris', given James's frequent visits to the French capital for research into the Haitian Revolution during his time in Britain from 1932-1938. As Forsdick notes, 'The original experience of James in the 1930s capital is a reminder that Black Paris is far from being a "Franco-francophone" phenomenon, and that the anglophone contribution to the creation of this space was not only North American but originated also from the English-speaking Caribbean'.<sup>9</sup> Yet scholars are only really beginning the work of mapping James's sojourns in inter-war France, his archival researches undertaken there, his experience of the counter-cultures of 'Black Paris', his

relationship with Francophone Pan-Africanists from Africa and the Caribbean, his more ambivalent relationship with a wider Francophone world of letters – and how all this shaped *The Black Jacobins*.<sup>10</sup>

Stuart Hall rightly drew attention to James's 'very profound and complicated feelings towards Europe', noting 'he's formed by Europe, he feels himself to be a European intellectual' but also himself always maintained 'he was in, but not entirely of Europe'.<sup>11</sup> This article will explore some of the complexities of James's early relationship to continental Europe as a black colonial subject from the Anglophone Caribbean, framed through a discussion of his experiences and travels in interwar France. As a colonial subject who would become a leading anti-colonial activist and militant Pan-Africanist, James viewed French society through the lens of colour, allowing us an important insight into how race and the colonial dimension of metropolitan politics manifested themselves in Europe during the 1930s. Given France also experienced great social and political tumult in these years amidst a context of economic crisis and the rise of the 'Popular Front' government, some of which James experienced at first hand, we will also explore how this shaped both James's thinking about strategies of colonial liberation and the writing of *The Black Jacobins* itself.

### **A Francophile in Port of Spain**

From a young age in colonial Trinidad, James had developed a keen interest in French literature, no doubt perhaps stimulated by learning French at Queen's Royal College (QRC), the elite school in Port of Spain, to which he had won an exhibition scholarship. 'They told me to read Balzac, *Les Chouans*, but I finished my *Chouans* in about ten days and I went off and read a lot of other Balzac.'<sup>12</sup> James's mother Ida Elizabeth (Bessie) was also a great reader of Balzac, and he himself would soon appreciate other writers including Molière, Corneille, Racine, Flaubert, Théophile Gautier, Victor Hugo and Lamartine.<sup>13</sup>

Trinidad had been hugely influenced by the arrival of French settlers in the 1780s who came to dominate the island's planter elite, and James would have learnt more about the dark side of French civilisation when, in 1921 – now a teacher of English and History back at QRC, he read the Martinican writer René Maran's Prix Goncourt award-winning novel of that year, *Batouala*, a devastating expose of French colonialism in Africa, tellingly subtitled 'a real Negro novel'.<sup>14</sup> Once when giving English lessons to the French consul, James remembered 'we talked about European history'.

He was strong on Bismarck's policy towards the East, I on imperialist intrigues resulting in the partition of Africa. He passed disparaging remarks on the colonial policies of Great Britain; I pointed out the similarities with those of his own country. We had a good time and he told me a lot about diplomacy that isn't written in books.<sup>15</sup>

In his first book, *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* (1932), a biography of Arthur Andrew Cipriani, the leader of the mass social democratic nationalist Trinidad Workingmen's Association, James, in keeping with his very Victorian notion of 'national character' which had been ingrained into him as a result of his public school education, declared in passing that 'the Frenchman, the Spaniard, the Chinaman' and 'the Englishman' and so on 'are recognised types'. James was not uncritical of 'the Frenchman'. Like the Americans, their 'men of business' were 'given to fraud' and the French overall lacked 'a streak of idealism in their nature' and so perhaps unduly suffered 'from the follies of a life of reason'. Yet, according to James, they found 'ordinary social intercourse' easy, even with 'persons of different race and upbringing to themselves' and the

fact they apparently had ‘little or no colour prejudice’ made them ‘in intellectual and social culture the most advanced people in Europe’.<sup>16</sup>

James’s Francophilia was perhaps influenced by that of the Victorian cultural critic Matthew Arnold, whose liberal humanism was an important early intellectual influence on James.<sup>17</sup> Arnold would always praise the French Revolution as ‘the greatest, the most animating event in history’, an event which had created a distinctively modern nation, ‘the country in Europe where *the people* is most alive’.<sup>18</sup> While in Trinidad, James had already begun thinking of writing about how the French Revolution ‘animated’ the enslaved masses of colonial Saint-Domingue to make their own great revolution, and he made further research into the Haitian Revolution a priority after making his ‘voyage in’ to imperial Britain in 1932, ordering relevant books from France. In London soon after his arrival, James happened to meet a Frenchwoman, a little older than himself.

One day I walked into a bookshop to buy a couple of French magazines ... a woman of about forty, dressed in black, came into the shop. She stood looking at some magazines for a while and then when the shop assistant turned her back, she came up to me and spoke in French. Did I read French a lot? As much as I could. Where did I come from? *La Trinité - les Antilles Britanniques*. Was I staying in London a long time? Yes. For some years, I thought. Did I hope to visit France someday? Yes, I very much hoped to. That was very nice. I smiled appreciatively. Goodbye. Goodbye.’<sup>19</sup>

James thought this ‘a slight but charming episode’, one that perhaps reveals something about the ‘exotic’ attraction of James for white women generally.<sup>20</sup> That a white French woman, on encountering a highly educated black colonial subject in

an imperial city like London, seems to have assumed that James must be French as opposed to British, is perhaps also revealing of wider French assumptions about the broader African diaspora in this period.

### **Researching the Haitian Revolution in ‘Black Paris’**

James did not stay long in London after his initial arrival, but instead journeyed to north-east Lancashire to stay for ten months from May 1932 to March 1933 with his compatriot and friend, the great West Indian cricketer Learie Constantine, who played professionally in the Lancashire League for Nelson Cricket Club. His experience of meeting with and learning about socialist politics from members of the English working class in the depression-hit cotton town of Nelson meant these would be ‘ten months that shook the world’ of James politically, giving him a glimpse of a possible ‘postcolonial’ Britain.<sup>21</sup> James’s first visit to France came courtesy of a friend he made in Nelson, Harry Spencer, a small businessman. During the summer of 1933, when James returned to visit Nelson from his new base in London, Spencer, after listening to James enthuse over the latest historical work he had ordered from France and how it fitted into his plans to write on the Haitian Revolution, asked ‘why are you always talking about this book - why don’t you write it?’ When James explained he was saving up to visit the archives in Paris, Spencer gave James ninety pounds to enable him to get ‘on to France’ that winter.<sup>22</sup>

Looking back at his six months spent in Paris researching Haiti, during the winter of 1933 and spring of 1934, James was always very proud that, as a black colonial subject from the British Caribbean, he was able to surprise librarians at La Bibliothèque Nationale with his knowledge of French.<sup>23</sup> Early into his historical researches, James had the good fortune to meet Léon-Gontran Damas, a black student and poet from French Guiana, who would shortly return home to write the notes that would become *Retour de Guyane*, an anti-colonial work

that would be banned in his homeland. James recalled Damas's attitude to him: 'If you are working on the Haitian Revolution, this is the kind of material which you need; I know Paris and sources of material very well and I put my knowledge at your disposal.' James remembered Damas helped him become 'aware of rapid ways in which to get the materials I wanted and needed for examination' in La Bibliothèque Nationale and the Archives Nationales, as well as taking James 'to bookshops which specialized in collecting and selling documents about the colonial revolution and Caribbean history.'<sup>24</sup> James was thus able to consult documents that had rarely received such serious attention since they had been read by the first generation of Haitian historians – figures such as Thomas Madiou and Beaubrun Ardouin – in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> He later recalled how he found it amusing that the French concern for food meant the archives closed for two hours in the middle of the day for lunch.<sup>26</sup>

Lunch hours aside, James nonetheless accordingly recalled how he covered ground 'at a tremendous rate,' in various archives, bookshops and libraries by the banks of the Seine.<sup>27</sup> Intellectually, the experience also led James to radicalize 'at a tremendous rate,' encountering what he would later called term 'the French historical school of the French Revolution ... one of the greatest historical schools of Western civilization', ranging from Jules Michelet to Jean Jaurès (and his *Socialist History of the French Revolution*), and from François Alphonse Aulard to Albert Mathiez.<sup>28</sup> James also read more widely, discovering for example, the French philosopher Henri Bergson, which he remembered led to 'my first break with the philosophy of rationalism', as Bergson 'was startling to me on two counts'.

