CYRIL V. BRIGGS AND THE AMERICAN LEFT:

1917-1925

by

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Introduction

In the spring of 1998 I posed a question to Professor Tim Tyson. "Do you know of any early 1900's black anarchists," I asked. "No," was the reply, but he did know a bit about an African-American radical named Cyril Briggs and suggested I take a look.

My search for Cyril Valentine Briggs led me to the special collection section of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Dusty and virtually untouched sat a reproduced facsimile of The Crusader, the journal Briggs edited from 1918 to 1922. Briggs had bite. He was witty and militant, a beautiful combination for political journalism that comes across well in the first issues push for subscribers.

> ARE YOU WITH US? DON'T MERELY SAY YOU ARE. SHOW YOU ARE BY SUBSCRIBING TO, BOOSTING OF, AND ADVERTISING IN, THE CRUSADER, THIS IS YOUR FIGHT.!!!! (Hill, *The Crusader*, 4)

He was also unique, fusing Marxist and black nationalist ideas. I had not found a black anarchist but I had found an original thinker with attitude—an anarchist sensibility. The aims of The Crusader published in its first issue, encapsulates Briggs' complexity.

> To spread the Eternal Truths of the Creator-endowed equal rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" of every human being; the ultimate triumph of the forces of moral righteousness over the sordid utilitarianism which influences the powerful to superimpose their rule upon the weak and to subordinate what is morally right to what seems to be practically more expedient....To supply the necessary Historical Background—the racial backbone— and to eradicate the evils of Alien Education—which exalts the white man and debases the Negro—but authoritative articles dealing with the ancient cultures of the African races...To awaken the American Negro to the splendid strategic position of the Race in the South American and West Indian Republics, and the fine possibilities in those countries for trade, nation-building, LIBERTY,

> and the unhindered pursuit of happiness under conditions of guaranteeing "security of life", free development and the highest advancement. (Hill, *The Crusader*, 4)

Outside the confines of the special collections reading room, I found little information about Mr. Briggs. He was mentioned briefly in Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, a text much criticized for historical inaccuracy and ideological bias. Cruse was not kind to Briggs. There were also a few snippets in other texts but nothing of substance. Robert Hill's introduction to The Crusader remained the best source for information.

A month after I began my search two books placing emphasis on the life of Cyril Briggs were published. First was Winston James' *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia.* James focuses on Caribbean born radicals in the United States, arguing that these new immigrants played leadership roles as intellectuals and activists within the African-American community. He places Briggs at the forefront of black radical activism in the post-War period. James counters the writings of Harold Cruse who portrays radicals from the West Indies as stupid and ignorant. Second, Mark Solomon published his long anticipated work *The Cry Was Unity*, a study of the relationship between African-Americans and Communists between 1917 and 1936. Solomon gives Briggs the opening chapter of his text, placing him as the major figure in the movement of black radicals into the Communist Party.

James and Solomon offered me new insight into Cyril Briggs and the era in which he came to political prominence. With new information about the life and ideas of Briggs, it became possible to explore his political and social context. The period between 1917 and 1925 was a transition period for the American left. World War I signaled a new phase of capitalist development focused on rapid expansion of global markets. In response, anti-capitalist activists focused energy on international resistance movements. The 1917 Revolution in Russia brought hope and a potential model for the new movement. Initial

reaction to the Revolution among leftists was overwhelmingly positive. Within weeks, however, as the new Soviet state began to take form, criticism about centralization and Soviet policy towards dissenters, particularly anarchists and organizers within the soviets (worker controlled factories), dramatically increased.

In the United States, debates sharply divided radical activist communities, causing a split in the Socialist Party, heated discussion in the African-American community, a destabilizing of radical unions such as the Industrial Workers of the World, and bitter arguments within anarchist and non-Socialist Party socialist groups. By the middle of the 1920s the radical shifting of coalitions subsided. The IWW withered away and the Socialist Party splits resulted in the formation of an American Communist Party that attracted many African-American radicals, including Cyril Briggs. Anarchism was no longer a political force. Non-CP socialists and Marxists, ranging from populists to labor activists, were left scrambling for their own organization and movement structure. The Communist Party in the United States had solidified, victorious as the dominant force of American left activism, and aligned with the Soviet Union as the dominant international force against capital.

In my attempt to understand this complex and swift-moving era of radical history, I ran into a barrier that I had not anticipated—the historiography of the American left, which draws overly sharp ideological lines. I found books about anarchist opposition to Lenin, the splits within the Socialist Party, debates within main currents of Marxist thought, forms of black nationalism, organization of the labor movement, and, with Solomon, the relationship between black radicals and the new Communist Party. However, I did not find any books that discussed all of these issues. In short, I found no books within which it was possible to imagine the existence of an activist as complex as Cyril V. Briggs.

This problem became my focus. Understanding Briggs in context remains a much larger problem then simply getting a grip on Briggs. As my attention focused on this issue, I began to consider a new question. Why does this matter? Why do I care about the American left between 1917 and 1925? And most crucially, why must we learn history?

From my mother I learned the mantra "never again," a reference to Nazi instituted mass genocide of Jews but also a touchstone for the importance of historical understanding. We must understand the past in order to avoid repeating it. We must also understand the past in order to learn from earlier successes. We must learn from experiences and that requires understanding them in all their detail.

As I worked, I become increasingly concerned with the accessibility of radical history to activist communities. If the left is to prosper, access to information about past historical struggles and coalition building is crucial. As this writing begins, thousands of activists are leaving Los Angeles where they spent the past week warding off police brutality and edging into the media apparatus with their message of social justice. Albert Gore still received the Presidential nomination from the Democratic Party but not without voices of dissent outside the Convention walls, voices that called on the Democratic Party to address issues ranging from global trade to health insurance to institutional racism. Should these fighters against social injustice and global capital know about Cyril Briggs and his times? The question is clearly rhetorical. History teaches us about past movements for social justice and the mistakes we should not repeat.

The thesis has three chapters. Chapter I is a political portrait of Cyril Briggs, which complements Robert Hill's introduction to the reproduced facsimile of The Crusader, providing a shorter overview of the development of Briggs's political thought from black nationalism to a fusion of black nationalism and Marxist internationalism. The biography

illustrates the complexity of radical thought during the period, and, I hope, provides an easily accessible introduction for students curious about Cyril Briggs.

Chapter II is a literature review of the historiographic material written about the American left between 1917 and 1925. Of these, I chose texts that are both influential and representative of the historical material. The review focuses on the three dominant radical currents of the period: black radicalism, socialism/Marxism, and anarchism.

Chapter III argues that new comprehensive scholarship should counter the historiography's arbitrary separation between radical movements. I argue that historical material about radicalism must be accessible to activists and students of American history. While the current literature contains the seeds for this new scholarship, future work should forge an explicit connection between contemporary activist politics and past radical movements.

Chapter I

Cyril V. Briggs: A Political Biography

Cyril Valentine Briggs was a radical. He was an African-American activist and a black nationalist. He was a socialist with a Marxist approach. He had the rhetoric of a fire and brimstone anarcho-syndicalist and the heart of a revolutionary. In many respects, Briggs symbolizes the radical era in which he grew to political prominence, during the late teens and early twenties. He was multi-dimensional, an activist intellectual, constantly re-evaluating his alliances and relationship to movements for social justice.[1]

Briggs's identity has been pigeonholed. Histories of the left view him as a black nationalist with a Marxist sensibility. Indeed, his "race first" approach coupled with his belief that workers of the world should unite was probably the first of its kind. But, Briggs did not conform to the Party line. In many ways the Party line conformed to Briggs. He helped bring race to the forefront of Communist politics in the United States. His passionate nationalist writings in The Crusader, coupled with his equally passionate vision of a unified worker's movement, pushed the Communist Party to evaluate race/class relationships within the context of American life. For the first time, the dominant party espousing a socialist message in the United States explicitly debated race and attempted to forge an institutional connection between race and class politics.

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[1] All biographical information is culled from Robert Hill's introduction to the reprinting of The Crusader, Mark Solomon *The Cry Was Unity*, Winston James *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, and Theodore Kornweibel *Seeing Red*. All quotations from The Crusader are marked in text by the month and year of issue (Crusader was monthly). All other quotations have source notations in the text and can be found in *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1919-1929*, edited by Philip S. Foner and James S. Allen or original document.

Briggs also exhibited a strong anti-authoritarian strain that did not fit neatly into either the black nationalist or Marxist camp. Briggs was not an anarchist. However, there is much in his character that follows the anarchist impulse. He relentlessly questioned authority and always challenged those in positions of power, including those in the Communist Party, something that eventually cast him out of the Party fold.

Briggs's theoretical linkage between race and class along Marxist lines is extremely important. During the teens and early twenties terms such as nationalism and internationalism begin to take definition in the United States. Debates that had occurred in the late 1800s within the German socialist movement had just begun infiltrating the mainstream of America radicalism, largely as a result of increased immigration of European socialists. Though race was not the term used in relation to nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe, debates about ethnicity—Jews, Poles, Slavs—translated into U.S. racial debates. Should the rights of local ethnic groups take priority over a unified, international working class movement? In the United States the dichotomy between nationalism and internationalism became an issue of African-American self-determination, what Briggs would refer to as a "race-first" politics, and a world-wide working class movement that is unified along color lines.

The adoption of these seemingly antithetical viewpoints placed Briggs in an interesting political position. When race and class are in competition, which side was he on? Briggs always fell back on his nationalist politics when in conflict, such as his leaving the Communist Party late in life for their refusal to support the Black Panther Party because of its nationalist stance. However, he always made it clear that both race pride and self-determination and international working-class politics should not be antithetical. He made it his life's struggle to preach and strive for both.

Unfortunately, his theoretical writing does not address this conflict in much depth or give hints as to how political theorists and activists might reconcile the issues when race and class are in competition. We can only guess how Briggs might have outlined these ideas. Most of his life was spent speaking and writing journalistically. As an activist intellectual Briggs engaged in original theoretical thinking but insisted that theory intimately connected with organizing and mobilizing.

Despite his important place in the histories of African-American history, American socialism, and Marxist political theory, Briggs has been left out of most history books, including many that focus on race or the left. Only recently has this historical error begun to be rectified. Two recent works, Mark Solomon's *The Cry Was Unity* and Winston James' *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, place Briggs back in the center of the era's political debates. Solomon gives Briggs credit for influencing the Communist Party on issues of race and class, labeling him a "pioneer" in American radical history. James presents Briggs as part of a larger group of black radicals, many of whom were Caribbean born, who have gone unrecognized for their immense influence on the history of the 20th century black freedom struggle.

Prior to Solomon and James, the only text to discuss Briggs in any depth was Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual.* Cruse did not like radicals from the West Indies and in particular did not like Briggs, claiming at one point in *Crisis* that "not a single innovation that Briggs, et al. formulated in the African Blood Brotherhood was actually new" (129). Cruse was entrenched in a mythic interpretation of American radicalism that placed outside influences—such as Briggs and other West Indies radicals—at the fringe of innovation and historical import.

Now that James and Solomon have published their texts the impact and historical truth of many Harold Cruse claims about Briggs and African-American radicalism during this period can be pushed aside. The new works of James and Solomon tell a more accurate story. For Cyril Briggs this has meant a revival of interest in a forgotten figure. Two years ago his name was unknown to all except a few specialists. Today he is becoming a permanent fixture in the history of African-American and American radicalism. There is no doubt this is the place in history Briggs deserves.

Cyril Valentine Briggs was born on the Caribbean Island of St. Kitts on May 28, 1888. He was an only child. His mother was a black woman and his father a white Trinidadian overseer of a sugar plantation. They were not married.

