“The Independence So Hardly Won Has Been Maintained”: C. L. R. James and the U.S. Occupation of Haiti

Raphael Dalleo

Cultural Critique, Number 87, Spring 2014, pp. 38-59 (Article)

Published by University of Minnesota Press
DOI: 10.1353/cul.2014.0017

"THE INDEPENDENCE SO HARDLY WON HAS BEEN MAINTAINED"

C. L. R. JAMES AND THE U.S. OCCUPATION OF HAITI

Raphael Dalleo

> *What makes* The Black Jacobins *the exemplary and lasting work of historical criticism that it is, is the self-consciousness with which James connects the story of Toussaint Louverture to the vital stories of his—that is James's—time. Doing so, he urges us to connect Toussaint to the vital stories of* our own *time.*
>
> —*David Scott,* Conscripts of Modernity

> *What I don't know is precisely when James began to be interested in Haiti. It doesn't figure in his earlier writing. And yet very shortly after he comes to England, in 1932, he travels to Paris to immerse himself in the archives, almost as if it's one of the reasons for his coming to Europe in the first place. He must have been thinking about it; he must have known about it.*
>
> —*Stuart Hall, "Breaking Bread with History"*

> *I had decided—God only knows why, I don't; and I rather doubt if even He would too—that I would write a history of Toussaint L'Ouverture. Why? I don't know . . . I had made up my mind, for no other than a* literary *reason, that when I reached England I would settle down to write a history of Toussaint L'Ouverture.*
>
> —*C. L. R. James, "How I Wrote* The Black Jacobins"

These epigraphs, from David Scott, Stuart Hall, and C. L. R. James, all address the act of contextualization, even as they call it into question. How can we know which are the "vital stories" that influence a text? What happens when we encounter a mystery to which we can find no answer? What do we do when a historical event seems so obviously to have influenced a writer—to have laid the foundations for that writer to arrive at his topic of investigation—but the writer himself avoids virtually any mention of this event, and in fact, almost obsessively offers other explanations? What should we think when subsequent

Cultural Critique 87—Spring 2014—Copyright 2014 Regents of the University of Minnesota

interpreters of that writer's work have been equally silent on this context? How can we find evidence of causality when all we have is absence? Sometimes so much has been written about an event—or a text—that it seems like all questions about it have been answered; sometimes the most obvious and essential questions have not yet been asked. Finding answers may not always be possible, but looking for them can open up new ways of seeing.

C. L. R. James wrote the most important English-language history of the Haitian Revolution as a text very much in dialogue with its 1930s context. James describes conceiving the book in Trinidad before moving to London in 1932, and then undertaking research in the Paris archives in 1933. James's findings would be dramatized in the play *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (written in 1934 and performed in 1936), and then published in the extraordinary history *The Black Jacobins* in 1938. *The Black Jacobins* is arguably the most important book of international anticolonialism written during the first half of the twentieth century. Yet the book's origins are surprisingly cloudy. James frequently discussed his motivation for writing *The Black Jacobins* as a desire to prophesize what he calls in a preface to the 1963 edition the "coming emancipation of Africa" (1963, vii). The best-informed James scholars, like Robert Hill, Anthony Bogues, and David Scott, cite the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and this threat to the sovereignty of the only African nation not under European control as the crucial motivation for *The Black Jacobins;* in Grant Farred's words, "*The Black Jacobins* was conceived as an extended critique of the imperialist Italian invasion of Abyssinia" (115).[1] That invasion and the International African Friends of Ethiopia (later reconfigured as the International African Service Bureau) that James helped form in response were undoubtedly crucial to his political development. But the Abyssinia crisis began at the end of 1934; James says that he carried out his research on Haiti for six months, beginning in 1933.[2] The final product that would become *The Black Jacobins* was certainly composed with the invasion of Abyssinia in mind, but this event occurred too late to be credited for the book's conception. The catalyst for James's initial interest in the Haitian Revolution, then, remains a mystery that pointing to the Abyssinia crisis cannot solve. Why did James want to write about Haiti in particular—not Africa, not his native Trinidad—in the early 1930s?