- (1) He attacked the abstractions of Understanding, their mechanical categorisation, etc., and opposed to this, Intuition.

(2) Humour, he said, was the fulfilment of the desire to see the snob and the aristocrat humbled. So that the well-dressed man slipping on a banana peel was his classic example of humour. It is still individualistic, as it would be in this philosopher, but I remember it broke me with morbid and melancholy philosophy speculation.<sup>29</sup>

Rationalism, which was championed by the Enlightenment, has been defined as an attempt to ‘reconstruct reality by insisting that only those aspects of the world which conform to preconceived canons of reason have any true substance; the rest is insubstantial illusion bound to be condemned to oblivion as rationality gains ground against error and superstition.’<sup>30</sup> Bergson had been part of a wider revolt against ‘positivism’ and ‘naturalism’ that swept Europe during the 1890s, rejecting the tendency to discuss human behavior through analogies drawn from natural sciences and seeking instead to explain and understand what had previously been dismissed as ‘superstition’ and the ‘irrational.’<sup>31</sup> That James found reading Bergson liberating should not really surprise us, as Bergson’s stress on ‘intuition’ was to prove an inspiration to several black colonial subjects in France during the 1930s, including Léopold Senghor (later president of Senegal). Against the white supremacist claims of European imperialism, Senghor drew courage from Bergson’s argument that ‘the objects of discursive reason were only the superficial surface that must be surpassed, by *intuition*, in order to have a deeper vision of the *real*.’<sup>32</sup>

James’s and Senghor’s invocation of Bergson also reminds us that for many black colonial subjects twentieth-century Paris was more than just an intellectual center of the West. Invoking Walter Benjamin’s description of Paris as the ‘Capital of the Nineteenth Century’ in *The Arcades Project* (1939), Jonathan P. Eburne and Jeremy Braddock suggested

that it was also a ‘Capital of the Black Atlantic.’ This manifested itself not only in ‘the transatlantic circulation of ideas, texts, and objects’ that resulted from those black writers from across the African diaspora having visited Paris, but also in ‘the Benjaminian sense of a wish image of diasporic imagination,’ where ‘black Paris’ became a mythological space of tolerance and enlightenment with respect to race.<sup>33</sup> The ‘Negrophilia’ of the white avant-garde in 1920s Paris epitomized by the career of the sensational dancer Josephine Baker is well known, as is the impact of black American musicians and music hall performers in Paris more generally.<sup>34</sup> Less well known is that during the early 1930s, militant and radical black journals such as *La Revue du Monde Noir* and *Légitime défense* flourished and were important precursors to the Negritude movement, born in 1935. Léon-Gontran Damas (who was distantly related by marriage to Paulette Nardal, the founder of *La Revue du Monde Noir*), alongside Léopold Senghor and the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, would be central to the development of the philosophy of Negritude.<sup>35</sup> In his subsequent visits to Paris to research the Haitian Revolution in the 1930s, James recalled Damas ‘was not concerned about educating me into the realities of Negritude because [he knew] I was busy with [other] work which would help the emancipation of Black people.’<sup>36</sup>

Though therefore never part of the Negritude movement himself, James got a taste of the heady atmosphere of ‘black Paris’ as a racialized space when in 1933 he met the Haitian military historian and diplomat Colonel Auguste Nemours. Nemours, former Haitian minister in France, is perhaps best remembered for his intervention as a delegate at the League of Nations in 1935, when he protested against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia with the call: ‘Craignons d’être, un jour, l’Éthiopie de quelqu’un’ [Be afraid of becoming one day someone else’s Ethiopia]. By the time he met James, Nemours had written a two-volume account of the Haitian war of independence, *Histoire militaire de la guerre d’indépendance de Saint-Domingue* (1925 and 1928), and also *Histoire de la captivité et de la mort de*

*Toussaint Louverture* (1929). As James recalled, Nemours was ‘an enthusiastic admirer of Toussaint but exceptionally fair,’ who was keen to explain the military conflicts of Haiti’s revolution and war of independence ‘in great detail, using books and coffee cups on a large table.’<sup>37</sup> James also recalled other contacts that Nemours facilitated: ‘He introduced me to the Haitian Ambassador in Paris who told me a great deal. Whether he knew it or not he gave me great insight into the Mulatto side of the Haitian people.’<sup>38</sup> The nexus of race and class – and the critique of pigmentocracy – that underpins *The Black Jacobins* was therefore clearly embedded in James’s observations of contemporary Haiti as reflected by its representatives in Paris.

The comparatively privileged figure of Nemours also critically confirmed many of James’s preconceived ideas about France itself. As Michael Goebel – author of *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, a fine recent study of ‘interwar Paris and the seeds of Third World nationalism’ - notes, Nemours saw France as ‘peculiarly free of racism’ and in 1932 had ‘even portrayed France as “the protector of the colored races”’, for ‘France’s republican tradition, Nemours argued, implied the rule of law and made France “unique in Europe”’.<sup>39</sup> In March 1934, after James had returned to Britain, he gave a lecture in Nelson titled ‘The Negro’. James’s lecture was reported in the *Nelson Leader* on 16 March 1934, and here he denounced French colonialism in Africa as being even worse than the British in South Africa, noting ‘between 1911 and 1926 3,250,000 natives died in French Equatorial Africa. Big holes were dug and the natives were thrown into them and blown up with dynamite.’ Yet James contrasted the level of racial prejudice in France with that of Britain positively:

The average person in England did not understand the negro. They saw him only dancing and kicking his heels like a half-crazy lunatic; the screen always presented him in an unfair position. People could not get away from the idea that he was fit for

nothing better than the role of shoe-black or railroad porter ... If hearers went across the Channel and investigated conditions in France ... they would find negroes in the French Cabinet, in the ranks of retired naval and army men, in the professions, universities and colleges. France had already disregarded scientific theories, and judged the negro on results.

In early 1936, amidst Fascist Italy's war on the people of Ethiopia, James noted that French and British acquiescence with such barbarism meant 'Mussolini, the British government and the French have shown the Negro only too plainly that he has got nothing to expect from them but exploitation, either naked or wrapped in bluff'.<sup>40</sup> Yet in an 'author's note' written for the programme of the March 1936 London production of his play *Toussaint Louverture*, James again remarked on the comparative lack of racial prejudice in modern France:

The former French colony of San Domingo, today Haiti, is a member of the League of Nations, and Colonel Nemours, its representative, a man of colour, presided over the eighth assembly of the League. The closest and most cordial relationship exists today between white France and coloured San Domingo. The French take a deep interest in a people whose language, cultural traditions and aspiration are entirely French.<sup>41</sup>

It is worth recalling here – a matter that James himself neglected to mention - that Haiti was still paying off its massive 'Independence Debt' to France at this point, and would not finally pay this off until 1947.