Born with a very light complexion, Briggs was often referred to later in life as an angry blond Negro, an epithet he hated and perhaps an identity issue he never fully came to terms with. He was also born with a severe stutter, something that always hindered his soapbox leadership skills but most likely pushed him to excel as a writer. As his friend Harry Haywood remembered "it often took him several seconds to get out the first word of a sentence" (James 158). Haywood also noted that when Briggs did speak, "No one would interrupt him because we knew he always had something important and pertinent to say" (158).

Most of Briggs' childhood was spent on the neighboring island of Nevis, where he attended a colonial school and received a thorough British education. Here his political education began as he read the works of the American radical Robert Ingersoll. Though he was an excellent student and awarded a scholarship, Briggs did not feel comfortable in Nevis

and left at the first opportunity afforded him. The island was a limiting environment for intellectual exploration.

On July 4, 1905, at the young age of seventeen, Briggs traveled alone to the United States. His mother had come to the United States a few years earlier. Their communication and relationship remains unclear. Briggs settled in Harlem. Not much is known about Briggs' initial life in the United States. He married Bertha Florence Johnson of Talcott, West Virginia in January of 1914, but little else is known of the marriage. He spent time writing for various local newspapers, training himself as a journalist and learning about the politics of a growing New York African-American and Caribbean community. In 1912, after seven years in New York, Briggs landed a job with the Harlem based Amsterdam News.

Over the next few years, Briggs' writing began to exhibit his trademark values: a strong belief in race pride and a firm respect for worker's rights. His writing was improving and he was obtaining a more secure position writing for the paper.

In the spring of 1917, President Wilson called for the oppressed to "have a voice in their own government" (Hill, "Racial and Radical", xi). Initially, Briggs hoped that the President might be moving for African-American self-determination. Briggs even registered for the draft, though years later he would claim he "refused to fight for a democracy denied my people" (xi). However, with the East St. Louis race riot of July 2, 1917, a skepticism towards Wilson's pledge swept the black community. In late August, after thirteen black soldiers were executed for a mutiny against white officers in Houston Briggs' view toward Wilson shifted dramatically. For Briggs, the event solidified his impression of the United States government as a complicit agent in racist political practices. The power of the State and racial self-determination became antithetical.

In September 1917 Briggs placed himself on the political map. Writing in the Amsterdam News, Briggs openly advocated the ceding of one-tenth of US territory for the "pursuit of happiness" under black self-government. Largely inspired by the revolutionary nationalism of the Irish Easter Rising, the article, entitled "Security of Life for Poles and Serbs, Why Not for Colored Nations?" received strong community reaction. Briggs wrote:

> Considering that the more we are outnumbered, the weaker we will get, and the weaker we get the less respect, justice or opportunity we will obtain, is it not time to consider a separate political existence? As one-tenth of the population, backed with many generations of unrequited toil and half a century of contribution, as free men, to American prosperity, we can with reason and justice demand our portion for purposes of self-government and the pursuit of happiness, one-tenth of the territory of continental United States. (Hill, "Racial and Radical", xiii)

Before the incident in Texas, Briggs published an article in the Boston Globe that caught the eye of Caribbean businessman Anthony Crawford. The article was inspired by the call in Wilson's Fourteen Points for the "impartial adjustment of all colonial claims." In reaction, Briggs called for "Africa for the Africans" (Solomon 6). For the first time, he linked the liberation of African-Americans directly with African liberation, further expanding his views on both self-determination and the international nature of liberation struggles.

In a letter to Briggs, later published in the first issue of The Crusader, Crawford wrote:

> In these days when Jewish People are working for a united Israel and Palestine, I feel it my duty to do something towards supporting the ONE VOICE in all America for Africa for the Africans. (Hill, *The Crusader*, 24)

Hoping for a journal of "racial patriotism," Crawford contacted Briggs and supplied a large portion of financial backing for Briggs' journal, The Crusader, which was first published in

September 1918, a year following the breakthrough Amsterdam News article about self-determination..

The lead article in The Crusader was entitled "Africa for the Africans." The article outlined the necessity for self-determination and a condemnation of all major political parties.

> A free Africa will mean that Africa will no longer be exploited by a ruling caste of European overlords, that the natives no longer will be crushed under the heel of alien rule superimposed by unrighteous force, that the civilization of African by machine guns and bad gin will cease and the 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people' shall be the rule in Africa as in European affairs as the truly democratic nations recognize and accept the principle inlaid in the American Declaration of Independence...The Crusader intends to save the African people before they are exterminated. Will you help? The task is long and hard. And mighty the forces of sin and imperialism. But on our side are the eternal moral rights....We are fighting for Democracy. We must see to it that it is applied to Africans as well as to European, to the Negro as well as the white man. (Hill, *The Crusader*, 3-6).

The issue also explicitly condemned lynching, peonage, segregation, and discrimination and endorsed African-American Socialist candidates A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen for New York City district offices. Briggs called for "the settlement of every question, whether territory, of sovereignty, or economic arrangement, or of political relationship, upon the basis of the free acceptance of that settlement by the people immediately concerned." (3-6) Furthermore, he preached a "a renaissance of Negro power and culture throughout the world." He tore down the "alien education" that focused on Rome and ignored the riches of African history. And, he proclaimed himself first and foremost, "pro-Negro" (6). Briggs' politics had begun to take explicit shape. His nationalist inclinations were tempered with a Pan-African worldview. Although Briggs did not use the word Pan-African, he recognized the connections between the oppression of people of African descent. Unlike the Garvey

movement Briggs did not believe in mass emigration to Africa. Rather, like Du Bois, he believed that the liberation of people of African descent required supporting local freedom struggles with an international consciousness. Black freedom would not be gained by repatriation but by fighting racism wherever it existed including the streets of Harlem.

In December 1918, in exchange for financial aid, The Crusader became the "Publicity Organ of the Hamitic League of the World." The Hamitic League was an Afrocentric group founded by Omaha, Nebraska businessman George Wells Parker. Hamitic League politics centered on race pride and a nationalist consciousness rooted in African history and culture. Following his donation, Parker proceeded to write articles about African history and African pride for the journal. Parker argued,

> To inspire the Negro with new hopes; to make him openly proud of his race and of its great contributions to the religious development and civilization of mankind and to place in the hands of every race man and woman and child the facts which support the League's claim that the NEGRO RACE IS THE GREATEST RACE THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN. (Hill, "Racial and Radical", xxi)

In February 1919, Briggs' language reached a new level of militancy toward President Wilson. He wrote that the League of Nations was constructed to "suppress revolutions on the part of the oppressed and the dissatisfied" (Solomon 7). In May Briggs wrote an article entitled "League of Thieves" for the Amsterdam News. In April Briggs denounced Wilson as "damnable" and "hypocritical" for his new style of colonial tactics. Once again, Briggs' nationalism was taking on more powerful form as was his internationalist consciousness with the world's oppressed (7). Wilson was not just attacked because he had lied about a belief in self-determination but because his foreign policy

explicitly suppressed movements for self-determination. Wilson was showing his true colors as an imperialist. The hypocrisy was glaring.

By June The Crusader was repeatedly linking capitalism and colonialism, connecting the struggle of black and white workers against the dominant capitalist system. Historian Mark Solomon notes that this first occurred in the April issue where Briggs "drew a parallel between the forced removal of black workers from a Pennsylvania steel town (where they had migrated during wartime labor shortages) and the deportation of white foreign radicals" (Solomon 7). Due to prejudice on both sides, neither the white workers nor the black workers voiced opposition to the plight of the other.

Solomon poses this as Briggs' first instance of a "Marxist sense of social class" (Solomon 7). However, there is no evidence that Briggs' realizations were based upon his own readings of Marxist political theory. Rather, the evidence only points to a more general socialist influence and reading of class politics. Yet, this does note an explicit shift towards class based analysis, something that was not nearly as prominent in earlier writings, though present in his endorsements of the Socialists Randolph and Owen in the first issue of The Crusader.

Between June and October, Briggs discussed class politics with an emphasis on working-class unity. "The Negro's place is with labor." He called black and white labor "the two most powerful sections of the world proletariat" and stressed the need to work together. And most forcefully he issued a call for "the triumph of Labor and the destruction of parasitic Capital Civilization with its Imperialism incubus that is squeezing the life-blood out of millions of our race." (Solomon 8)

Since his later days with the Amsterdam News in 1917, Briggs had begun relationships with other radicals in the African-American community, including Hubert

Harrison, Claude McKay, and Otto Huiswood. Some were Communists and the more he learned, the more he became sympathetic with the young Communist movement. In October 1919 he entitled an editorial "Bolshevist!!!" in protest of government suppression and censorship.

> Bolshevist is the epithet that present-day reactionaries delight to fling around loosely against those who insist on thinking for themselves and on agitating for their rights. We do not know exactly what the reactionaries desire to convey by the term—we do not think that they know themselves. However, if as appears by its frequent use against those who are agitating in the people's interests and for justice for the oppressed, the term is intended to cover those 'bad agitators,' who are not content that the people shall forever be enslaved in the clutches of the cut-throat, child-exploiting, capitalist-imperialist crew, then assuredly we are Bolshevists. This epithet nor any other holds any terror for us. If to fight for one's rights is to be Bolshevists, then we are Bolshevists and let them make the most of it! (James 167-168)

In the same issue Briggs placed a heading that read "Negro First!"

> For the benefit of the serviles and lick-spitles who are shocked because we refuse to profess perfect contentment under oppression or slavishly to designate a Living Hell as a 'free, grand and glorious country,' the editor of The Crusader desires to state that, while he is, theoretically, an 'American citizen'— with all the surplus of duties and lack of rights which characterize a Negro 'American citizen'—he is still and always has been a NEGRO BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE and will continue so to be until Negro 'American citizens' are not only American in theory, but in practice as well. (168)

Briggs further declared that "Negroes with an ounce of spirit and intelligence are, in their minds as well as in the minds of the whites, NEGRO FIRST, LAST AND ALL THE TIME." (168)

Here we see the clear presentation of both a radical left class politics and radical black nationalist politics placed side-by-side. Briggs had matured into an outspoken

advocate of explicitly revolutionary views that were uncompromising along race and class lines and hinted at things to come. In the back of the same October issue was a small hard to find notice that read "Mr. Cyril V. Briggs announces the organization of the African Blood Brotherhood for African Liberation Redemption....Those only need apply who are willing to go the distance." (James 168) Thus, the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) was born. The organization was deeply inspired by the Irish revolutionary nationalism of Sin Fein, which had inspired Briggs' 1917 article on self-determination published in the Amsterdam News. As Briggs states in the ABB program:

> No opportunity should be lost for propagandizing the native soldiers in the 'colonial armies' and for organizing secretly a great Pan-African army in the same way as the Sinn Fein built up the Irish Army under the very nose of England. (Foner and Allen 20)

The ABB adopted a similar paramilitary stance: extreme secrecy, loyalty oaths, passwords, and a hierarchical body simply called the Supreme Council. Ideologically, the ABB attempted to link race, class, and nationalist politics with a firm root in organized self-defense.

Revolutionary black nationalism refers to a black nationalist politics with an anti-capitalist worldview that advocates organized armed resistance to white capitalist government oppression. The Black Panther Party is probably the most well known group to take such a stance. Their Marxist rhetoric regarding working class oppression, their emphasis on black self-determination and community control, and their uniformed, armed, aggressive image typify the revolutionary black nationalist stance Briggs advocated. Although the Black Panther Party did not acknowledge a connection to the legacy of Cyril Briggs—I have seen no evidence that they were aware of his existence—their politics

emulated a style that began with the ABB and was later adapted by African American radicals such as Robert F. Williams.