I want to hazard an explanation for which I have been able to find no proof. But perhaps, as postcolonial studies teaches us, this absence—

what Michel-Rolph Trouillot might call this "archival silence"—*is* the story. Interrogating such a silence requires methodological creativity and flexibility. When James first began to think about Haiti, the fears that would later be evoked by the threat to Abyssinian sovereignty had already been realized in the Caribbean. From 1915 to 1934—the years during which James began work on his history of the Haitian Revolution—Haiti, the second nation in the Americas to have successfully overthrown colonial domination, was occupied by the United States. My hypothesis is twofold: first, that James's interest in Haiti was mediated by that occupation, making *The Black Jacobins* part of the international fascination with all things Haitian sparked by U.S.-disseminated narratives of Haiti;[3] and second, that the silence about this context (and repeated preference to point to Africa as the book's inspiration) reflects just how threatening the occupation was to the vision of anticolonialism that animates *The Black Jacobins*. Scholars of anticolonialism have not adequately engaged with this ambiguous event, an occupation that lasted for almost two decades and significantly shaped the visions of imperialism and resistance for those who lived through it. A fuller understanding of the contexts of texts like *The Black Jacobins* must account for how the U.S. occupation of Haiti stands at the outset of Caribbean anticolonialism, inspiring, initiating, and enabling it even as Haiti's loss of sovereignty would hang as a shadow over all of the discourses of decolonization that followed.

Writing about absence presents obvious challenges, but as Sibylle Fischer shows in *Modernity Disavowed*, it is not impossible. Fischer examines how the successful Haitian Revolution haunted nineteenth-century planter discourse. As she puts it:

> This project started as a study of nineteenth-century Caribbean literatures and the beginnings of national cultures. Eventually I came to feel that at the core of many literary texts and literary and cultural histories there is a certain mystery: a suspended contradiction, an unexpected flight of fantasy where one might have expected a reckoning with reality, an aesthetic judgment too harsh to be taken at face value, or a failure to deal with what we know to have been the main issues of concern. I came to think that there were more, and more complex, connections between these odd moments and the "horrors of Saint Domingue" than the cursory references to the fears of the Creole population in most literary histories suggested. To be sure, the fear of a repetition of the events in Haiti led to denials of their transcendence and the suppression of any information

> relating to them. But silence and fear are not beyond interrogation . . . the impact of an event that is experienced as antagonistic or even traumatic cannot be measured merely by looking at explicit statements. (ix–x)

In Fischer's work, the Haitian Revolution becomes the silent, silenced center of the nineteenth-century Americas. That silence began to be filled in the twentieth century, especially by works like *The Black Jacobins*. Yet James's history contains a different silence at its center. James's desire to make this story from Haiti's past relevant to his present has been amply noted: the 1938 preface to *The Black Jacobins* references the Spanish civil war and the Russian Revolution, and allusions to the coming decolonization of Africa appear throughout the text. Yet his only mention of contemporary Haiti comes in a single paragraph, five pages from the end of the 1938 edition, which is edited out of the 1963 reprint. The 1938 edition of *The Black Jacobins* includes a description of how "in 1915 . . . America pounced on Haiti" but that because "the tradition of independence was too strong . . . the American marines had to evacuate the country" (311). Even this reference downplays the impact of the occupation and casts it as a momentary threat quickly overcome; James further casts this event as part of the past rather than his present by incorrectly giving 1931 rather than 1934 as the end date of the occupation. Yet this single paragraph lets us know that James could not help but be aware of the uncertain status of Haitian independence in his own lifetime, even if most of his energies are spent diverting attention away from that reality.