## **Guns and Butter**

Though James's six months in Paris were mainly spent on his historical researches, he did not neglect his more directly political work in the cause of making "The Case for West Indian Self-Government". Just before James returned to Britain from France in March 1934, he was joined in Paris by Learie Constantine, and the two friends now embarked on a brief but decidedly unusual mission in Western France ostensibly in the service of West Indian nationalism but also on behalf of a British company, Green Pastures. Green Pastures produced tinned butter in Britain for sale in colonial Trinidad, 'the All-Purpose British Butter', and were enlisting local influential nationalist politicians like Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani and popular well-known figures like Constantine and James as part of a fierce advertising campaign they were waging in the local press to shift public opinion against rival, more heavily salted and so apparently inferior so-called 'red' butters, produced and shipped to Trinidad from France. As a Green Pastures advert in the *Trinidad Guardian* in June 1934 reported,

Both Mr. Constantine and Mr. James are possessed of the keenest public spirit, and when in March this year the statement was made that certain qualities of butter, shipped in the British West Indies from France were not used in that country, and were considered unfit for consumption by the people there, Mr. Constantine and Mr. James voluntarily offered to go and investigate the conditions under which these qualities of butter are produced in France. These two sons of the West Indies made a thorough investigation into the matter, and the result of their investigation has been recorded by Mr. James in a brilliant article written in Mr. James's own inimitable manner.<sup>42</sup>

James's article duly appeared a few days later in Trinidad's *Sunday Guardian*, where he described the visit by Constantine and himself to Morlaix in Brittany the month before. They visited a dirty, poorly organised family farm, and also a local butter factory, where they secured a brief but frank interview with two managers.

We learnt that Morlaix did a great trade in butter with the West Indies, particularly Trinidad. The butter for Trinidad was specially prepared. Why? They did not know exactly. Then they went into detail about the butter going to the West Indies. And then Berrurier said most emphatically, waving his hand in a typically French way: "Of course, we don't use that butter in France. We send it out to colonies."

He suddenly seemed to realise that he was talking to persons from the Colonies. I have said it before, I say it now, and I am going to say it many times before I die, that ninety-nine percent of Europeans when they think of Colonials think of half-naked savages walking about in the forest, and rescued from savagery and all sorts of bestialities by the ennobling influence of European culture.<sup>43</sup>

In the local town shops, Constantine and James were unable to buy local 'Brittany butter' but only butter produced in Normandy, and the same was true in Paris, as James noted in the conclusion to his article.

I went to the Louvre, wandered round the Arc de Triomphe; stood on the Place de la Concorde and saw where Marie Antoinette came out of the Palais de Justice in the little cart, up the incline, across the river and then to the guillotine, while the women of Paris sat round knitting and waiting to see her head fall. A tragic spectacle to remember even at this distance, but Heaven knows the French people had had

provocation enough. Then I sat outside a café and sipped from my coffee and then from my brandy, and then from the coffee again. Giving, I hope, a very passable imitation of a true-born French Colonial. And at intervals during the day I sought Brittany butter. In vain.<sup>44</sup>

Constantine, in a short separate statement, drew the political lessons for Trinidadians.

I can testify from my own observation to the facts which Mr. James has reported in his article and I feel that in associating myself with his statements I am performing a public duty. We in the West Indies suffer from the wrong ideas which people abroad have of us. I, having lived in both Europe and at home and knowing well the people of both, see no reason why what is not considered good enough for them should be passed on to us; and therefore we should not use red butter, as it is not used in France, where it is not considered good enough for the people.<sup>45</sup>

This incident around the production of butter in competing imperial metropolises and their sale in the colonial periphery highlights the complex nature of ‘commodities of empire’ in general.<sup>46</sup> For the 1 August Emancipation Day celebrations in 1934, marking the centenary of the abolition of slavery across the British Empire, Green Pastures even produced a special local film advertisement making the case that such ‘red’ butters were a ‘relic of slavery’.

Investigations recently made, suggest that red and heavily salted butter is one of the relics of slavery days, when the slave-owners forced the slaves to eat bad butter, the bad taste of which was disguised by the heavy addition of salt and colouring matter.

It is suggested that the slave-owners cultivated a taste for bad butter among the slaves for the purpose of creating the impression that people who could eat such bad butter and like it, could not be considered fit for personal freedom. What lends colour to the suggestion is the fact that European people never use these red butters, and smile at those who use it. Of course, the use of red butters in the West Indies has, within the past two years, dwindled considerably, and it looks as if they will be finally ousted from these markets... It is hoped that this film will drive the final nail in the coffin of those dirty red butters, which are made from sour and spoilt cream, and are not used by the inhabitants of France. Certainly what is not good enough for the people of France is not good enough for West Indians! The chairman of the Emancipation Centenary Committee, Capt, the Hon'ble A.A. Cipriani, plays a prominent part in this film, and he says "Do not use what France refuses. Stick to British *Green Pastures*".<sup>47</sup>

### **Red Flags in Black Paris**

This period in spring 1934 was a critical moment in James's intellectual and political evolution, for very soon after his return to Britain he decided to become an organised revolutionary socialist, joining the tiny Trotskyist movement. Never again would James undertake the kind of 'campaigning journalism' on behalf of a British company like Green Pastures, and indeed, James's recent experiences in Paris were crucial to his decision to ultimately break with such 'respectable' forms of West Indian nationalist political activity and throw himself into revolutionary politics.

In February 1934, Paris was experiencing massive civil unrest as the far right hoped to emulate the success of Hitler's Nazis in Germany the year before, through exploiting the growing protests of the middle class and blaming 'corrupt' financiers and Jews. On 6

February 1934, the fascists called a huge demonstration against the recently formed, left-of-center government under the Liberal Radical Party's Eduard Daladier. The vicious fighting that ensued with police led to Daladier's resignation, his replacement by a right-wing Liberal, and proof that through force the French fascists could deliver political change. The social democratic Socialist Party, happy to line up behind the still governing Radical Party, did nothing. The French Communists were still following Stalin's line of a 'Third Period,' wherein socialist revolution, not counterrevolution, was imminent, and their paper *L'Humanité* carried the headline 'No panic' and declared that the choice between the fascists and the existing government was like the choice between 'plague and cholera.'<sup>48</sup>

Yet just as James might have been reaching for his British passport, workers in Paris instinctively felt the need for unity against the fascists, something only a minuscule group of Trotskyists were arguing for. On the night of 9 February 1934, James described how he witnessed 'fierce fighting' and 'men were killed.' He later recorded how, 'The proletariat, the stock of 1789 and the 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1792, of 1830, of 1848 and 1871, came out in their thousands, whether Socialist or Communist.' On 12 February, the main union federation, the General Confederation of Labour, called for a general strike and at the last minute the Communist Party called for a demonstration, albeit separate from that held by the main Socialist Party and the General Confederation of Labour. Instead of the two demonstrations' showing their traditional animosity toward each other, on meeting, workers spontaneously and gloriously came together to sing antifascist slogans. As James noted, 'It was in the streets that French parliamentarism was saved. The coup had failed.'<sup>49</sup> Coupled with the inspirational but ultimately unsuccessful uprising by the Social Democratic Schutzbund in Vienna, by then under Dollfuss's dictatorship, James had left France exhilarated at seeing fascism being resisted at last.