In 1920 the ABB held a convention and put forth a party program that included racial self-reliance, resistance to the Ku Klux Klan, support for African liberation, better wages and working conditions for black workers, and a merging of race and class consciousness. The tone was overtly revolutionary and ended with a call for "cooperation with other darker races and with the class-conscious white workers."

> Every effort and every dollar should be spent to effect the organization of a Pan-American army, whose very existence would drive respect and terror into the hearts of the white capitalist-planters, and protect our people against their abuses. Remember: MIGHT MAKES RIGHT—ALWAYS DID AND ALWAYS WILL. (Foner and Allen 20)

According to Mark Solomon, membership for the ABB never exceeded 3,500 something he attributes to the social positioning, complex program, secrecy and lack of charismatic leadership. The ABB was not the easiest organization to join (membership was an arduous process) and the attraction of such an explicitly revolutionary, paramilitary organization was minimal side for cautious concerned persons. Its influence lay not in its numbers but in its militant message, which, as Theodore Kornweibel documents, led the Federal Government into placing the organization on constant surveillance. As one Military Intelligence Division official remarked about the creation of the ABB "it seems to me that this only means one thing—organization for revolution." (Kornweibel 134)

The membership was dominantly Caribbean. Winston James points to the immediate circle of activists Briggs was aligned with, many of whom were Caribbean, as well as what he argues was an impulse amongst Caribbean immigrants for radical activism. James places this later phenomenon in the context of the colonial experience in the West Indies which

created a greater sense of political consciousness because of the explicit, clean cut nature of race and class relationships on the islands. Some ABB members were veterans of World War I, those that Solomon refers to as the "new intelligentsia," and the working class. Most were recruited from reading The Crusader, though many had joined local posts through word of mouth. With the Harlem Menelik Post as base there were 50 posts nationwide, including a large post in Chicago—Pushkin Post— and an affiliate amongst Black coal miners in West Virginia.

By the time the ABB was formed, Briggs' internationalism had become so strong that his previous nationalist prejudices had begun to disappear. Eventually, the Hamitic League, which was still preaching primarily African history and not the brand of worldwide race/class liberation that Briggs espoused, was absent from The Crusader's masthead. The ABB was now the only organization promoted.

The ABB achieved its most national attention when it became implicated in the Tulsa race riots of 1921, thereby attracting Federal surveillance and national news media. On May 31 an angry mob of armed whites inflamed by press reports descended on a jail holding a young black man who was wrongfully accused of attacking a white female elevator operator. In order to prevent a lynching, a small group of black males offered to help the sheriff hold the jail. Whites began looting businesses and homes. Dozens of blacks and whites were killed and numerous were injured. The local authorities and the local press blamed the ABB for instigating the riots.

Though the ABB clearly did not start this white riot, the Tulsa branch seemed more than willing to play the role of instigator if assigned. The ABB post official commented to the press "whether we directed Negroes in their fight in self-defense is certainly no crime in Negro eyes, and is left for the white Oklahoma authorities to prove. For ourselves, we

neither deny or confirm it." Briggs also responded to the Tulsa riots and accusations of a "Negro" conspiracy. While denying that the ABB were aggressors, he noted that "the African Blood Brotherhood is not a 'secret order of revolutionists,' but simply a Negro protective organization pledged to mobilize Negro thought, and organize Negro manpower to a defense of Negro rights wherever and by whomsoever attacked." (Solomon 15)

The press over Tulsa brought new support. An ABB meeting that closely followed the riot witnessed 2,000 people turn out. Briggs claimed a flood of new applications pouring into the office, inflating the ABB's size to 150 posts and 50,000 members, numbers that far exceed Solomon's estimate of 3,500.

In the June 1921 Crusader Briggs ended long held suspicion that the journal was the organ of the ABB by making it official. Membership standards changed yet again with African descent being the only criteria. Additionally, Briggs decided that posts could now be started with only seven people. This coupled with an ABB Constitution calling the ABB "essentially a propaganda machine" opened up access dramatically.

The ABB had a limited relationship with Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association. The UNIA was created in February 1918 and quickly became the largest black nationalist movement in the world. It was international in scope with some estimates (James) pointing to 4 million members with only half in the United States. Africa, Britain, the Caribbean, Central America, and Australia were all populated with UNIA membership. The UNIA message of black self-determination and African liberation provided hope to its members and non-members alike. Projects such as the Black Star Line, a black owned and operated shipping business with hopes of transporting large number of blacks to Africa for repatriation, symbolized the UNIA message of empowerment. These

projects were rooted in Garvey's own brand of self-help philosophy, African theology, and economic self-sufficiency. The UNIA motto was "one God, one aim, one destiny".

Briggs, like other radicals (black and white), was extremely impressed with the UNIA's organization and had hoped to infuse the ABB politics into Garvey's organizational structure. At the very least, Briggs had hoped to reach some UNIA members and bring them into the ABB. However, neither hope was fulfilled; largely because of the ABB's adversarial stance towards Garvey's capitalist economic schemes. The conflict ultimately got Briggs and the ABB thrown out of the 1921 UNIA convention after Briggs referred to numerous members of the audience as "servile lickspittle tools of White Capitalism." (Solomon 124) Additionally the ABB put forth a platform that attacked though never mentioned the UNIA. The platform concluded:

> To be kidded along with the idea that because a few hundreds of us assemble once in a while in a convention that therefore we are free to legislate for ourselves; to fall for the bunk that before having made any serious effort to free our country, before having crossed swords on the field of battle with the oppressors, we can have government of our own with presidents, potentates, royalties and other queer mixtures; to speak about wasting our energies and money in propositions like Bureaus of Passports and Identifications, diplomatic representatives, etc., is to indulge in pure moonshine and supply free amusement for our enemies. (James 171)

Briggs' comments began a feud with Garvey that ultimately hurt both the ABB and UNIA by diverting funds and energy from both organizations. In reply, Garvey began referring to Briggs as the "little boy who runs The Crusader," and calling him a white man who traveled in the south and "tried to be a Negro" in New York. Furthermore, Garvey urged intelligent men to "keep far away from those Socialistic parasites who are receiving money from the Soviet and Communists to...universal chaos and destruction." Garvey also

ran a Negro World notice warning Harlemites of a "Negro for Convenience". (Solomon 124-127)

At this point, Briggs sued Garvey for libel and even though the judge did not seem to understand why calling someone white was a bad thing, he ruled in Briggs' favor. As punishment the Negro World published an apology. In return Garvey sued Briggs for libel stating that the October issue of The Crusader had implied that Garvey had abandoned his wife a year ago and raped a white girl in London. Briggs lost, though he was convinced the decision was "fixed".

Despite the dedication of both Briggs and Garvey to black liberation, their hatred of one another clearly prohibited anything more than a fleeting alliance between the ABB and UNIA. However, the fact that Garvey and his organization were explicitly capitalist did not offer great promise that the two organizations could have ever fully converged. Garvey's attacks against Briggs for being a socialist were not incorrect and indicate that, despite their personal problems, the issue of capital was the major issue of contention.

Garvey and others asked whether or not Briggs had in fact joined the Communist Party. Cruse, James and others cite different dates, beginning as early as 1919. Mark Solomon, who researched Soviet archives, gives the clearest answer.

> The approximate date of Briggs' formal entry to the Party is verified in a letter written by McKay to a Comintern official in December 1922. McKay complained that although he had introduced Briggs to the Communists, he himself had a higher regard for the political and intellectual gifts of the editors of W.A. Domingo's defunct Emancipator, whom he had wished to draw into the Party. But the Communists had shown more interest in Briggs 'because he had a magazine.' Briggs, according to McKay, was recruited a 'few months' before the demise of the Crusader in February 1922. (Solomon 9)

Whatever the answer, Briggs' unique approach to race and class politics were not supplied by outside sources. There were no directives from the Comintern informing Briggs that his stance must be X or that he must say Y. Briggs joined the Communist Party because he believed the Party offered the best vehicle for a race/class agenda.

Solomon concludes that, except for formalities, Briggs had joined the Party in the middle of 1921, affiliating with Robert Minor and Rose Pastor Stokes's Goose Caucus. The Goose Caucus, advocated "parallel legal and underground parties" and thus was unacceptable to many, including Claude McKay who firmly believed in an open Party. Briggs, however, with his fascination for secret organizations had no problem with the situation.

Even though Briggs had joined the Party in 1921, the ABB did not simply move into the CP fold. Still it is clear that the Party was very interested in using the ABB as a vehicle for CP promotion within the black Community. Instead, the ABB (and The Crusader) maintained an independent relationship with the Party.

The last major editorial Briggs printed in The Crusader appeared in April 1921. It was entitled "The Salvation of the Negro." Briggs supported the creation of a "Socialist Cooperative Commonwealth...along the lines of our own race genius as evidenced by the existence of Communist States in Central Africa and our leaning towards Communism wherever the race genius has had free play." (Solomon 13)

The plan Briggs advocated was for the "establishment of a strong, stable, independent Negro state (along the lines of our race genius) in Africa or elsewhere; and salvation for all Negroes (as well as oppressed peoples) through the establishment of a Universal Socialist Cooperative Commonwealth. To us it seems that one working for the first proposition would also be working for the second proposition." As Solomon writes it "a black embrace of

socialism would not be based on the desires of a generalized humanity or a communist movement, but upon the national aspirations of people of African descent themselves."(13)

Briggs presents an interesting fusion of socialist and nationalist politics. Socialism must be nationalized along racial lines. People of African descent have the right to self-determination and, when exerting this right, they have leaned towards "Communism." Part of the argument assumes a natural inclination to socialism amongst people of African descent, an interesting take on Marxism which does not argue that socialism is natural but is inevitable because of historical processes and the will of humans. In many ways, this advocacy moves Briggs away from earlier internationalist claims about inter-racial working class unity and places him further in the nationalist circle.

In early 1922 The Crusader folded due to economic difficulties, mostly as a result of court and political battles with Garvey. The CP would not fund the journal, perhaps because Briggs was becoming too nationalistic or perhaps it was deemed unnecessary as an organ of Communist Party promotion. The last issue of The Crusader did not even hint that the end had arrived.

Briggs had to seek new employment. In March 1922 he went to work for the national office of the Friends for Soviet Russia. In November 1922 he became an organizer for the Yorkville branch of the Workers Party. At about this time, with the help of Grace Campbell, Briggs began publishing the twice weekly Crusader News Service. In early 1923 Briggs became the recording and financial secretary of the West Side Harlem Branch of the Workers Party. As a result of this new position with the Party, the ABB was very quickly absorbed into the CP. In one last attempt to get the ABB back on the ground in June 1923, Briggs sought funds to establish 25 cooperative stores for ABB members in various cities to create "unity will all blacks and truly class conscious white workers" (Solomon 29) He also

proposed comprehensive sickness and death benefit insurance. Unfortunately due to a lack of funds, the plan failed. In early 1924 the ABB was completely integrated into the Workers Party and dissolved.

In 1925 the American Negro Labor Congress was established by the Communist Party to centralize Black protest with an emphasis on labor activism. The organization never achieved much financial support or large membership but it did institutionalize efforts for unionizing black workers within the Communist Party before it folded into other CP elements in 1930. Briggs was a founding member of the organization and eventually became editor of its paper the Negro Champion in 1928. During his time with the ANLC, Briggs was extremely active in labor movement politics, attempting to organize black workers and create an environment for inter-racial unionism. One such instance was in Gastonia, North Carolina were there was an attempt to organize black and white textile workers. In a June 1929 issue of the Communist, Briggs wrote a reaction to the difficulty of inter-racial organizing. "It must be borne in mind that the Negro masses will not be won for the revolutionary struggles until such time as the most conscious sections of the white workers show by action that they are fighting with the Negroes against all racial discrimination and persecution." (Cruse 140)

In 1929 Briggs once again moved into a prominent position within the Communist movement when he was elected to the Central Executive Committee. In addition, Briggs was given the directorship of the Central Committee's Negro Department, where his most lasting legacy was pushing for a second ten day "National Negro Week." Briggs demanded the Party celebrate the revolutionary tradition of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Nat Turner, and Denmark Vesey and promote discussion of Jim Crow policies and lynching in the South. For Briggs these discussions were especially urgent because White Communists held a "sort of

condescending interest in Negro Work." Briggs also advocated inter-racial dances to counter "the capitalist dictum of racial separation." (Solomon 98)

In 1929 Briggs launched a campaign against chauvinism within the Party. In the Communist of September 1929, Briggs wrote an article entitled "Our Negro Work" which succinctly listed his complaints.