The U.S. occupation of Haiti was, from a global marketing standpoint, the best and worst thing to happen to Haitian culture. The occupation brought Haiti and its culture to the forefront of U.S. consciousness, with Broadway plays, best-selling travel narratives, and zombie movies all circulating images of Haiti—frequently represented in exotic and racist ways—throughout the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. This omnipresence of Haiti, well documented in Mary Renda's *Taking Haiti*, was not limited to any one group: black and white audiences alike responded—though often in different ways—to all things Haitian. Harlem Renaissance luminaries like James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston traveled to Haiti during the occupation and wrote about their experiences. Renda describes how for these African Americans, "discussions of Haitian history and

culture" provided hope of "unsettling . . . hegemonic interpretations of American identity" (264). Representations of Haiti implicitly justifying the foreign intervention as well as counternarratives disputing the dominant versions circulated widely during this period and helped define perceptions of the Caribbean in the United States and beyond.

In the context of this national obsession with Haiti, West Indians in the United States found themselves mediating their own identities and experiences as Caribbean people through these images of Haiti. Jamaican Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo* (1929) feature black characters who are mostly non-Caribbean, with the exception of Ray, a Haitian, who is one of the few characters to appear in both novels. McKay moved to the United States in 1912; he moved to Harlem during a period in which black intellectuals there were actively debating the U.S. military presence in Haiti, and in fact, *Home to Harlem* includes commentary on both the Haitian Revolution and the U.S. occupation.[4] One of the other major West Indian intellectual figures in the United States during this time period, George Padmore—who would become one of James's closest collaborators while *The Black Jacobins* was being written—similarly found his attention drawn to Haiti. Padmore regularly references the U.S. occupation in his writing, and would publish the pamphlet *Haiti: An American Slave Colony* in 1931. James's *The Black Jacobins* thus fits into an international surge in interest in Haiti sparked by the occupation, especially among people of the African diaspora. Yet unlike McKay or Padmore, James, so concerned with the lessons of Haitian history for his present context, has surprisingly little to say about contemporary Haiti.

It would be one thing if James had simply ignored the present status of Haiti, which by the time *The Black Jacobins* was first published in 1938 was no longer occupied by the United States (though neither was Haiti totally autonomous, as a treaty and constitution ratified during the occupation allowed the United States to maintain control of Haitian finances and foreign affairs until the National City Bank of New York—known today as Citigroup—collected in full the debt payments it had forced Haiti to agree to during the occupation). But like the anxious disavowals Fischer notices characterizing planter responses to the Haitian Revolution, James at times seems to be deliberately writing around the specter of the occupation. One of his first published essays, from a 1931 issue of the *Beacon*, is positioned as a

refutation of an earlier article on black inferiority yet opens with a strange discussion of Japan's occupation by U.S. marines. James brings up Japan to argue that while its occupation was used in the mid-nineteenth century as proof of Japanese inferiority, the fifty years since then had seen Japan thoroughly disprove this idea. Unmentioned but lurking behind this story is Haiti; the fact that James's essay moves from marines in Japan to invoke Toussaint Louverture and James Weldon Johnson as proofs of black achievement further amplifies this haunting effect. James even attests to Johnson's accomplishments by quoting from the *Nation*, the publication that had famously featured Johnson's 1920 articles opposing the U.S. mission in Haiti. To not directly name what was still an ongoing occupation in the face of all of these signifiers associated with it—U.S. marines, Toussaint, Johnson, the *Nation*—suggests an almost exaggerated avoidance of the topic.