Meanwhile, back in Britain, encouraged by Mussolini's and Hitler's success, Sir Oswald Mosley had since 1932 put himself forward as national 'saviour' to the economic crisis, pouring thousands of pounds into his new British Union of Fascists (BUF). By the spring of 1934, Mosley's BUF enjoyed an air of respectability among some sections of the British establishment (and the explicit admiration from some elite figures like the media baron Lord Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mail*) and was beginning to be seen as a legitimate part of British politics. Having seen the sort of 'fight' that the official social democratic and Communist parties had put up against fascism in France, James on his return to Britain felt he 'wanted to meet some Trotskyists', finally running some down in the summer of 1934, and promptly joining them.<sup>50</sup> As well as moving to embrace revolutionary Marxism, James was also by now a militant Pan-Africanist, and his growing circle of contacts in London included such figures as the radical poet and journalist Nancy Cunard, whose flat at 9 Heathcote Street was a popular meeting place for black radicals. When Cunard left for Paris in the Spring of 1934, around the same time her monumental 855 page anthology *Negro* - a remarkable fusion of Pan-Africanism and Communism - was published, it is not perhaps such a coincidence that James now moved from Hampstead to take up residence in Cunard's former flat.<sup>51</sup>

We get insights into James's subsequent research trips to Paris during the 1930s from the memoir of Louise Cripps, a new friend and comrade in the tiny British Trotskyist movement. According to Cripps, James took her and a friend (and another comrade) Esther Heiger to Paris, probably in spring 1935. The three stayed in Montparnasse, where the local cafés were 'favourite meeting grounds for the Trotskyists at that time (as well as the rendezvous for artists and writers)'.<sup>52</sup> James did not miss out on sampling the culture of 'Black Paris', and one evening, he took Cripps to one of Paris's most famous black nightclubs, *Le Bal Nègre* (also known as *Bal Colonial*), at 33 rue Blomet. As Cripps recalled,

‘it was not a very fancy place, but it was filled with people. There were blacks of every height, weight, and shades of colour from all parts of the world where there are Africans or people of African descent ... we danced and danced.’<sup>53</sup> The little party also took in French Impressionist art in the Jeu de Paume in the Tuilleries Gardens, and in general did a lot of sightseeing, visiting Le Louvre, the Bastille, Napoleon’s Tomb at les Invalides, the Palace of Versailles, with James ‘giving us several lectures as we wandered from place to place’. As Cripps recalled, though James could clearly read French well, his spoken French in comparison was less strong, something that ‘really angered him’ as ‘he could not fully express his views’. Accordingly, on that trip ‘he became almost fluent in French in three weeks’.

We meandered along the Left Bank, turning over and looking at all the books on the stalls. Esther and James went to the top of the Eiffel Tower ... With not much enthusiasm, Esther and I accompanied James to the Military Museum. It was springtime in Paris, the loveliest time of the year, and we sat outside the cafes, drinking wine and trying our first taste of absinthe ... it was an exciting time ... the memory of that French vacation stayed with all three of us for a long time.

Yet this trip was not purely social, and Cripps recalled James in particular spent some time researching and a lot of time ‘meeting with French comrades’. Trotsky himself was in exile and hiding in France in 1935, and so Paris temporarily became, in an important sense (and to invoke Benjamin again), ‘Capital of International Trotskyism’. ‘Esther and I were not seeing James all the time, since he was visiting other people. I think he went to see Lev Sedov, Trotsky’s son’.<sup>54</sup> Part of the circle around Trotsky in this period in France also included the French surrealist poet Benjamin Péret - and his former wife the singer Elsie

Houston (of black Brazilian and white U.S. parentage) - and since Péret had contributed to *Negro*, it is possible Nancy Cunard may have put James in touch.<sup>55</sup>

In December 1934, the murder of Sergei Kirov in the Soviet Union had led to a wave of repression (including the arrest of Zinoviev) and the exiled Trotsky was being smeared by the Stalinist regime as among those implicated, so necessitating a high level of security for leading Trotskyists. This comes through well in one story Cripps, a journalist and editor, tells of this trip to France.

One day, James came to us in our lodgings and pulled me aside from Esther, and said, "I want you to go out with me this evening." James told me to wear something that was unobtrusive ... It was nearly dark when I met him - *l'heure bleu*, a time of slight *tristesse*, a slight sense of sadness, of foreboding ... and there was a good deal of cloak-and-dagger stuff. We would go a little way on the metro, then we would hurriedly change, and then we would change again, and then we would go by bus, and then we would change again. It was all to prevent our being followed. I did not take this too seriously ... [but] James had been quite serious and had hardly spoken until then.

As Cripps continues, 'finally, we arrived on the outskirts of Paris and went to a rather large glass-enclosed restaurant ... we approached a young man sitting alone and pulled up our chairs to his table.' Introduced to her only as 'Adolf' [Adolphe], the young man was actually Rudolf Klement, a German political émigré and one of Trotsky's secretaries, and she remembered 'the idea of adventure was quickly erased by the tensions of the young man we had joined'.

The young man I think was in his thirties, thin, not very tall ... [and] was highly nervous, his eyes darting to the door of the restaurant and searching around the outside glass windows .... My excitement turned to confusion. What was this meeting? ... James sat unusually quiet ... the young man looked me over and started asking questions about myself: how long I had been in the movement; my education; my professional experience ... Then one after the other, both started telling me what they wanted of me. It was a serious proposal ... if I would act as Trotsky's secretary and assistant for three months. The need was obviously urgent ... I thought about the proposal; finally said no. After my decision, Adolf [Adolphe] left very quickly, slid away like a shadow ... obviously, James was disappointed in me. He had felt I would have suitably fit into the role ... and that my reason for refusing, to go home to look after my husband, was too trivial. But he made no effort to dissuade me.<sup>56</sup>

In May 1936, a 'Popular Front' Government had been elected in France, and with the inspiring memory of the General Strike of 1934 in the minds of militants, another massive strike wave shook France to its foundations in the aftermath of the election. As James noted, 'les Soviets partout', 'the Soviets everywhere' became 'the most popular slogan in the whole of working-class France' as over a million workers seized and occupied their factories and millions rushed into trade unions to 'join' in the class war.<sup>57</sup> In June 1936, Trotsky – now in Norway - triumphantly declared 'The French Revolution has begun!' and even the British ambassador compared the situation of the mass stay-in strikes during the 'June days' in France to Russia in 1917, with the premier of the 'Popular Front' Government, Socialist leader Léon Blum, in the ill-fated role of Kerensky.<sup>58</sup> The French Communist Party had grown massively in the run up to the June days, and was seen as the clear anti-capitalist choice for newly radicalised workers. Yet rather than counter-posing a vision of 'Soviet

Power' to the Popular Front Government, the French Communist Party argued that the economic gains that had been won by the strike movement should now be consolidated. As their leader Maurice Thorez famously declared, 'we must know how to end a strike when satisfaction has been gained'.<sup>59</sup>

James must have been itching to get over to Paris again to witness the tumult underway, and in late July 1936, James took the opportunity to return as a British delegate for the 'First International Conference for the Fourth International'. At the conference itself, James remembered meeting revolutionary socialists from the dictatorships of Nazi Germany and Austria, made new friends such as the Belgian comrade Leon Lesoil and also met young French revolutionaries like Pierre Naville and Daniel Guérin. It was a perfect opportunity for James to develop his knowledge about the international Trotskyist movement, and he himself made an impression at this Paris conference. 'I would say a few words and speak, as I could speak in French,' but unsurprisingly he was overall left feeling the distinct impression that the others 'had come from the revolutionary movement, but we [in Britain] had not ... what was happening in Britain was nothing'.<sup>60</sup>