> White chauvinism manifests itself in a general underestimation of the importance of the role of the Negro masses in the revolutionary struggles; in open or concealed opposition to doing work among the Negroes, in thinly veneered antagonism to Negro comrades and sympathizers; in failure to carry on anything but the most sporadic and feeble activities among these masses; in failure to come out openly and continually as the champion of the Negro masses in their racial and economic struggles; in failure to prosecute the fight in the reactionary trade unions for the removal of the color bar; in failure to mobilize and rally the broad masses of the white workers for active participation in the struggles of the Negro masses; in failure to draw capable Negro comrades into responsible and leading positions in the Party, in the left wing unions, in the Party auxiliaries, and in trying to excuse the failure to push the Negro comrades to the front with the rotten slander that existing Negro cadres are totally incapable and undeveloped. (Foner and Allen
>
> 215-218)

Briggs concluded his article with a direct attack on racism in the CP:

> White chauvinism must be rooted out of our Party. The petty bourgeois elements who are the ones most responsible for this manifestation within our ranks of the influence of the imperialist ideology must be dealt with sharply and wherever it can be shown that they are sabotaging the Party's Negro work or exhibiting other indications of white chauvinism. (215-218)

This was Brigg's last big statement from within the Party and marks the beginning of his withdrawal from the political mainstream of Party organization and radical politics. Fittingly, Briggs' idealism and moral compass are present in his lambasting of Communist Party treatment of black Communists and the cause of black liberation. He was always

committed to black self-determination. When the Party acted counter to his belief in black self-determination he criticized the organization.

James Ford, a young African-American in the Party, came to Harlem as a section organizer in 1933 and clamped down on Party loyalty, shutting out older figures, such as Briggs, whose politics were becoming increasingly separated from the Party norm. Of special concern to the Party was the independent style of Briggs who was always agitating on his own and did not accept centralized directives uncritically. As a result of these tensions, Briggs was released as editor of the Liberator, a job he had assumed after the folding of the ANLC paper the Negro Champion a few years earlier. He began to write about lynching and racism for the Daily Worker and kept the Crusader News Service going. It was, however, the end of Briggs' tenure as a prominent radical activist. In 1939 Briggs was expelled from the Communist Party for his black nationalist politics, officially marking the end of nearly 20 years of activism within the Party.

There is very little information about the last 30 years of Briggs' life. His personal papers are not available to the public, though they are awaiting circulation at the Schomburg for scholarly use. After 1939 Briggs left the mainstream of political activism. In 1944 he moved to Los Angeles and became the editor of the California Eagle until 1948. That year Briggs rejoined the Party but went underground during the McCarthy years leaving little trace of his doings. In the early 1960's Briggs resurfaced, though by the mid 1960's he left the Party again, this time for its failure to support the Black Panther Party, an organization that in many ways mirrored the Black Revolutionary nationalism of the African Blood Brotherhood. Once again, Briggs demonstrated Party loyalty was conditional. The Communist Party was unwilling to support the Black Panther Party because it would not embrace black self-determination. Briggs, as he had in the 1929 Communist, recognized that

racism was still an issue within the Party structure. Marxism that did not respect black nationalism was of no use for Briggs whose vision was a unity of race and class consciousness. Briggs' left the Communist Party because the Communist Party left the cause of black liberation. In 1966 Cyril Briggs passed away at the age of 88.

Chapter II

Historiography of the American Left:

1917-1925

The core years of Cyril V. Briggs' intellectual and political development coincided with a period of extreme diversity, fluctuation, and transformation within American radical politics. World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917 forced radicals in the United States and abroad to reconsider their approach to movement building. World War I established military backed capital investment as the future of global politics. The Bolshevik victory in the Russian Revolution potentially set the stage for what Leon Trotsky referred to as permanent revolution, a tidal wave of revolutionary activity, ignited by the Revolution in Russia, that would challenge global capitalism's growing dominance. As the 1920s proceeded, the enemy of capital and the most powerful force against it—Lenin's Russia—became increasingly clear. For those on the left the issue was whether Lenin's Russia and aligned Communist Party affiliates were the ideal vehicle for lasting and effective political mobilization.

Opinions regarding Lenin, Marxist politics, and the future models of leftist organization were extremely diverse and hotly debated. As a result, most on the left were constantly reformulating their political beliefs, often combining views from seemingly opposed ideological positions. Cyril Briggs was one of these figures; having forged new links between Marxism and black nationalist thought, he flirted with historically anarchist styles of union building (IWW) and explicitly non-Marxist socialist politics (his endorsements of A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen candidacies). Briggs' politics did

not fit cleanly within any one ideological grouping. Unfortunately, most histories of radicalism in the United States are content to label radicals and their alliances with cookie cutter designations such as black radical, Marxist, or Anarchist. These divisions are historically artificial and mask many of the inter-relationships between radical movements as well as the complexity of thought amongst individual activists. Cyril Briggs' absence from the great majority of this literature typifies these problems. Briggs does not fit nicely into a box, making discussions of his politics difficult to fit into rigidly defined discussions.

This chapter reviews the literature written on the three dominant radical currents of Cyril Briggs' milieu: anarchism, socialism/Marxism, and black radicalism. Several other currents of leftist thought, such as the liberalism of Walter Lippman and John Dewey are discussed in connection with the literature listed under socialism/Marxism. Works limited to the history of American liberalism or progressivism, none of which mentions Briggs, have not been added to this historiography.

There is little doubt that the anarchism of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin is part of a European socialist tradition; however, within historical literature, and especially within American leftist history, the term socialism has become virtually synonymous with Marxism. Thus, texts written about the history of American socialism and texts written about the history of American Marxism cover virtually the same territory. A classic example is Paul Buhle's *Marxism in the United States*, which bills itself as a history of socialism in the America. Buhle, considered by many to be the leading scholar on the history of the American left, omits virtually any discussion of anarchism, except in reference to the IWW, an organization that although syndicalist in practice and historically wedded to anarchist thought, was never explicitly anarchist. As a result of such omissions, the anarchist thought

of figures such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, though highly influential in their times, has been ignored by the "socialist" historical record.

Radicalism within the African-American community has also been sectionalized by leftist historians and treated as an entity in itself. Aside from occasional mentions of W.E.B. Du Bois and less frequent mentions of A. Philip Randolph, much of the literature discussing the period's left neglects radical politics within the black community altogether. The narrative of the black freedom movement has most definitely been segregated, ironically enough, at a time when it was truly a central component of left mobilization.

The one major exception has been those who focus their work on the relationship between African-Americans and Communists. These studies have looked into the connections of Marxism and black nationalist currents thus showing the communication between radical currents. However, the focus of these texts is limited to a discussion about African-Americans in relation to the Communist Party. These texts contain little discussion about Party activity outside this relationship, thus reading as case studies of African-American/Communist relations instead of narratives of a Communist Party with African-American members.

Black Radicalism

Cyril V. Briggs was a black radical, yet much of the historical literature on black radicalism either ignores Briggs or isolates him from the mainstream of the period's black radical movements. Until the past couple of years, there was only one comprehensive historical account of African-American radical activism and thought during the inter-war period. Since its publication in 1967, Harold Cruses' *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* has dominated historical interpretation and debate about African-American radicalism. While highly controversial and often disregarded as egocentric and historically sloppy, it has been the text that begins all debates about the era's radical politics. The core of Cruse's argument centers around the division between integrationists and nationalists, a division of labor that does not necessarily fit historical accuracy for the period he is attempting to analyze. But one that rhetorically fits well with civil rights era politics. From the outset, it becomes obvious that *Crisis* is as much, if not more, about conflicts amongst African-American radicals in the 1960s as it is about the first half of the twentieth century. There is a yearning in his voice for something to work out correctly for black America and almost a shrill scowl for all the stupid and misguided leaders of past and present to just go away. He is bitter and disgusted. By the end of the text he appears to be arguing for a nationalist-based politics which has little form or substance. Still, *Crisis* is a very detailed piece of writing that attempts to give full flavor to the development of 20th century black radical thought. In many respects it is comparable to Bell's *Marxian Socialism*. These two texts have probably formed most of our understanding of radical movements for the first part of the 20th Century.

In recent years, however, the tide of historical scholarship has shifted and new attention has been paid to the period. Two texts mark this new scholarship. The first is Winston James' *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (1998) which traces radical ideologies from the Caribbean to the United States. James discusses an interwoven, yet diverse, population of radical activists and intellectuals including Hubert Harrison, Cyril Briggs, Marcus Garvey, and Arthur Schomburg. James, who teaches history at Columbia University, offers the first and only book length study of Caribbean radicals in the United States.

Perhaps the most important element of *Holding Aloft the Banner* is James' postscript, a 30 page critique of Harold Cruse, which firmly indicates that a new style and era of historical writing has begun. James begins his critique with some scathing remarks: "some books get better each time we read them; others get worse; a few remain the same; and a small number, like *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, get considerably worse with each additional reading" (262). James takes particular issue with Cruse's attitude towards Caribbean intellectuals who he views as "at best misconceived and unreliable." He strongly refutes many of Cruse's claims regarding the character and politics of various radicals as well as demonstrating some deep methodological flaws in Cruse's writing. James challenges the pervasive view of *Crisis* as a "monument of historical analysis." "After all...the analysis itself is flawed and the research upon which it is based uneven, inadequate, partial, distorted, too feeble to carry the heavy load of Cruse's many and controversial judgements, how can the book be seen as a historical monument?" (264-65)

James argues that a complete understanding of radical currents within the United States African-American community is incomplete, if not inaccurate, without an understanding of the influence of Caribbean radicals, which he views as the driving

leadership force behind U.S. black radicalism in the teens and twenties. Hubert Harrison, who A Philip Randolph once referred to as the "Father of Harlem Radicalism," is rescued from historical obscurity and given the first portrait, followed by Briggs and the African Blood Brotherhood, and Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. Arthur Schomburg and Jesus Colon also receive a chapter in which James investigates Afro-Hispanic radicalism, leading him to a final chapter on Afro-Cuban radicalism in Florida. Most of his information on Cyril Briggs comes from Robert Hill's introduction to the reprinting of The Crusader and unpublished papers waiting processing at the Schomburg.

While James' focus on Caribbean radicalism prevents him from moving into more general discussions about the political framework of the American left, he offers insight, especially through his analysis of Hubert Harrison, how those on the largely white and European immigrant left, responded to radical impulses within the African-American community. James writes, "Harrison's black nationalism was the last resort of a black socialist in a racist land; a land of white workers and black workers, where race is elevated above social class in politics as well as social life....Harrison was, in essence, a black socialist, waiting for a better day that he feared would never come, working in the meantime as a black nationalist" (128).

For James, movement building in the United States was undercut by issues of race. Harrison, Briggs, and others recognized this limit to class based politics, noting that a nationalist agenda preaching race liberation was a crucial component to any freedom movement. James argues throughout the course of the work that it is largely due to their Caribbean backgrounds and their resulting diasporic experience that this realization became an active part of their respective ideas and politics. This, James argues, explains a great deal about why there were so many radicals of Caribbean descent in leadership positions. James

explores many radicals and radical movements but he does not address anarchism or investigate the IWW influence of his players including Harrison and McKay.