This same tendency to auspiciously write around the occupation occurs in the rare instances where James *does* address the contemporary situation in Haiti. James's first public presentation of his research on the Haitian Revolution in his play *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (performed in London in March 1936, a little more than a year after the occupation ended in August 1934) includes this author's note in the playbill:

> The independence so hardly won has been maintained. The former French colony of San Domingo, to-day Haiti, is a member of the League of Nations, and Colonel Nemours, its representative, a man of colour, presided over the eighth assembly of the League. The closest and most cordial relationship exists to-day between white France and coloured San Domingo. The French take a deep interest in a people whose language, cultural traditions and aspirations are entirely French. The Haitians look on France as their spiritual home and many of them fought in the French army during the war of 1914–1918. The play was conceived four years ago and was completely finished by the autumn of 1934. (2013, 45)[5]

The play, in other words, was "completely finished" while Haiti was still under U.S. military control, and before the Walwal incident in November 1934 prompted Emperor Haile Selassie to go to the League of Nations in January 1935 to protest Italian aggression. James does not mention Abyssinia as context, but instead emphasizes Haiti's uninterrupted freedom as well as its current status as equal member in the world of nations.

The evidence James offers of Haiti's continuous independence actually speaks to the nation's embattled status. Haiti's admission to the League of Nations came in 1920, at the height of occupation. Alfred Nemours (whom James credits in the foreword to the 1980 edition of *The Black Jacobins* as the person who "explained the whole [Revolution] to me in great detail" [1980b, v]) served as vice president to the league's assembly in 1927, while Haiti was still under U.S. rule. Nemours had been a member of the Conseil d'Etat, the body appointed by successive U.S.-aligned presidents that replaced the democratically elected legislature dissolved at the outset of the occupation (Supplice, 62). A loyal member of the pro-occupation Borno administration, Nemours wrote a 1926 book, *Les Borno dans l'histoire d'Haïti*, about the heroic participation of the president's ancestors in the Haitian Revolution. Nemours was even called in 1930 to testify in favor of U.S. presence in the aftermath of the Cayes massacre (Heinl and Heinl, 485). His prestigious position in the League of Nations is therefore hardly incontrovertible proof of Haiti's independence, and if anything suggests that his career advancement owed to his acceptance of the nonsovereign status quo. Once again, James invokes signifiers of the occupation, in this case not only avoiding naming it, but also presenting an overstated performance of how fully Haitian independence has been preserved that surely speaks to an underlying anxiety.

Along with this emphasis on the unbroken nature of Haitian independence, the assertions that Haiti is "entirely French" and that "Haitians look on France as their spiritual home" seem equally out of place, unusually Europhilic as preface to a play about how the French were driven out of Haiti. The emphasis on the Caribbean as an extension of Europe could be read as an attempt to deflect attention from what by the 1930s had become the obvious rise of U.S. power in the region. Other members of the *Beacon* group with whom James collaborated in Trinidad certainly saw the U.S. presence as a threat: Jean De Boissiere, writing in the *Beacon* in November 1933, describes a situation in which "Cuba, as the whole world knows, although technically free, is under the complete political domination of the United States. Economically, she is absolutely owned by American finance" (299).[6] At face value, the preface to *Toussaint L'Ouverture* seems a strange set of assertions; these assertions make more sense when understood as avoidances of the very concerns being expressed by James's contemporaries.

The many references in *The Black Jacobins* to the coming African revolution or even the parallels James draws between the Haitian and Russian Revolutions can make it seem as though his focus was elsewhere, that he had made the kind of "detour" that Edouard Glissant finds in Frantz Fanon's participation in the Algerian independence struggle.[7] But James is undoubtedly invested in thinking about the Caribbean throughout this period. He contributed regularly to the London-based periodical the *Keys* from 1933 to 1936, publishing on Abyssinia and Africa but also on topics like "West Indies Self-Government." The first issue of the *Keys*, from July 1933, includes a report on the First Weekend Conference of the League of Coloured Peoples, in which James gave a lecture about Captain Cipriani, the Trinidadian pro-autonomy leader about whom James published a book during this period. James's lecture focused especially on the West Indies' "internal" divisions "based on varying shades of complexion" and his argument about the "definite need of a West Indian consciousness" ("Conference Report," 5); these divisions are precisely the issues James explores in *The Black Jacobins*. Yet there is no mention that James, during this lecture from early 1933, discussed Haiti, which was at that moment negotiating the withdrawal of U.S. forces while black and mulatto elites jockeyed for control of the new government.