Over the coming months, James put his work on the Haitian Revolution to one side somewhat as he worked intensively to write his pioneering history of 'the rise and fall of the Communist International', *World Revolution, 1917-1936*, which was published in April 1937. Though James was scathing about the Communists and Blum's Popular Front government, he retained his optimism about the potential possibilities that might flow from further independent activity by French workers. In May 1937, James noted 'the French workers have a revolutionary tradition. Their spirit is high. This May Day [1937] there will be tremendous demonstrations. Before another May Day arrives, there are likely to be barricades in the streets.'<sup>61</sup>

## French Pan-Africanism under the Popular Front

Tracking the exact dates of James's subsequent visits to France in 1937 and 1938 for the purposes of both research and political activism is more difficult. James's original bibliography in *The Black Jacobins* lists the Paris archives he visited, and aside from Les Bibliothèque Nationale and Les Archives Nationales, these were Les Archives du Ministère de la Guerre, Les Archives du Ministère des Colonies, and Les Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères.<sup>62</sup> His researches also took him outside Paris, and he recalled that 'when I was preparing *The Black Jacobins*, I had to leave Paris and spend some days in Bordeaux and in Nantes ... in pursuit of material on the slave trade and the West Indies'.<sup>63</sup> As James later recalled, he came across French historians who 'had made it clear, that the movement toward the abolition of slavery came from the capitalistic element who were tired with the poor production of ... feudalism and slavery ... I had learnt this in France, I didn't discover it.'<sup>64</sup> After Eric Williams had embarked on his doctorate at Oxford on 'The Economic Aspect of the Abolition of the West Indian Slave Trade and Slavery' in the mid-1930s, Williams would now accompany James on his French research visits.<sup>65</sup>

British and French official support for Mussolini's war on Ethiopia helped not only galvanise Pan-Africanist movements in London and Paris, but also acted as a spur to subsequent wider anti-colonial unity and mobilisation. In London, James together with the Jamaican Pan-Africanist Amy Ashwood Garvey and others like the Kenyan nationalist Jomo Kenyatta formed the militant campaigning International African Friends of Abyssinia (later Ethiopia) in 1935. He would soon be joined by his boyhood friend, compatriot and former leading Communist George Padmore – who had also contributed to Cunard's *Negro Anthology* - and in 1937 the much broader International African Service Bureau (IASB) was set up.<sup>66</sup> Thanks to Padmore's longstanding comradeship with another former Communist, Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté, born in the French Sudan (Mali) and the leading anti-colonialist

from French West Africa in Paris during the 1930s, the tiny Pan-Africanist movement in Britain soon established links with their Francophone counterparts. After Padmore and Kouyaté had first met in 1929, they had become close friends and allies, and both had been expelled from the Communist International in 1933 for their questioning of the Comintern's shift away from anti-colonialism towards the new-fangled 'Popular Front' against fascism. The talented Kouyaté now combined a belief in independent radical Pan-African organisation with a strategic pragmatism, tactical flexibility and organisational flair that meant he cut a distinctive figure among black radicals in Paris during the 1930s.<sup>67</sup> James recalled meeting with Kouyaté in Paris:

I knew one man who was very friendly with Padmore - that was [Tiemoko] Garan Kouyaté. When I went to Paris, Padmore insisted I see him. I discussed the Trotskyist movement with him and he commented that he could agree with me about everything except that one thing would be needed. I asked what that was. "That Trotsky was a black man, that's all." Apart from Kouyaté I had few other contacts and seldom attended any of the nationalist conferences in Paris ... I did not do much with the black movement there.<sup>68</sup>

The 'black movement' in France was organised in large part through the Colonial Assembly (Rassemblement Colonial), an organisation formed in 1935 which united the nationalist movements of Algeria, Tunisia, French West Africa, Madagascar, Pondicherry and Indochina. As Goebel notes, 'the Reassemblment brought together all the major spokesmen of Paris's remaining colonial communities, including the emergent writers of the *négritude* movement, which arguably had also grown out of the Ethiopia campaign'.<sup>69</sup> According to IASB member Ras T. Makonnen, both James and Kouyaté attended a 1938

conference of Rassemblement Colonial, where Makonnen remembers the latter was ‘conspicuous’.<sup>70</sup> James’s memory of Kouyaté’s comments on Trotskyism (the necessity for Trotsky himself to be ‘a black man’) seem to suggest something of how the French Popular Front government’s colonial policy by this period must have led to a profound disillusion among what Wilder has called ‘the interwar black public sphere’ with respect to the ‘republican public sphere’ and to some extent the Left in general.<sup>71</sup>

We get some sense of this disillusion among French Pan-Africanists by a report by a British anti-imperialist, Reginald Reynolds, of the London ‘Conference on Peace and Empire’, organised by the India League and the London Federation of Peace Councils in July 1938. ‘The subject peoples are no longer docile and capable of being used to suit the purposes of imperial powers’, Jawaharlal Nehru declared in his keynote address to the thousand-strong audience.<sup>72</sup> To reinforce this anti-imperialist message and so embarrass the conference organisers (mainly members and supporters of the Communist Party of Great Britain), supporters of the IASB had secured the attendance and speaking rights of a ‘fraternal delegate’ from France, Émile Faure of Senegal, President of the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre (LDRN) and secretary of the Rassemblement Colonial. According to Lelia Seleau, reporting the conference for *International African Opinion* (the IASB journal James edited), Faure’s detailed conference speech demonstrated how ‘never, since the Revolution in 1789 has France given the vote to the colonial populations’. The French Popular Front government had re-established forced labour in West Africa, imprisoned journalists in Indochina, and arrested, deported and imprisoned a number of nationalist leaders in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Seleau noted that Faure’s address ‘came as a bombshell to those delegates who had made a vehement demonstration of their loyalty to the Popular Front’.<sup>73</sup> Reynolds recalled Faure ‘spoke with intense feeling, but used his time economically by

delivering a broadside of ugly facts, relating to repression and exposing [French Communist leader] Thorez and Co'.<sup>74</sup>

According to Ras Makonnen, the Paris meeting of the Rassemblement Colonial in 1938 that James attended was held at the agricultural school in the Latin Quarter, and was an event 'where a number of British blacks met their French colleagues'.<sup>75</sup> In attendance were figures like Aimé Césaire, as well as leading nationalists including Lamine Guèye (born in French Sudan and now a leader of the French Socialist Party in Senegal) and Félix Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast.<sup>76</sup> James famously ended *The Black Jacobins* with an implicit acknowledgement of Césaire, but refused to imagine that such people, 'the isolated blacks' at French institutions of higher education like the Sorbonne, these 'dabblers in *surréalisme*', might ever lead any sort of revolution against French colonial rule. Rather, 'from the people heaving in action will come the leaders', James insisted.<sup>77</sup>

In his 1938 pioneering work of 'black internationalism', *A History of Negro Revolt* James denounced French colonialism in Africa, but again retained a benign impression of France. Perhaps in part this stands as testament to James's relatively privileged experiences while visiting interwar Paris compared to say, Francophone colonial workers or black women – or indeed his own status as a black colonial subject back in either Britain or the Caribbean.<sup>78</sup> As well as referring to the comparative lack of racial prejudice as he saw it, 'a valuable feature of French civilization' which 'disposes of many illusions, carefully cultivated in America and Britain, about Negro incapacity and racial incompatibility', James also outlined the French colonial policy of assimilation, which seemed to contrast positively with the British experience, at least for educated black colonial subjects. 'In a French colony, a Negro who by education or military service becomes a French citizen, is given all privileges, and is governed by the laws which apply to white men. He can become a high official in the government service, or a general in the French army.' However, James did not

romanticise assimilation, nor ‘French civilisation’ in Africa, as ‘imperialism remains imperialism’.<sup>79</sup> And as James memorably noted in *The Black Jacobins*, it is ‘easier to find decency, gratitude, justice, and humanity in a cage of starving tigers than in the councils of imperialism, whether in the cabinets of Pitt and Bonaparte, of Baldwin, Laval or Blum’.<sup>80</sup>