The second major new work is Mark Solomon's *The Cry Was Unity: African Americans and Communism, 1917-1936* (1998) the first study of black/Communist relations to use the newly opened Soviet archives. Professor emeritus at Simmons College, Solomon argues that it in order to understand the history of black/Communist relations it is crucial to focus on concrete political events and debates within both communities and not to focus too much on cultural shifts, trends, and acts of resistance (such as literature). The Communist take on the "Negro Question" is the center of this relationship. The more aware the Communist Party was to the issue of black liberation the more closely aligned black leaders were to the Communist Party.

Solomon details this relationship and offers a completely new interpretation of the development of the "Negro Question" within the Communist Party. He argues that the initial push to incorporate race as an element of Party policy and activism began with an attraction to the radical politics of Cyril Briggs and the gradual increase of African-American radicals that followed him into the Party, largely a result of African Blood Brotherhood membership. This relationship eventually led to an increased number of active African-Americans within the Party apparatus and the solidification of a Soviet based policy on the "Negro Question" in 1928. The most important new element of Solomon's story is that despite a strong willingness to have black radicals move into the Party, there was nothing close to an official Party line regarding self-determination until 1928. This means that past historians who conclude that the Communist Party under Lenin did have an established policy of black self-determination are incorrect. Solomon concludes, however, that the perception of a Communist Party policy regarding self-determination, especially because of the Party's

seeming willingness to work closely with black radicals, attracted numerous African-Americans into the Party fold, thus making the CP the organizational center for black anti-capitalists.

Solomon's work on Briggs is the best to date, demonstrating clear connections to the Communist Party, using original source material and providing important biographical information that extends beyond 1924 when Briggs became more of a fringe player within the movement. There is no discussion of anarchism or other socialist factions. Solomon is focused on his topic of choice and rarely deviates though there is a remarkable amount of information about Marcus Garvey and his relationship to the Communist Party.

In addition to the work of Cruse, James, and Solomon, several other key works discuss African-American radicalism during this period. The first of these, Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* , covers the relationship between Marxism and Communism and the African-American community. *Black Marxism* is widely recognized as the most important theoretical study of the relationship between Marxism and African-American radicalism. The newly revised and updated edition (2000) includes an introduction from Robin D.G. Kelley as well as a new preface by the author, who teaches political science at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Robinson argues that while Marxism has offered insights into the nature of black oppression and liberation in the United States, it is not the best theoretical framework to analyze these issues. Robinson suggests that, because of its European perspective on history and culture, a Marxist paradigm is unable to, and often ideologically opposed to, understanding African history and the unique experiences of the black Diaspora. Along similar lines, Marxism is unable to answer the complexity of nationalist politics, something he argues C.L.R James came to recognize in his essays and letters to Trotsky about the

"Negro Question". Robinson acknowledges that numerous aspects of a materialist approach, especially its focus on capital, is essential for prospects of black liberation. For the time period of Cyril Briggs, who is briefly mentioned, Robinson focuses on Du Bois. Again, there is no mention of anarchism.

Mark Naison's *Communists in Harlem: During the Depression* (1983) was the first study of the relationship between black radicals and Communists in a specific community. At the time of publication, Mark Naison was director of the Urban Studies Program and a member of the Afro-American Studies department at Fordham University. Naison argues that case studies of specific areas—in this case Harlem—offer valuable and crucial insight into understanding the dynamics of African-American and Communist interactions. In particular, Naison concludes that the dynamics of the relationship were less controlled by Communist Party officials than they were directed by the needs, crises, and movements embedded in the local black community. While Naison's study focuses on the years between 1928 and 1941 he does offer a short introduction that traces the history of the Party's growth in Harlem. Naison's coverage of Cyril Briggs is very brief and culled almost exclusively from Robert Hill's introduction to the reprinting of Briggs' Crusader. While the work has been eclipsed and is somewhat dated, it still remains the only book length study that focuses exclusively on Harlem. It has been influential on other works, including Solomon's *The Cry Was Unity*. Again, there is no mention of anarchism.

Several studies present and analyze crucial documentary evidence on these issues. Philip S. Foner and James S. Allen's *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1919-1929* (1987) is the only text on the topic that collects primary documents. Foner and Allen make the intention of the publication clear by stating that "the significant impact of communism in combating racism in the labor movement and in support

of black liberation cannot be ignored by any serious student of United States history and society" (Foner and Allen vii). The introduction and documents collected treat the period from 1919-1929 as a transition period, a decade in which much debate and organizational shifting occurred within both the African-American community and the Communist Party as they moved into relationship with one another. The documents are numerous and in many cases represent the only easily accessible location for the material. *The Black Worker: A Documentary History From Colonial Times to the Present, Volume VI: The Era of Post-War Prosperity and the Great Depression, 1920-1936*, edited by Philip S. Foner and Ronald L. Lewis offers the only single volume of original documents about Black workers during the period. This monumental publication traces racial exclusion and inclusion within the labor movement, mostly with regards to the American Federation of Labor. There is also extensive information about the Industrial Workers of the World and its relationship to the African-American community. There is clearly an impulse for inter-racial unionism, though no arguments to this effect are made explicit within the very short introduction. *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* by Theodore Kornweibel (1998) is the only book-length study of Federal clampdowns on black radicalism during the period. The text is based on over ten years of research of federal archives. Kornweibel demonstrates the very close relationships between IWW suppression and the suppression of African-American radical groups including the ABB and the UNIA. Theodore G. Vincent's *Voices of a Black Nation: Political Journalism in the Harlem Renaissance* (1973) provides a wide range of original source material, including very difficult to find material from various newspaper and journal articles of the era. Vincent's objective was to promote radical journalism within the black community and demonstrate a historical connection of issues and passion with debates of the period, the early 1970's. He intentionally put together varying

ideological perspectives on the left in order to show diversity of thought and depth of community debate. Of special value are the articles he has put together on the IWW, Cyril Briggs, and Hubert Harrison. Vincent also reprinted many articles that focus on factionalism and debate within the community, thus giving insight to varying figures impressions of one another.

Other studies focus on major black leaders of the period. The most well known political figure during this period was W.E.B DuBois, *W.E.B. DuBois: Black Radical Democrat* by Manning Marable (1986) offers the best political portrait of DuBois and his relationship to varying radical currents. Marable teaches history at Columbia University. Marable argues that throughout his life DuBois always adhered to a radical democratic impulse, one led by a strong belief in social justice. With this lens Marable traces DuBois' actions in a very sweeping fashion. Little emphasis is placed on radicalism between 1917 and 1925, however, he does situate DuBois with radical currents at the time, placing him mostly at the margins of the most radical of organizations, though sympathetic and rhetorically in step with their causes. Marcus Garvey was perhaps the most influential black radical figure during the period. There are a few biographies of Garvey, however, the best single source introducing Garvey's views and his relationship to the African-American radical community is *Marcus Garvey Life and Lessons*, edited by Robert Hill (1987). Hill offers a long overview of Garvey's life including a detailed chronology of events and a one hundred-page glossary of names and terms.

Socialism/Marxism

While Cyril Briggs had an interest in Marxist and socialist class politics there is little or no mention of him within the standard works on Marxism and socialism in America. Most ignore African-American radicals entirely.

"Why is there no socialism in the United States?" This is the driving question of American socialist history. There are three general approaches within the historiography of American socialism during the inter-war period. First, there are those, such as Daniel Bell's classic *Marxian Socialism*, that argue the socialist camps during the period were too Marxist in orientation and thus too closely wedded to Marxist-Leninist forms of mobilization. Second, there are those, such as Brian Lloyd's *Left Out*, which argue that Marxist thought in the United States was too diluted by non-Marxist currents—Lloyd pinpoints pragmatism—and thus unable to provide a clear vision or political framework for socialist mobilization. Finally, there are those, such as Paul Buhle's *Marxism in the United States*, which praise all forms of left or Marxist thought because they have helped build real movements against social injustice.

Daniel Bell's *Marxian Socialism* (1951) is the most detailed history of left political mobilization in the United States between the late 1800s and mid 1920s. No other text discusses the intricacies of factional debate within the Socialist Labor Party, the Socialist Party, and the Communist Party. Bell argues that despite many of the progressive and democratic tendencies within the socialist camp an over-riding need to connect and adhere to Marxist politics centralized the movement. Ultimately this led astray and fragmented organized labor and the socialist left. He argues that the left became Bolshevised, moving

into its own insular world, unwilling to deal with those outside its ideological box due to a strong disdain of reformism and fear of co-optation. Bell places the failure of a strong democratic socialist left squarely on the shoulders of Lenin and the Communist Party. He views this historical tragedy as a necessary topic of study for all activists and potential revolutionaries. Like Harold Cruse, Daniel Bell became fairly bitter and eventually turned rightward touting his end of ideology thesis, which clearly has its seeds in this text, a clean and simple indictment of ideological rigidity as inherently destructive to any kind of political discourse or mobilization. Despite his detailed descriptions of splits and debates within socialist and communist party factions, Bell does not mention Cyril Briggs and ignores African-American radicals altogether. Furthermore, despite references to the IWW, there is no evaluation of anarchist currents not wedded to the mainstream of left labor politics,

Brian Lloyd's *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism, and the Poverty of American Marxism, 1890-1922* (1997), the most thorough intellectual history of Second International Marxist thought in the United States, traces the left's problems to fundamentally different sources. On one level, *Left Out* is a relentless critique of American Pragmatism and its adoption by various early 20th century socialist and Marxist thinkers; a theoretical merging that Lloyd views as the main cause for the impoverishment of American Marxist thought and, by extension, the lifelessness of the American left. *Left Out* is a damning indictment of New Left scholars ("Paul Buhle et al.") who Lloyd thinks have tainted, falsified and propagandized the history of the American left, leaving their students and readers with delusions of radicalism, revolutionary rhetoric, and anti-capitalist sentiment. "If readers decide that, by popularizing the radical world with hapless empiricists, I have contributed a philosophical companion to The Liberal Tradition In America," writes Lloyd, "I would still consider this a worthier achievement than staging some Thompsonian or Gramscian

celebration of labor republicanism or, even worse, working-class Americanism" (417). For Lloyd, the essential component of a successful left is a theoretically grounded critique of capitalism. He is largely sympathetic to Lenin. Despite the depth and specificity of his critique and notations, Lloyd completely ignores black radical thinkers. No African-American appears anywhere in the text or footnotes. The omission of Du Bois who was heavily influenced by both pragmatism and Marxism is particularly striking. Like most left histories, Lloyd only gives passing mention to anarchism and the IWW.

Paul Buhle's *Marxism in the United States* (revised edition, 1991) argues that debates about the positive and negative impact of Marxist thought on American radicalism—such as Bell and Lloyd— often veil the complex nature of American Marxist thought and mobilization. It is this complexity and richness which Buhle's text, the most comprehensive history of Marxist thought in the United States, attempts to trace with the hopes of furthering a tradition of left mobilization for future generations. Of particular note is Buhle's interest in immigrant and African-American radicalism. He devotes more attention to these groups then either Bell or Lloyd and focuses on issues of nationalism and culture. While these nuances to Buhle's approach add to its comprehensiveness, they do not formulate any specific arguments about the nature of socialism in the United States or prospects for future movement building. Buhle makes very brief mention of Briggs, positioning him against Garvey, noting that "The Crusader...touched the sophisticated minority who understood the limits of Marcus Garvey's programs" (139). Very little of the text deals with African-American radicalism though Buhle seems to greatly admire Du Bois. There are only a few fleeting mentions of anarchism, which he represents as part of an American socialist current.