The *Keys*, however, might not be the best place to see where contemporary U.S.–Haitian relations would have made their mark on James's consciousness. The *Keys* is itself almost entirely silent on Haiti, suggesting that the occupation was much less an issue for the black community in London than for African Americans in Harlem. The end of the U.S. occupation passes in August 1934 virtually unacknowledged, though the October–December 1934 issue of the *Keys* does contain an article comparing the state of public health and education in Africa and "Hayti" (Barlovatz). The article never directly names the end of U.S. occupation as its context, but it takes for granted that readers will be aware of the recent U.S. presence: there is mention that health services are "now manned only by natives of the country" and the assertion that "as for education, where the Americans did not collaborate, there are probably more and better schools above the elementary in little Hayti than in whole middle Africa" (Barlovatz, 38). Without knowledge of the occupation, these statements make little sense; the fact that explanation of this context seems unnecessary to the author suggests

how much the occupation would have defined Haiti's status in the mid-1930s. Any relatively well-informed person in England would have known about the occupation of Haiti. The *Times* of London ran a series of three articles in December 1929, the period of the Cayes massacre that finally shifted world opinion against the occupation, as well as six stories in March and April 1930 as a U.S. commission was trying to negotiate an end to the military operation. The coverage of the massacre was even more extensive in the *Manchester Guardian*, which throughout December 1929 ran such headlines as "Martial Law in Haiti: Many Injured in Riots," "U.S. Shooting in Haiti," and "Oppression in Haiti."

James covered cricket for the *Manchester Guardian* upon his arrival in England: in fact, a few days after the *Guardian* ran the article "U.S. Marines to Withdraw from Haiti" on August 9, 1933, a series of James's articles on cricket appeared in the August 14 to 18 issues. The *Times* is one of the newspapers that James mentions reading while still living in Trinidad. In the essay "Discovering Literature in Trinidad: The 1930s," James lists a number of periodicals that, he says, "[came] to my house, on my subscription" (1980a, 237), well before he had begun his research on the Haitian Revolution. Many of these publications contained coverage of the occupation. The only publication James mentions receiving from the United States was the *New Republic*, which was a well-known voice against the occupation. As early as 1922, an article detailed "the hatred that exists on both sides, the 'grand fossé,' (the great ditch—a Haitian phrase) between the American military and the Haitians" (Angell, 107). An article from 1929 advocates for the end to occupation by concluding, "No one can say whether or not the Haitians will be able to govern themselves until they have been given a real and untrammeled opportunity" ("Misrepresenting," 59). The front page of the April 9, 1930, issue of the *New Republic* trumpets the beginning of a gradual U.S. withdrawal. The fact that James's 1931 essay "The Intelligence of the Negro" quotes from an editorial in a May 1931 issue of the *Nation* suggests that he likely read the July 15, 1931, editorial in the *Nation* titled "Haiti Still a Problem."

To note that James read these publications, and that these publications contained news of the U.S. occupation, is not the same thing as proving that James decided to write about Haiti based on this news. Susan Buck-Morss uses a similarly speculative methodology to address another silence, that of the contribution of the Haitian Revolution to

modernity and Western philosophy. She looks at Hegel's master–slave dialectic, developed in a series of lectures in Jena from 1803 to 1806, and then notices that the newspaper Hegel was regularly reading in this period frequently ran articles on the events in Saint-Domingue. Buck-Morss concludes: "We are left with only two alternatives: either Hegel was the blindest of all the blind philosophers of freedom in Enlightenment Europe, surpassing Locke and Rousseau by far in his ability to block out reality right in front of his nose (the *print* right in front of his face at the breakfast table); or Hegel knew—knew about real slaves revolting successfully against real masters, and he elaborated his dialectic of lordship and bondage deliberately within this contemporary context" (50). To argue about how much James knew of the bondage Haitians experienced under U.S. rule from 1915 to 1934 requires similar assumptions about what James might have read and how he might have responded to it during the period when he was turning his focus toward Haitian history. But considering how uncommon it was for the *Times* of London or the *New Republic* to cover news from the Caribbean, it is hard to believe that James would not have carefully read these articles about Haiti.