In late August 1938, James, together with a Scottish comrade, Willie Tait, visited Paris one last time, as delegates for preliminary discussions for the founding conference of the Fourth International, held on 3 September 1938, and at which James was elected to its international executive committee. James subsequently spent several weeks in Paris, translating Boris Souvarine’s 1935 biography *Staline* into English, writing on French politics for the British Trotskyist press, and playing host to friends from England including Harry Spencer and Eric Williams. While finishing off the Souvarine translation (which would be published in 1939), James also spent time in Normandy, relaxing, it seems, in the company of a young student. ‘I knew a girl in Rouen who came over every morning at 9, helped me in the translation. We had lunch and dinner and walked in the woods. I took her to the bus at 9, and went back and read Maupassant until I fell asleep.’<sup>81</sup>

In late 1938, James left Europe for what turned out to be a fifteen-year sojourn in the United States, until the rise of McCarthyism forced his return to Britain. In 1944, in a private letter to the woman who would become his second wife, Constance Webb, James relayed ‘how I loved Paris - of having dinner with a friend in a restaurant on the left bank from which we could see Notre Dame - the wonderful food, the quiet - the overshadowing cathedral’. While James regarded Versailles as ‘the most wonderful place in the world I think’, he wrote,

I hope to God they do not destroy Paris - Bastille Square, the Tuileries, the Louvre, the Luxembourg, Champs Elysees [sic], the Arc de Triomphe, Montmartre, Place Blanche, Place de l’Opera, the sense of history in every inch, the wonderful food, the

social grace of the French people, their pride in their famous capital, bookshops (they say more in Paris than in the whole of England), the open-book shops on the Seine - a great capital throbbing above...<sup>82</sup>

### ***The Black Jacobins: Globalising the Haitian Revolution***

In *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, Michael Goebel rightly notes how Francophone anti-colonialists ‘drew on the vocabulary and on metaphors of the French Revolution, specifically popular sovereignty and citizenship’, in order to demonstrate ‘that they were the most truthful heirs of French revolutionary principles’. They thus ‘rescued from oblivion the French Revolution’s anticolonial record, for instance in the form of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 – as the Trinidadian historian C.L.R. James did in his famous book *The Black Jacobins* of 1938’.<sup>83</sup> As Goebel continues, with reference to James:

Anti-imperialists in interwar Paris only had to rescue the traces from the city’s archives ... Drawing heavily on the historian of the French Revolution, Jules Michelet, James depicted the rebels in Saint-Domingue as the standard bearers of 1789: “The liberty and equality which these blacks acclaimed as they went into battle,” he wrote, “meant far more to them than the same words in the mouths of the French.”<sup>84</sup>

One of the direct literary traces of ‘black Paris’ on *The Black Jacobins* might be seen in James’s discussion of the rise and fall of General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas – father of the famous novelist Alexandre Dumas – who was born in Saint-Domingue of mixed heritage and rose to a division general in the French revolutionary armies in Europe, the highest-ranking person of African descent ever in a European army. As C.L.R. James noted, the French

Revolution had appointed ‘that brave and brilliant Mulatto, General Dumas, Commander-in-Chief of one of its armies, but Bonaparte detested him for his colour, and persecuted him’.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, throughout *The Black Jacobins*, James ably demonstrated for the first time that the Haitian Revolution was not simply an inspiring struggle on a tiny island on the periphery of the world system, but was inextricably intertwined with the French Revolution throughout, pushing the revolutionary process forward in the metropole itself and investing notions of human rights with new meanings and universal significance. James’s experience of visiting France and witnessing the inspiring mass strikes in 1934 and the new spirit of resistance in the aftermath of the ‘June days’ in 1936 must have clearly shaped the argument of *The Black Jacobins*. In that work, James paid tribute – not to ‘the perorating Liberals in France’ - but to ‘the noble and generous working people of France’, whom, alongside ‘those millions of honest English Nonconformists who listened to their clergymen and gave strength to the English movement for the abolition of slavery’, ‘the sons of Africa and the lovers of humanity will remember with gratitude and affection’.

Paris between March 1793 and July 1794 was one of the supreme epochs of political history. Never until 1917 were masses ever to have such powerful influence – for it was no more than influence – upon any government. In these few months of their nearest approach to power they did not forget the blacks. They felt towards them as brothers ... all over revolutionary France were filled with a virulent hatred against the “aristocracy of the skin”.<sup>86</sup>

James’s turn to Marxism – itself shaped by his experiences in France during the Spring of 1934 – was vindicated in a sense by the mass strikes during France in 1936, and this demonstration of working class power in the imperial metropole in turn reinforced

James's strategic understanding that colonial liberation in Africa and the Caribbean was inextricably intertwined with the struggle for socialist revolution in the European imperial metropolises. As James wrote in the conclusion to the original 1938 edition of *The Black Jacobins*,

Let the blacks but hear from Europe the slogans of Revolution, and the *Internationale*, in the same concrete manner that the slaves of San Domingo heard Liberty and Equality and the *Marseillaise*, and from the mass uprising will emerge the Toussaints, the Christophes, and the Dessalines. They will hear. The forces of emancipation are at work, far more clearly today than in 1789. In Europe and Asia the forces of revolution, though damped down, smoulder in every country.<sup>87</sup>

As a result, as Charles Forsdick notes, while a figure like Auguste Nemours represented 'a Haitian tradition that transforms Toussaint into the messianic figure who some thought was urgently required during U.S. occupation [1915-34]', James 'discovers in Toussaint an incendiary figure with extra-Caribbean implications, whose example had connotations for current and future anticolonial struggle (as well as revolutionary struggle more generally)'.<sup>88</sup> James's 1934 play *Toussaint Louverture: The story of the only successful slave revolt in history* – which was performed in London's Westminster Theatre in 1936 with Paul Robeson in the title role - and his later more explicit historical analysis of Toussaint Louverture as a 'black Jacobin' - and of *black Jacobinism* in general - saw him beginning to 'globalise' the events of 1791-1804 in a way previous Haitian nationalist historiography had not done.<sup>89</sup>

In writing about and 'globalising' the Haitian Revolution, James rewrote and helped 'globalise' the French Revolution as well. James fused classical and Marxist scholarship to

resurrect a vivid panorama of the Haitian Revolution, stressing that it was not simply the greatest event in the history of the West Indies, but took its place alongside the English Civil War, the American War of Independence and the French Revolution as one of the great world-historical revolutions in its own right, a revolution which had forever transformed the world and laid the foundation for the continuing struggle for universal human rights. As James put it in 1938, ‘the work of Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe, and Pétion endures in Hayti, but what they did went far, far beyond the boundaries of the island’.<sup>90</sup>

In a nice coda, we might recall that *The Black Jacobins* – though written and published in Britain – not only found its way into Haiti itself but also slowly made an impact on Francophone anti-colonialists, two other lasting legacies of the frequent visits James made to ‘black Paris’. While France was under Nazi occupation during the Second World War, unbeknownst it seems to James (at the time in the United States), one of his comrades in the French Trotskyist movement, Pierre Naville, was hard at work translating *The Black Jacobins* into French. As Naville later wrote,

My opinion at that time was that if France succeeded in restoring its national sovereignty – with the help of the Anglo-American forces – her first duty would be to give back freedom to its colonial empire as it existed before 1939. I thought that the publication of this book by James, whom I had known before the war, dedicated to the freedom struggle of the “Haitians” in Saint-Domingue during the first French Revolution, would serve this purpose.<sup>91</sup>