Lescek Kolakowski's *Main Current of Marxism* contextualizes the development of Marxism and Marxist views of nationalism in the United States. *Part 2: The Golden Age*,

which surveys Second International Marxist thought (1889-1914), offers intellectual biographies of key thinkers such as Rosa Luxemberg and Karl Kautsky, who greatly influenced the development of nationalist politics within Marxism. Kolakowski's approach is humanist in impulse, though his intention seems less to highlight humanist Marxism than give a broad history of Marxist thought in Europe. There is little discussion in any of the three volumes of Marxist currents in the United States, much less Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The text is critically important, however, simply because it shapes perceptions about Marxism, especially with regard to the question of nationalism, a fundamental focus of most of the thinkers covered in *Part 2*.

Anarchism

While there is little documentation directly connecting Cyril Briggs to anarchist movements, he was extremely interested in anarchist tactics such as general strikes and sympathetic to the Industrial Workers of the World, an anarcho-syndicalist union. At the very least there was dialogue between black radicals and anarchists, though the historical record is silent on the issue.

Most literature on anarchism is isolationist in nature, grappling with the complex dimensions of thought and activism within the movement, placing studies of activism and theory from Marxism in the margins. Marxism has dominated post World War II radical scholarship to such a strong degree that many historians tend to completely ignore anarchist history altogether, drastically under-analyzing its impact on movements for social justice in both Europe and the United States. Thus only anarchists tend to write about anarchism.

Unfortunately, the tendency of anarchists to focus attention on contemporary movement construction and activism rather than scholarship has led to a general lack of scholarship on the subject. At present, there is no definitive history of anarchism in the United States. Additionally, there are no texts that focus on anarchism in the United States between 1917 and 1925.

Of the texts written about anarchism in the United States, the one with the most to say about the late teens and early twenties is Paul Avrich's *Anarchist Portraits* (1988). Avrich argues that anarchism has been historically shut out from mainstream accounts of radicalism in both Europe and the United States despite its impact on political events and ideas. He views his text as an attempt to reclaim much of this lost history. Avrich focuses most of his attention on the influence of Bakunin and Kropotkin on American anarchist thought and on anarchist activism within the Jewish and Italian immigrant communities. Focusing exclusively on the anarchist community, he does not attempt to set-up a broader context for understanding anarchist thought and history in relation to other radical activism. Avrich approaches the individual essays as portraits, focusing on the personalities and relations of anarchists with other anarchists. Little attention is paid to relations anarchists held with non-anarchists. Avrich does not discuss anarchism within the context of intellectual history, political theory or political history, thus making theoretical/approach connections between anarchism and other radicals currents difficult to make. Anarchism is treated as a way of living, an approach to politics and society with a central impulse of human freedom and community. There is no mention of African-American radicals of the period or of the two most prominent American anarchist figures of the period, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman , both of whom were more integrated into the general radical current of the period than either Yiddish anarchists or Italian immigrant anarchists.

Richard Reichert's *Partisans of Freedom* (1971) is the most comprehensive history of American anarchism. Reichert focuses exclusively on the United States and figures from Thomas Paine to Dwight MacDonald. His goal, like Avrich's, is to historically document anarchist thought and ideas. While his analysis of early twentieth century anarchist thinkers—specifically, Goldman and Berkman— is thorough, there is little historical contextualization and almost no integration of materials from other socialist currents. There is no discussion of African-American radicalism, though Lucy Parsons is three times mentioned.

Much of the work on anarchism exists within studies of key figures. *Emma Goldman and the American Left* by Marian J. Norton (1992) offers the best single volume analysis of Goldman's life in relation to more general radical currents, ultimately making it one of the only sources that attempts to narrate anarchisms relation to various radical currents during the post-War period. Norton argues that it is necessary to understand the diversity and cross-pollination of radicalism during the period for a clear understanding of Goldman's political views as well as an understanding of why anarchism as a movement declined significantly following the Revolution, something she largely attributes to government repression. However, despite her attempt at a more complete approach, Norton does not offer much insight into the formation of radical groups outside of anarchist currents. Her focus is on Goldman, Berkman, and to a lesser extent, the Industrial Workers of the World. Biographical material on Emma Goldman is best found in her two-volume autobiography *Living My Life*. There is also a biography of African-American anarchist Lucy Parsons entitled *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* by Carolyn Ashbaugh, a long and detailed text which includes sections on the IWW and the Socialist Party.

Of the texts written about the Industrial Workers of the World the best remains *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* by labor historian Melvin Dubofsky (1969). Dubofsky focuses almost exclusively on movement organization and leadership within the union, especially Big Bill Haywood. However, he does offer insight into how the IWW related to other left and mainstream labor unions. His portrayal is very sympathetic. African-American radicals and IWW members such as McKay are occasionally mentioned but there is no attempt to analyze the significance or impact of African-American membership other than to point out that the IWW was the only inter-racial union during the period. Other books about the IWW follow the same pattern.

General Works

In addition to works specific about various currents there are a couple of pieces of literature that are sweeping in their coverage of the American left and used quite frequently, by scholars and students alike, as reference texts. These texts cover a range of topics from labor to race to gender. Unfortunately, their ability to cover a large amount of territory often spreads the content thin, leaving out many key thinkers, movements, and events.

The Encyclopedia of the American Left, (1992) edited by Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas, is the largest single volume resource on the history of radical movements in the United States. As the introduction by the editors comments: "we have

scrupulously avoided favoritism toward any sections of the Left, providing factual and respectful accounts of groups which have sometimes condemned each other as ferociously as they condemned capitalism. Our philosophical view is that although the Left has had its share of fools and scoundrels, most of its adherents have been motivated by lofty ideals" (xii-xiii). *The Encyclopedia* offers a significant amount of information covering early twentieth century black radicalism including entries on Briggs' Crusader, W.E.B. Du Bois, A Philip Randolph, Hubert Harrison, Ida B. Wells, and Garveyism. These entries offer a solid introduction to individuals who are usually left out of more mainstream accounts of the period's events. It includes an entry on the virtually unknown Lucy Parsons, an African-American anarchist who was one of the founders of the IWW. If for no other reason, the usefulness and importance of this encyclopedia is that it is an attempt to capture the diversity of American leftist currents.

The other comprehensive text on the American Left is John Patrick Diggens' *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (1992) which focuses almost exclusively on Marxist and left-liberal currents in the twentieth century with special emphasis placed on immigrant radicalism. This is the text about American radicalism that is most often assigned in general American history survey courses across the country. While the text's strongest chapters are the two on the "Lyrical Left" and the "Old Left", they do not offer a comprehensive survey of the period's radicalism. Diggens' social history is caught up in resurrecting and preserving the legacy of intellectuals such as Max Eastman, Sidney Hook and John Dewey and much less interested in giving a space to—much less integrate the ideas of— the eras anarchists, black radicals, and feminists. While Du Bois and Paul Robeson receive mention, there is no indication that Diggens is aware of any other African-American radicals or any anarchists other than Emma Goldman, who is only discussed as a feminist.

Conclusion

The existing literature does not help us understand diversity within the American left between 1917 and 1925 nor does it offer us much insight into the life and ideas of Cyril Briggs. The literature is limited by a rigid construction of ideological thought that minimizes interaction between black radicalism, Marxism/socialism, and anarchism. The legacy of World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917 as points of complex transformation and conflict within radical thought and activism are thus lost, as is the legacy of Cyril Briggs.

Chapter III

Political Activism and Historical Reconstruction

The history of radical movements in the United States needs major reconsideration. Cyril V. Briggs' absence from the historical literature pinpoints a major problem with the historiography of the American left between 1917 and 1925: it's inability to grasp diversity of thought and offer a comprehensive study of activist politics. Historical works tend to divide radical currents along ideological and contextual lines. The constructions are often binary: Marxists and anarchists; black nationalists and black Communists; African-American radicals and immigrant radicals. Each story and group has its own chronicles, but they rarely move beyond the dichotomies.

History tells a different story. There were Marxists who were black nationalists (Cyril Briggs), African-American women anarchists who became socialists (Lucy Parsons), African-American radicals who were immigrants, socialists and nationalists (Hubert Harrison). Whites and blacks did participate in social movements together and not just within the Communist Party. The world of social movements and radical mobilization against injustice is more complex than any binary construction indicates. Radicals have always been a diverse group with myriad backgrounds, interests, and causes. Flow and flux is a fundamental part of American radicalism.

The narrative constructions of Daniel Bell and Harold Cruse are stale. They have become primary sources rather than the definitive studies they were intended be. Still these

and other historical works have provided a foundation for the next stage of work. These works have inspired numerous case studies, especially into the world of African-American and Communist relationships. The recent work of Mark Solomon (*The Cry Was Unity)*) and Winston James (*Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*) demonstrates how much we do know about diversity within the African-American left. The detailed understanding of the lives of various radicals, including the resurrection of Hubert Harrison and the recovery of Cyril Briggs, is quite promising. This chapter plots new steps, offering advice suggestion for the next stages of historical work about the American left between 1917 and 1925.

The chapter will be divided into two parts, discussing the two types of historical work needed. Section one focuses on the need for new case studies: new overviews of intellectual and political currents; new tools for historical work; and new biographical research. Section two emphasizes general histories that give narrative form to the complex political inter-relationships of the period and fills in the context of James and Solomon's works. These two approaches are complimentary: new case studies will contribute to new surveys and new surveys reveal areas we need new case studies. This dialectical process is necessary for conducting historical research.

The process of reconstruction, however, does not stop with simply more, new writing. Ideally, it should be wedded to contemporary politics and the activist community. Radical history must be connected to radical activism and the education of a socially and politically aware public. We must reconsider why we write history and for whom we are writing. Thus the chapter has a vision: history ought to be accessible to both scholars and activists. If the past is to guide our future, any history that purports to engage the lives of those who struggle for social justice must be written for their consumption. This is not to say that historical scholarship ought to be simplified to the point of losing its scholarly edge. For history to

serve its function as a means to a better future, histories of past struggles ought to be accessible to activist communities.

Much of the problem with past literature is that it is driven by theoretical/ academic debate. Harold Cruse and Daniel Bell were not writing for movement organizers and students of history, they were writing for other "intellectuals". Their writings, like the recent workings of Brian Lloyd, were geared for a select audience, those who are already knowledgeable of Marxist theory or inter-CP debates. The relationship between theory and praxis, the construction of movements and the actions of movement activists are lost in their work.

Left intellectual history must be tied to the movements that theorists theorize about. Likewise, activism on the front lines must be understood in relation to the theory that informs movement construction, focus, and the understanding of complex political and social issues. Too much history about the left focuses on one or the other with little connection. Yet as theorists such as Paulo Freire have emphasized, ideas spawn action and action spawns ideas. This relationship—like the writing of history—is also dialectical. Radical history and contemporary radical movements are intimately connected.

There is little question that the process of doing theory has become very detached from the grassroots of activist politics to the point of alienating those with whom theorists feel an alliance. Within historical writing the same problem applies. Those in the fields of radical history and left intellectual history entrenched in the world of ideas writing often write works divorced from any social movement reality. This not only alienates a potential audience from important historical information but also contracts the lenses of the historian. The result may be a brilliant or theoretically intense discussion about theoretical developments with the focus being somewhat akin to cannon formation: a discussion of key

texts and thinkers. While not inherently limiting, the focus on textual studies or key thinkers is usually tied to things such as historical visibility and publication and very rarely tied to intellectual activities within social movement formation and politics. Thus, numerous important historical figures who rarely published get lost in the shuffle. The activists on the front lines lose out.