The discussions taking place around the League of Coloured Peoples or in mainstream publications form only a small part of James's context. James was also part of a network of black thinkers that extended in profound ways to the United States and the Harlem scene. Most obvious is James's relationship with Paul Robeson, who would star in James's play *Toussaint L'Ouverture* in 1936. Robeson forms a crucial link to the North American fascination with Haitian history and culture during the years of occupation. Robeson's first lead role was in the 1922 play *Taboo*; the play was not set in Haiti, but was nonetheless renamed *Voodoo* when performed in London, presumably to capitalize on the interest in the exotic heightened by the occupation. In 1925, Robeson played Brutus Jones in Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones*, a role he reprised in the 1933 film. *The Emperor Jones* follows an African American's fall from power on what the playbill describes as "an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by white marines" (O'Neill, 2). The subtext of U.S. occupation in *The Emperor Jones* is therefore not subtle, and it is hard to imagine James not being familiar with the play or seeing the film, which opened in London in March 1934 (while James was writing his play) and was

reviewed in the *Times*. James and Robeson were meeting at parties in London as early as 1932, and James suggests in an interview that he wrote *Toussaint L'Ouverture* to create a good role for Robeson: "Paul did not ask me for any play but Paul needed a play. Nobody used to write any plays. He could play Othello and that was the end of it. . . . It was not the Abyssinian crisis that was at the back of that play. Behind that play was Paul Robeson."[8] Robeson's biographers speculate that "perhaps during rehearsals [for *Toussaint L'Ouverture*] Robeson and James talked about the situation in Ethiopia" (Boyle and Bunie, 341); we can only wonder how much this play about the Haitian Revolution would have sparked conversations about the more recent struggle for sovereignty Haiti was undergoing in the mid-1930s.

While James was not in the United States during the occupation period, then, he was certainly in conversation with other black thinkers who had been shaped by the American fascination with Haiti. James collaborated on the International African Service Bureau with George Padmore and Amy Ashwood Garvey, both important figures in 1920s Harlem. James credits Padmore in particular with shifting his political worldview toward the focus on international imperialism that would undergird *The Black Jacobins;* as James puts it, "I had come to England from the Caribbean where we had no native language, no Caribbean past, and I had become a Marxist along with the other Caribbean intellectuals following the European pattern. It was Padmore who brought me back and made me understand the significance of the colonial struggle in its own right and particularly the struggle that was to begin in Africa."[9] Padmore's own awareness of international imperialism was formed during the time he spent in the United States from 1924 to 1929, when debates about the role of U.S. empire were especially focused on Haiti. I want to turn to Padmore's writings from the early 1930s to think about how his ideas about colonialism are refracted through the U.S. occupation of Haiti because of the influence Padmore's vision of anticolonialism would have had on James while he was researching and writing about Haiti.

James and Padmore were childhood friends in Trinidad and then reconnected in London in 1933, the same year that James began his research in the Paris archives.[10] Soon after their reunion, Padmore moved permanently to London, where he and James began working together especially closely in 1935. Even before seeing Padmore again, James

was likely aware of Padmore's writing in the *Negro Worker*. Looking back on the 1930s, James describes how important the *Negro Worker* was to "the consciousness among blacks that they were part of an international movement" (1992, 290). James mentions "Uriah Butler and the workers of the oil-fields nourishing themselves on illicit copies of Padmore's paper" (290). The *Negro Worker* must have had some influence in the Trinidad that James left in February 1932; the May 1932 issue carries a note about the Trinidadian government banning the distribution of the newspaper. In an interview published in 1984, James says that he didn't read the *Negro Worker* in Trinidad, but "by the time I arrived in London I knew some West Indians who were taking all the literature they could" (MARHO, 268). If this means that James began reading the *Negro Worker* while living with Learie Constantine in 1932, he must have noticed the banner that the newspaper unveiled in mid-1931, which Brent Hayes Edwards reproduces in *The Practice of Diaspora*. The image features "a bare-chested black worker" (260) breaking the chains on a globe, with only four geographical spaces named: the United States, Africa, Cuba, and Haiti.