The French edition of *The Black Jacobins* translated by Naville appeared in 1949 and James recalled it quickly became something akin to a ‘Bible’ in Haiti itself. As James recalled, ‘when *The Black Jacobins* was published in French, it was read and deeply admired

in Haiti. I unreservedly took the side of the slaves. Yet it was years before they discovered that the book was written by a Negro and a West Indian. That testifies to the historical objectivity.’<sup>92</sup> Inevitably it was also now read by Francophone anti-colonialists, including it seems by Frantz Fanon, so helping play a part in the emergence of France as, in Christoph Kalter’s words, ‘the historical centre of Third Worldism’ from the 1950s onwards.<sup>93</sup> By the mid-1950s, James himself was able to return to Paris. It would take us too far afield to trace his relationship with the Francophone Pan-Africanist left and the collective around *Présence Africaine* in this heady period amid decolonisation. Nonetheless, James’s own ‘African presence’ in Paris during the 1950s, twenty years after his first sojourn, should be registered nonetheless, and might be a fitting place with which to close. In 1956, James gave an address in Paris to the small Marxist group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution. As Cornelius Castoriadis once recalled of that lecture, James ‘was a wonderful speaker ... When he rose to speak, it was as though you suddenly had Louis Armstrong himself taking the trumpet and doing a wonderful solo. He was extremely moving, capable, articulate, lively, and he conveyed his message forcefully.’<sup>94</sup>

**Word count** – 11,895.

### **Acknowledgements**

With thanks to John Cowley, Claire Eldridge, Charles Forsdick, F. Bart Miller, Matthieu Renault and Jennifer Sessions. I would also like to thank Daniel Laqua, Charlotte Alston and Laura O’Brien for giving me the opportunity to give a version of this as a paper at the ‘Histories of Activism’ research group conference ‘Revolutionary Pasts: Representing the Long Nineteenth Century’s Radical Heritage’, held at Northumbria University in 2016. A stimulating and relevant paper by Tom Stammers given at this conference is forthcoming as

an article in *Annales*, ‘Internationalising the French Revolution (c.1930-1960): The Origins and Eclipse of a Historiographical Paradigm’.

### **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest identified.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Rowbotham, 'Top ten books of radical history'.

<sup>2</sup> See Kamugisha, 'C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* and the Making of the Modern Atlantic World'.

<sup>3</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, viii, 113. For more on *The Black Jacobins*, see Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, eds, *The Black Jacobins Reader* and Douglas, *Making The Black Jacobins*.

<sup>4</sup> Hall and Schwarz, 'Breaking Bread with History', 21.

<sup>5</sup> On the occupation of Haiti, see Renda, *Taking Haiti*, while for some suggestive comments about James's thoughts on this, see Dalleo, "'The Independence so hardly won has been maintained'".

<sup>6</sup> Hall and Schwarz, 'Breaking Bread with History', 21. On James and the Caribbean Labour Rebellions, see Høgsbjerg, "'A Thorn in the Side of Great Britain'".

<sup>7</sup> Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*. It might also be remembered that large parts of the writing up of *The Black Jacobins* took place in Brighton, 'in the tranquillity of a seaside suburb'.

<sup>8</sup> Matera, *Black London*, 2, 4. For an earlier but still valuable discussion of C.L.R. James in 'black London', see Schwarz, 'Black Metropolis/White England.'

<sup>9</sup> Forsdick, 'The Black Jacobin in Paris', 17. On the topography of Black Paris, see Jules-Rosette, 'Black Paris'.

<sup>10</sup> There is though now at last a full-length biography of James in French, published in France by a French scholar and aimed at a French audience. See Renault, *C.L.R. James*.

<sup>11</sup> Hall and Schwarz, 'Breaking Bread with History', 24.

<sup>12</sup> Hall, 'A Conversation with C.L.R. James', 16. It is interesting to note in passing that *Les Chouans* is a novel about counter-revolution set during the French revolutionary period. My thanks to Charles Forsdick to drawing my attention to this.

<sup>13</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 26, 118; Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, 17; D. Cumber Dance, 'Conversation with C.L.R. James', 112.

<sup>14</sup> Small, 'The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist', 56. On *Batouala*, see Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 227; Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 162-65.

<sup>15</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 118.

<sup>16</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, 40-43.

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- <sup>17</sup> Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 17-37.
- <sup>18</sup> Keating, ed., *Matthew Arnold*, 137.
- <sup>19</sup> Laughlin, ed., *Letters from London*, 75-76.
- <sup>20</sup> Laughlin, ed., *Letters from London*, 76.
- <sup>21</sup> On James in Nelson, see Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 38-64. On Constantine, see Hill, *Learie Constantine and Race Relations in Britain and the Empire*.
- <sup>22</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, xv. For more on Spencer, who would later travel to France with James in the late 1930s, see C.L.R. James, 'Harry Spencer'.
- <sup>23</sup> Hall and Schwarz, 'Breaking Bread with History', 19.
- <sup>24</sup> James, 'My Knowledge of Damas is Unique', 131-32.
- <sup>25</sup> Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 87-102.
- <sup>26</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*', 70.
- <sup>27</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, xv.
- <sup>28</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 331-32.
- <sup>29</sup> James, Dunayevskaya, and Lee, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, xxii.
- <sup>30</sup> Rees, *The Algebra of Revolution: The Dialectic and the Classical Marxist Tradition*, 4.
- <sup>31</sup> Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 115-18, 121-22, 341.
- <sup>32</sup> Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 246, 257-58, 262. For more on Bergson and anti-colonialism, see Diagne, *Bergson postcolonial*.
- <sup>33</sup> Eburne and Braddock, 'Introduction: Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic', 732-33. See also Stovall, *Paris Noir*.
- <sup>34</sup> On Baker, see Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 1-35; Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia*, and Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life*. See also Hewitt, 'Black Montmartre'.
- <sup>35</sup> Bart Miller, *Rethinking Négritude through Léon-Gontran Damas*. Césaire first coined the term 'Negritude' in the March 1935 issue of the French journal *L'étudiant noir* (*The Black Student*). See Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 12. On Paulette Nardal, see Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 133-69.
- <sup>36</sup> James, 'My Knowledge of Damas is Unique,' 133. For James's thoughts on Negritude, see MARHO, ed. *Visions of History*, 270.
- <sup>37</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, xvi, 329, 336.
- <sup>38</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Autobiography, 1932-38'.
- <sup>39</sup> Auguste Nemours, 'La France protectrice des races colorées,' *Paris-Amérique* (December 15, 1932), quoted in Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 60.
- <sup>40</sup> James, 'Abyssinia and the Imperialists', 66.
- <sup>41</sup> James, *Toussaint Louverture*, 45. James would repeat this argument in 1938 in *The Black Jacobins*. 'Once the French had recognized Haytian independence, the Haytians turned back to France ... the race-hatred of two centuries, the fiercest that the world has known, has vanished. Its roots were in economic exploitation and the political tyranny necessitated by it. It is on that evil basis that is built the whole superstructure of what we know as the race question.' James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], 313.
- <sup>42</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, 13 June 1934. I am indebted to John Cowley for this reference.
- <sup>43</sup> 'Constantine and C.L.R. James search in vain for Brittany Butter – Famous Trinidadians visit French Farms', *Sunday Guardian*, 17 June 1934.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> For more on 'commodities of empire', see for example Jonathan Curry-Machado (ed.) *Global histories, imperial commodities, local interactions*.
- <sup>47</sup> 'Local Film to Combat Relic of Slavery', *Trinidad Guardian*, 29 July 1934.
- <sup>48</sup> Harman, *A People's History of the World*, 494. As James wrote two years later, 'The utter imbecility of all Stalinism was never more completely shown than in the actions of the Communist Party of France in this grave crisis.' James, *World Revolution*, 366.
- <sup>49</sup> James, *World Revolution*, 367. See also the brave anti-fascist role played by Francophone blacks at this critical time, described in Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 106-107.
- <sup>50</sup> Widgery, 'C.L.R. James', 123.
- <sup>51</sup> Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 89. On Cunard, see Anne Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*.
- <sup>52</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, 48-55.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 50. For more on the *Bal Nègre*, see Cowley 'Mascarade, beguine and the bal nègre', 232-259. James's presence as a black radical man with two white left-wing women in the *Bal Nègre* would not have raised any eyebrows. See Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 119-132.