The question then becomes how to better write history that reflects the history of ideas and the history of movements as a wedded project. This also becomes a question of how to make history accessible to both scholars and activists: theory and praxis. If history ought to be written for educational purposes, then the learning process should be our guide. Can my students read this book? Can educators read this book? Does this text open up discussion or shut it down? Can the activist community engage these texts? These are the crucial questions that historians should ask themselves during the writing process.

Thus the following two sections promote accessible material that encourages dialogue with other historical works and contemporary activist and learning communities. Radical history that can not be read by radical activists on the front lines of struggle has little use value. Radical history and radical activism must be part of the same project.

Case Studies

Contemporary case studies covering 1917 to 1925 have given valuable and exciting information about various movements for social justice. We have learned about the

relationship between African-Americans and Communists (Solomon), the role of Caribbean born black radicals in the United States (James), Yiddish speaking anarchists (Avrich) and Marxist theorists (Lloyd). Yet, much work remains to be conducted. While many issues of concern have been raised others must still be addressed. There are four issues of particular import. First, we must rewrite our overviews of the various radical currents in chapter two. Second, we must conduct new biographical research on figures previously forgotten. Third we must utilize a new tool while conducting our research— mapping. Fourth, we must increase the scope of our case studies, diversifying regional representation, especially with regards to African-American radical movements.

These four issues highlight the need for new case to studies to embrace complex relationships between radicals and their communities. Focusing on these four issues aids future works attempting to present general narratives of the American radical landscape. Case studies that detail and probe questions of the inter-relationship between radicals will subsequently inform general narratives.

Radical Currents

Overviews of radical currents—black radicalism, socialism/Marxism, and anarchism—need to reflect the diversity within their respective movements and demonstrate how individual movements relate to other radical currents. The history of African-American radicalism benefited greatly from the printing of James' *Holding Aloft the Banner of*

Ethiopia. Though James focuses on Caribbean born radicals, he traces an ideologically diverse cast—Briggs, Garvey, McKay, and Harrison. This allows him to present a solid overview of the major elements of black radicalism: nationalism, socialism, Marxism, and Garveyism. While James' text has replaced Cruse as the premier text about black radicalism during the period, more texts surveying the breadth of African-American radicalism need to be written. James' text is limited by its focus on Caribbean radicals. As Solomon's *The Cry Was Unity* demonstrates, James does not fully interrogate the relationships of prime importance during the period, notably the relationship between African-Americans and Communists.

New overviews of black radical movements can take cues from James, especially his interest in Hubert Harrison whose life demonstrates the extreme diversity within the black radical community. Harrison was a member of the Socialist Party, the IWW, a professed black nationalist as well as a Marxist and an immigrant. Briggs demonstrates this diversity with his anarchistic impulses, CP membership, and 'race first' attitude. Future surveys of African-American radicalism ought to adopt these figures and their complex inter-relationships with other movements as a guide to understanding the extreme diversity of activism within the black community. This new piece of work would be valuable as a tool for activists attempting to connect with past instances of coalition-building and movement construction as well as aiding students studying African-American radicalism.

The world of socialism and Marxism, on the other hand, offers some very severe complications. The immediate problem remains differentiating Marxism and socialism even though the current historiography lumps them together. The history of Marxism in the United States has an extensive body of literature, however few of these works incorporate African-American Marxists such as Briggs. Brian Lloyd's *Left Out* exhibits this most fully

with his complete omission of any mention of black Marxists. In this case, the title appears to be more ironic than the author understood. Furthermore, even texts addressing African-American radicals often treat them as side notes to history. Paul Buhle makes references to some black activists, but they do not appear as an integral part of his European immigrant focused narrative. Daniel Bell makes no mention of African-American Marxists. Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* combined with the information we know about Briggs and other black radicals who entered into the (Marxist) Communist Party challenges future histories of Marxism in the United States to incorporate black Marxist thinkers. The originality of Marxist and black nationalist fusion has impacted Marxist theory for the past 80 years especially in the field of British cultural studies which focused on race and class relationships as a guide to understanding community and subcultural formations. In fact, this pioneering work into the relationship between race and class was anticipated in the works of Cyril Briggs and his comrades. Leaving out this history leaves out a major theoretical development in the history of Marxism.

The history of socialism also needs some reworking, mostly in order to counter misconceptions propagated by Daniel Bell who marginalizes anarchism as well as the existence of African-American radicals. Not all socialists belonged to the Socialist Party and not all members of the Socialist Party were Marxist. An excellent example that finds no place in Bell's narrative is the association between A. Philip Randolph and Cyril Briggs. In the first issue of The Crusader, Briggs, who was developing into a Marxist, endorsed Randolph, who was a Socialist candidate for office, even though Briggs was not and had never been a member of the Socialist Party. Here we have a perfect example of the complex history of American socialism that Bell completely ignores—a black socialist who is not a Marxist being endorsed by a black Marxist who was never a member of the Socialist Party.

The Briggs—Randolph relationship is useful to those involved in movement building and construction. This one example teaches us more about the activist meaning of socialism than simply reading about Party splits and alliances. Briggs and Randolph forged an alliance based on an equal respect and understanding of race and class relationships.

It is essential for future studies of American socialism to study relationships between individuals and broadly defined socialisms. The educational value of such studies would be immense, serving to correct many of the myths about American socialist movements—mainly Marxism as socialism— and helping current and future movements better understand their historical legacy.

The history of anarchism is also in need of general surveys. However, unlike the histories of black radicalism, Marxism, and socialism, the history of anarchism has very little literature with which to disagree. At a time in history when anarchism is once again a player on the international political scene, a history of American anarchism's most vibrant period is very urgently needed for activists as well as scholars. The classic problem with the existing literature is that anarchism, unlike Marxism, does not adhere to a key body of theoretical work (Marx). Many anarchists are socialists yet many are not. Many anarchists are members of the Industrial Workers of the World and many are against any type of unionizing. The anarchist impulse is united by an anti-authoritarian strain that despises hierarchy and although usually capitalism there are some capitalist anarchists. New surveys must fight through these strands and make links.

Race and ethnicity must also be taken into consideration in future anarchist studies. As Avrich points out, Italian and Yiddish speaking anarchists lived in separate spheres. Additionally, African-American anarchists are ignored almost completely by the literature. James' biographical material on Harrison and other black IWW members and sympathizers,

points to this omission. black anarchists such as Lucy Parsons and IWW organizer Ben Foster remain ignored. A history of African-Americans and anarchism would be a historically important project that might unite these seemingly polar narratives. More so than the other two radical currents, the history of anarchism in the United States has a lot of pieces that must be found before they can be put together.

Finally, the history of progressive movements in the United States such as those affiliated with the moderate wing of the Socialist Party or those involved with the conservation or women's rights movements need to be considered. The influence of the women's movement is especially important because it overlaps with all of the radical currents addressed. Emma Goldman and Lucy Parsons were both vocal advocates of women's issues. While progressives and liberals, such as John Dewey and Walter Lippman, are not usually viewed as radical activists, causes they espoused should be addressed more frequently. Dewey, especially, has made lasting impact on the history of radical thought and activism in the United States with his firm belief in public education and democratic reforms.

Overlooked Figures

Biographical material on previously overlooked figures can aid our understanding of relations between radical currents. Until Solomon and James published their works, Cyril Briggs was a lost soul, someone known only to those with the most intimate knowledge of the period. Hubert Harrison also fits in this category; it is only a matter of time before someone latches on to this man who was once described by British secret intelligence as a

> ...very convincing speaker" whose "influence is considered to be more effective than that of any other individual radical, because his subtle propaganda, delivered in scholarly language and back by the facts of history, carries an appeal to the more thoughtful and conservative class of negroes who could not be reached by the 'cyclone' methods of the extreme radicals. (James, p.133)

Harrison's two books remain unpublished and to date he has no biographer. Of course, there are others, many of whom are mentioned by James or Solomon. The list of important and influential individuals who have received any biographical attention is very small, especially when one compares the amount of work that has been devoted to studying art and literature during the same Harlem Renaissance period.

A biography of Cyril Briggs would be a great asset to radical historians in tandem with a biography on Hubert Harrison. Through biographical studies we can learn more about the decisions that radicals make and how they relate to their radical community and hence how the radical community relates to individual radicals. The biography is a wonderful tool that future historical studies ought to utilize more often as a means to garnering a view of the life of a lost radical as well as the world of a radical community. Here, in the stories of the lives of individuals, the most complex relationships between currents and ideologies and movements really become apparent. How much do we know about the interaction between the IWW and black radical socialists? How much more would we know if we studied the life of Hubert Harrison?

Mapping

Future case studies need to expand their methodologies. One approach that promises useful insights involves the use of maps in conjunction with textual material. This must occur in two ways: collecting demographic material and placing maps in history texts.

Where did people live? Where did they drink their beer? What did transit systems look like? Where were organizations headquartered? Demographic studies help provide an understanding of how activist communities function and exist within broader social settings. Without a sense of the environment in which people live, it is very difficult to understand why or how movements and individual activities begin and sustain themselves. We need to chart out political maps of various communities. We should discover where community centers were located, where the majority of the community worked, and the relationship of various communities within a city to one another. We must study demographic shifts to understand the flow of movements as well as the effects of social movement organizing. What did Harlem look like in 1917? How had it changed ten years later? This information is crucial to understanding the politics of Harlem. Future historical works ought to address these types of questions. Additionally, future works should study the geographic history of the cities and communities their work concerns.

The visual element of learning also mandates that historians place maps in their books. Mark Solomon discusses Harlem, but nowhere in his text does he provide a map. Wouldn't it be helpful to know where the ABB headquarters was located in relation to UNIA offices, CP offices, Briggs' own residence, the police stations, and the factories that employed many of the black workers Briggs was attempting to connect with? This information would helps us understand how the black community in Harlem functioned as a

political and social body. Most students and radicals and even scholars reading pieces of historical work have never been to the communities being discussed. Scholarly works should provide readers with maps whenever the detail of a community is vitally important to the narrative, something that is definitely the case with the history of radical culture in New York City.

The visual element of learning is crucial for a solid historical education. Our ability to understand and critically analyze the spatial aspect to movement construction requires familiarizing ourselves with the political and social geographic landscape. Knowing that Seattle had a general strike in 1919 and that race riots occurred in Chicago that same year with nearly 2,000 miles between them tells us something special about the political climate nationally. For students and scholars to look at the map with these events charted forces the kind of associations of landscape and history that can not occur textually. Bringing maps into the fold of leftist historical research and publication would greatly improve the accessibility of scholarship.

Regional Distribution

Most of the work published on African-American radicalism, anarchism, and socialism during the first half of the twentieth century focuses on figures and movements in New York City. Solomon, James, Cruse, Bell, Avrich, and Lloyd all fit this model of geographic centering. While each text drifts away from New York to tell stories about a race riot in Omaha, Nebraska or a strike in Gastonia, North Carolina, the focus remains New

York. New York City was the epicenter for radical activism, especially intellectual radicalism. But many activists came from other places with hopes of better influencing various movements and organizing campaigns. As the center for African-American radicalism, New York was home to the ABB, the UNIA, The Messenger, and Communist Party organizing within the black community. New York was the center of Marxist theoretical development as well as the home of Emma Goldman and other anarchist activists. However, New York City was not the only place in the United States with radicals.

Chicago was home to the American Negro Labor Conference of 1925, which began an institutionalized effort on the part of the Communist Party to mobilize African-American labor. Tulsa, Oklahoma was the cite of one of the most brutal race riots in American history as well as home to one of 50 national chapters of the African Blood Brotherhood. The UNIA had 2 million members in the United States many of whom were not residing in Harlem. Philadelphia witnessed IWW inter-racial unionism amongst dock workers. All of these events have been discussed in text but always in pages dominated by a New York City narrative.