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<sup>54</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, 48-50. Leon Sedov, born in 1905, was Trotsky's eldest son and a revolutionary activist and writer. He died in suspicious circumstances, almost certainly poisoned by Stalin's agents in a French hospital in February 1938. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, 395-97.

<sup>55</sup> James described Benjamin Péret, 'the famous French poet (tenacious of his overalls even when calling on a minister)' as one of the 'active revolutionaries' who were in Spain during the revolution, in his 1937 introduction to Mary Low and Juan Breá's *Red Spanish Notebook*; v. For more on James and the Spanish Civil War, see Høgsbjerg, "'The Fever and the Fret': C.L.R. James, the Spanish Civil War and the Writing of *The Black Jacobins*'.

<sup>56</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, 51-53. Klement, who used the pseudonym 'Adolphe', had been Trotsky's personal secretary in Barbizon during 1933, and in July 1938, while still a secretary of the Fourth International, was abducted by Stalin's secret police while in Paris and murdered, his horribly mutilated body later found in the River Seine. See Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, 407-408. As James later told David Widgery of this period of Trotskyist activism, 'they were very serious days. There was a German boy very active in our movement. One day we found him at the bottom of the Seine.' Widgery, 'C.L.R. James', 123-24.

<sup>57</sup> James, *World Revolution*, 374. In the July 1936 issue of the Independent Labour Party publication *Controversy* - an issue it seems no surviving copies of remain - James apparently wrote an article on 'France Today'. *New Leader*, 10 July 1936.

<sup>58</sup> Trotsky, *Whither France?* 131-136. For background see Cliff, *Trotsky*, 196; Harman, *A People's History of the World*, 496. One classic account of the June days is Danos and Gibelin. *June '36*.

<sup>59</sup> Cliff, *Trotsky*, 195.

<sup>60</sup> Richardson, Chrysostom and Grimshaw, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, 9; Archer, 'C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38', 64.

<sup>61</sup> *Fight*, 1, no. 7 (June, 1937). Sadly, May 1938 brought not a revival in workers' militancy but the fall of the Popular Front government.

<sup>62</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], 317.

<sup>63</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Dr. Eric Williams, First Premier of Trinidad and Tobago', 345. Isaac Louverture, younger son of Toussaint Louverture, is buried in Bordeaux.

<sup>64</sup> Hall, 'A Conversation with C.L.R. James,' 22.

<sup>65</sup> Munro and Sander, eds., *Kas-Kas*, 36-37. For more on James and Williams in this period, see Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 172-79.

<sup>66</sup> On James's anti-colonialist activism in Britain in the 1930s see Derrick, '*Africa's Agitators*'; Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*; James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below*; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, and Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*.

<sup>67</sup> On Kouyaté, see Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, chapter 5; Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 181-83, 193-95; Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 300; Wilder, 'Panafrikanism and the Republican Political Sphere', 240-43.

<sup>68</sup> MARHO, ed. *Visions of History*, 269-70.

<sup>69</sup> Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 171.

<sup>70</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, 156, 175-76.

<sup>71</sup> Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 194-95. In 1939, Kouyaté was to rally around the French state, urging black colonial subjects to fight for France, writing on 21 October 1939: 'Brothers and sisters of French West Africa, you who desire the well-being, the liberty and the fraternity of all peoples under peace, we must tighten our ranks around France and always remain with France and be at her service ...' See Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 37. During the Second World War, Kouyaté was first imprisoned by the Nazis and then transferred to the Austrian concentration camp of Mauthausen, where he died in 1944. Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 300.

<sup>72</sup> Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 197.

<sup>73</sup> Lelia Seleau, 'The French Colonies under the Popular Front', *International African Opinion*, 1, no. 2 (August 1938). See also Chafer and Sackur, eds., *French Colonial Empire and the Popular Front*, 20, 99-102, 163-66, and Høgsbjerg, *Chris Braithwaite*, 54-56. On Faure, see Wilder, 'Panafrikanism and the Republican Political Sphere', 242-43.

<sup>74</sup> Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes*, 118-120.

<sup>75</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, 155-56.

<sup>76</sup> MacKenzie, 'British Marxists and the Empire', 235; Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, 156, 175-76; Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 285-86.

<sup>77</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 304. In late 1938, Trotsky allied with French surrealist André Breton and Diego Rivera to write a *Manifesto* for the freedom of art in late 1938, calling for an International Federation of Revolutionary Writers and Artists to resist totalitarian encroachments on literature and the arts. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, 431.

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<sup>78</sup> For more on James's *History of Negro Revolt*, see Høgsbjerg, 'The Black International as Social Movement Wave'. For more on the experience of colonial workers and black women in interwar Paris, see Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*.

<sup>79</sup> 'During the last twenty years the population of French Congo has declined by more than six millions, and the French have as black a record in Africa as any other imperialist nation ... French and Belgians have an evil reputation in the Congo for cold-blooded cruelty.' James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, 40-41.

<sup>80</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 229.

<sup>81</sup> Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Archive*, 53; C.L.R. James, 'French 40 Hour Week Attacked', *Workers' Fight* (October, 1938); Grimshaw, ed., *Special Delivery*, 142-43. On Souvarine, see Høgsbjerg, 'Introduction', 30, 34-35.

<sup>82</sup> Grimshaw, ed., *Special Delivery*, 143.

<sup>83</sup> Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 216-17, 244.

<sup>84</sup> Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 244.

<sup>85</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 219. See also Reiss, *The Black Count*.

<sup>86</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 112-113.

<sup>87</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], 314.

<sup>88</sup> Forsdick, 'The Black Jacobin in Paris,' 17-18.

<sup>89</sup> There was an important precursor to James in the remarkable 1925 dissertation submitted to the University of Paris on 'L'Attitude de la France a l'egard de 'l'esclavage pendant la revolution' [The Attitude of France toward Slavery during the Revolution] by the black American scholar Anna Julia Cooper. This was not to be published until 1988 though, fifty years after the first edition of *The Black Jacobins*. See Cooper, *Slavery and the French Revolutionists*.

<sup>90</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], 311. James's use of the phrase 'beyond the boundaries' in 1938 is quite striking, given the title of the other work for which he is perhaps best known, *Beyond a Boundary*.

<sup>91</sup> Naville, 'Translator's Foreword', 378-79. On Naville, see Löwy, *Morning Star*, 43-62.

<sup>92</sup> James, 'Dr. Eric Williams, First Premier of Trinidad and Tobago', 338.

<sup>93</sup> Kalter, 'From global to local and back', 117. There is a copy of *Les Jacobins noirs* in Fanon's personal library. See Ministère de la Culture (CNRPAH), *Bibliothèque Fonds Frantz Fanon*, 60. Thanks to Matthieu Renault for this reference. See also James, 'Fanon and the Caribbean', 43-46.

<sup>94</sup> Castoriadis, 'C.L.R. James and the Fate of Marxism', 284.