Future historical works must regionally diversify. This means focusing on the Southwest, the Deep South, California and the Northwest. While brief studies of these regions have been published, the emphasis remains placed on New York City. New studies should de-center New York. Part of this process means moving away from intellectual history as a model for studying the left and re-focussing on grass-roots activist campaigns, much like recent works on Civil Rights era politics. We should also focus on the geographical landscape of different regions and the unique history that shapes these region's activist communities

Historical Overviews

As the literature review demonstrates, several studies discuss various aspects of the American left between 1917 and 1925, yet no one volume offers a comprehensive overview of the period. The goal of this section is to offer suggestions for how a general overview might be approached.

World War I and the 1917 Russian Revolution sparked various mobilization efforts and new alliances during the period while the solidification of the American Communist Party in 1925 marked the end point for much of this restructuring. Obviously the left was a complex formation before and after these bookmarks, however the bookmarks provide a frame within which the historian can begin to inquire about the overall landscape of leftist organization. The goal of the general narrative is not to dismiss past literature but to utilize past historical studies in search of a new historical synthesis. The best approach may be asking a broad question that allows us to use current historical works to construct a general narrative. One question that nicely sets up this project may be: why did the left undergo a structural overhaul between the end of World War I and the eventual solidification of an American Communist Party in 1925? There are numerous potential answers. From the viewpoint of African-American radical history and especially the life of Cyril Briggs the issue of race and class must be raised. Was the Communist Party offering something to the African-American community that past organizations did not? Another answer from this vantage might be found in Theodore Kornweibel's study of government repression of African-American radical activists. Did the Federal government prevent African-Americans from organizing in a certain manner and thus drive many to join the Communist Party?

Government repression hurt the UNIA as well as the IWW, an inter-racial union which had numerous African-American members until it almost vanished due to government repression.

Other approaches to this question can be found in the historical literature about anarchism. Anarchist history largely follows an approach similar to Kornweibel's , pointing to Federal repression and anti-immigration legislation which resulted in the deportation of radicals such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman. Authors writing about Marxism, such as Lloyd, point to competing leftist ideas as a major reason why particular factions won in the Socialist Party splits of the late teens. Lloyd also points to competing progressive ideologies such as the influence of pragmatism on American Marxist thought. Daniel Bell looks to a tension between socialists who want to centralize power on the left and those who want to maintain old structures, something Bell views as a result of the success of the Russian Revolution.

The present historiographic landscape lacks comprehensiveness. In order to follow the logic of these relationships and issues of debate, it is necessary to reconsider our interpretations of why and how movement mobilization occurred. The wealth of evidence demonstrates extreme diversity, something that the current material fails to recognize. We must ask the broad question and chart out potential answers, keeping in mind the relationship between race and class; ambiguities within movements and between individual alliances; the need to question past scholarship; and, the need to expand the definition of radicalism.

Race and Class

Several excellent works focus on the relationship between the Communist Party and black radicals (Solomon and Naison); however, few studies look to race and class outside of this relationship. Attention should shift to non-CP organizations, analyzing how other institutions and radical movements negotiated race and class. This information might in turn better aid an understanding of the choices made by many black radicals, such as Cyril Briggs, to enter into the Communist Party.

Of particular interest is the relationship between black radicals and the Industrial Workers of the World. Many African-Americans were members of the IWW, but most left the organization and moved into the CP. Why would blacks leave the only inter-racial union? Studying this question would give insight into power shifts occurring on the left. The IWW was decreasing in membership and suffering dramatic blows from government repression. The CP was riding the wave of Russian Revolution momentum and preaching anti-imperialist politics. In many respects the CP was more internationalist in its race and class relationship while the IWW was more immediate, focusing on inter-racial labor organizing in the United States. Was there a shift in thinking amongst black leaders such as Claude McKay (an IWW member) from short term gains to long term revolutionary goals? Hubert Harrison, interestingly, never moved into the CP but he did leave the IWW. Why? Was the IWW becoming unresponsive to the needs of African-American workers?

There are numerous questions to be posed regarding the IWW and the CP and black radicals. New overviews of the period ought to look towards these and other questions regarding race and class relationships in order to expand the scope of our current knowledge regarding African-American and Communist Party relationships.

Focus on Ambiguities

Much of the current historical focus is on concrete examples of political mobilization (CP, IWW, UNIA) and Marxist political theory. This research has allowed us to understand general institutional and ideological constructions of the American left. However, it has not given us much insight into the gray lines between various institutions and ideologies. This is where the focus must now shift.

Briggs, for example, had an ambiguous relationship with the IWW. His membership status is unclear. Was Briggs an active member? How deep were his ties beyond the sympathetic writings in The Crusader? Focusing on Briggs' relationship with the IWW helps us better understand the relationship between black radicals and anarchism.

Emma Goldman was not a member of the IWW nor was she prominent within Yiddish speaking anarchist circles despite the fact that she supported the IWW and spoke Yiddish. What does this tell us about the nature of anarchist activism during the period amongst Jewish radicals? Perhaps through learning more about Goldman's relationship to the IWW and the Yiddish anarchists, we can learn more about the history of American Jewish radical association.

Reevaluating Past Scholarship

As Winston James' critique of Harold Cruse makes clear, there are serious problems with some past scholarship. As a result, it is necessary to be exceptionally careful when using past historical writings as a guide to future ones. The history of American radicalism offers two unique obstacles to overcome: recognizing ideological bias and motivation behind scholarship and evaluating the quality of new research that relies upon potentially problematic sources.

First, the ideological positioning of authors can limit their scope and pre-determine their conclusions. Brian Lloyd, a Leninist sympathizer, serves as example. His conclusion that pragmatism was an awful influence on American Marxist thought and is to blame for the lack of Marxist led left mobilization in the United States suggests that Lloyd's ideological views pre-determined his conclusions.

Ideology can help provide focus and structure in political thought, but it can also hinder attempts at understanding historical issues. Cruse, Bell, and Lloyd all focus their energy on things they oppose politically. As a result they spend little time focusing on anything other than the polar objects of hate and love. Conducting sweeping historical work requires a vision. This can be ideological, such as a belief in the people and democracy and justice. However, historians must be able to distance themselves from their passions enough to offer the most thorough and reasonable study possible. For a historian of the left passion usually runs very deep and detachment can often be painful, if not impossible. Ideology is hotly contested terrain and those on the left have always fought bitterly with one another for the banner of ideological purity. For the sake of coalition building and the future of

movements for social justice, it might be time to set aside some of the hateful ideological warfare. We need to understand our past and we need to begin that understanding now.

Second, many current historical works rely too heavily on past historical works, such as Cruse. This process can occur in two ways: an author may not address the usage of a known problem (Cruse) or an author may directly address a known problem. The first instance forces the reader to think about the influence of the known problem on the new text. Naison, for example, relies a bit on Cruse for his historical background on Briggs and other teens and twenties black radicals. The question becomes whether or not Naison's information or conclusions are based on flaws within Cruse's scholarship. James' critique of Cruse offers example of the second instance. James announces a break with Cruse and past scholarship influenced and based upon Cruse. Thus, James' conclusions regarding Briggs and others is probably more reliable and based on greater reflection of the historical literature than Naison.

We need to pay closer attention to where authors are obtaining their information. The source of historical information is usually an indicator of how an author's argument might proceed as well as its quality. By paying attention to both author perspective and research materials we can critically gage the quality of historical material and provide increased insight in future writings.

Expanding the Definition of Radicalism

While I have argued that the current historiography is limiting because it does not allow for a look at the inter-relationships between varying radical ideologies, it should also

be said that current definitions of what constitutes radical activism is extremely limiting. Class and anti-racist politics appear to be the defining characteristics of the historiographic material. Gender is addressed rarely, mostly in the literature about Emma Goldman. There is little discussion of environmental activism except for occasional mentions by IWW historians writing about logging and shipping in the Northwest. There is also separation between progressives and radicals within the literature, a distinction that may make sense ideologically but confuses the issue with regard to actual movement building.

The contemporary political landscape is dotted with radicalism of different sorts, including such hybrids as the environmental justice movement or ecological socialist movements. These contemporary movements give us an increased understanding of how past movements might have formed and what issues they may have formed around. The omission of environmental concerns and women's issues from the bulk of leftist historical work raises extremely critical questions about the realistic portrayal of radical movements between 1917 and 1925. Were these movements centered only around either race or class? The modern environmental movement and the women's movement were gaining strength and direction during this period. It is unlikely that members of these radical movements for justice were not either in discussion with or part of race and class based mobilizations. The CP never really looked to environmental concerns and the IWW was not sexually diverse but were these issues ever discussed within the movements? The literature is silent on these questions. In order to find out the answers we should expand our definition of what constitutes radical activism and work towards connecting various radical movements, and adding more radical currents to the current list of three.

Conclusion

The historiography of the American left between 1917 and 1925 needs work. We must write new case studies and general narratives that are accessible to scholars, activists, and students. The current literature denies much of the left's complexity and diversity by boxing radical currents along binary ideological lines. Anarchists, Marxists, socialists, black radicals, and others fought long and hard for social justice and very often they fought together. Scholarly history ought to reflect the realities of past activist politics and help inform future activist politics. The life of Cyril Briggs and his treatment within the historical literature mirrors these problems. Briggs was a complex individual with numerous alliances and affiliations. The story of his life informs us why we must reconsider the history of his time.

Conclusion

Cyril Briggs was an original thinker and a radical activist who garnered insight into left political mobilization and politics from a diverse and complex radical landscape. His fusion of black nationalism and Marxist internationalism remains a unique and lasting contribution to the history of radical political theory and a crucial joining of race and class politics that became the centerpiece of African-American and Communist Party relations. Briggs' journal, The Crusader, gave him a public forum for political expression and, eventually, a vehicle to promote his revolutionary black nationalist organization, the African Blood Brotherhood. Briggs influenced countless of his contemporaries with his punchy writing style and unwavering political commitments. He remains one of the most significant figures in 20th Century American radical history.

Unfortunately, the historiographic material on the American left between 1917 and 1925 largely ignores Briggs. Until the recent publications of Winston *James' Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia* and Mark Solomon's *The Cry Was Unity*, Briggs was known to only a handful of scholars. Still, Briggs has not received attention outside the field of African-American history even though his ideas cover the landscape of American radical thought. This problem, however, is not unique to Briggs. The historiography fails to cover the diversity of thought and opinion that aided Briggs in the development of his political thought. The literature tends to construct binary relations between the era's dominant radical currents: anarchism, socialism/Marxism, and black radicalism. These literatures rarely overlap across ideological lines. World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917 forced radicals to reconsider their approach to fighting the expansion of military backed capital investment, resulting in a diverse and confrontational radical climate. This context does not fit the

historiogrpahies arbitrary separation of radical currents. Briggs and his radical contemporaries fused ideas and formed movements across ideological lines. The literature available does not present this picture of radical activism during the period.

Thus, the current approach to writing American radical history must be reconsidered. We need to write new case studies that delve into the complex inter-relationships of the period and new historical overviews that offer a comprehensive narrative of this intricate and constantly shifting radical landscape. This new scholarship must be accessible to activist communities and students of history. If movements for social justice are to prosper access to information about past historical struggles and coalition building is crucial. Left mobilization and coalition building from 1917 to 1925 provides historical knowledge for contemporary and future radical movements. Cyril Briggs was an intellectual and an activist, a standard of living that historical works ought to emulate. The history of ideas and movements must be wedded in a manner accessible to both scholars and activists: theory and praxis.

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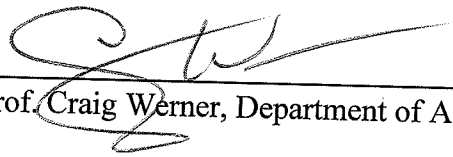
Title: 
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