The *Negro Worker* was edited by Padmore while he headed Profintern's Negro Bureau and was published by the Comintern-backed International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUC-NW). Padmore seems to have become especially favored by these Soviet Union–sponsored groups because of his keen awareness of U.S. imperialism. From the first issue of the *Negro Worker* (January 1931), Padmore includes occupied Haiti in his list of colonized Caribbean spaces: "All [of the Caribbean islands] except Cuba, Haiti and San Domingo are dominated by British, French, Dutch and American imperialism; while Cuba, Haiti, and San Domingo, the so-called independent Republics are, in truth and reality, economic colonies of the United States, which maintains puppet governments in each of them as well as marines in Haiti" (1931b, 16). Later in 1931, Padmore's article "Hands Off Liberia!" continues to emphasize Haiti's status as de facto colony: "It is important for every Negro worker to take note that, whenever the Americans and other white capitalists have some dirty task to perform in connection with Negro countries like Haiti and Liberia, they always secure the services of some black lickspittle who is supposed to be a 'big' leader of his race, pay him a few dollars and give him some petty office and thereby get him to do the job for them" (7). When, in act 1,

scene 4 of James's 1936 play, the British general Maitland offers Toussaint one million francs and the opportunity to become a figurehead in restoring slavery, Padmore's lesson from the U.S. occupation rings through (James 2013, 75).

In addition to writing about Haiti himself, Padmore regularly published articles about Haiti written by others. The October–November 1931 issue of *The Negro Worker* features an article by Trinidadian Charles Alexander, which places the occupation of Haiti in the context of U.S. imperialism in other parts of the region: "Cuba is not the only colony of American imperialism in the Caribbean where the Negro workers find a life of hell. In Panama the oppression and persecution is intense; in Colombia, under the domination of the United Fruit Company, they live a life of misery and torture; while in Honduras, Guatemala, and San Salvador, a vicious situation exists. In Haiti, where the American imperialists have replaced Borno with an equally servile tool, Vincent, the bloody massacres of hundreds of Haitian workers and peasants in December 1929 are still fresh in the minds of the toilers" (18). In the penultimate issue that Padmore edited, in February–March 1933, an unattributed article titled "A Wave of Terror Is Sweeping over Haiti" describes:

> United States imperialism aided by the corrupt puppet Vincent government has launched a savage attack on the militant workers, in an attempt to crush their newlyformed class trade union organization, the "Ligue des Ouvriers en General d'Haiti." . . . Among other militant Haitians arrested is the well known Haitian revolutionary writer Jacques Roumain. . . . The Int. Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers once more protests against this high-handed policy of American imperialism and its black agents in Haiti. . . . We demand the immediate withdrawal of all the marines and all American military officials from Haiti. We denounce the new slave treaty recently imposed upon the Haitian people by the white imperialist rulers of the country. (15)

The article ends by directly invoking the legacy of the Haitian Revolution as a response to contemporary U.S. domination: "Down with American imperialism! Down with the Haitian traitors! Long live the spirit of Toussaint Louverture! Long live the independence of the Haitian people!" (16).

Did James read these words in early 1933, and did they inspire him to travel to Paris to carry out research on a history of the Haitian

Revolution when the cricket season ended that year? At the very least, we can see this article as evidence that another Trinidadian was creating a narrative in which Haiti's twentieth-century loss of sovereignty could be combatted by going back to the past and recuperating Haiti's revolutionary tradition. David Scott persuasively analyzes the 1938 *Black Jacobins* as what he calls a "vindicationist narrative" (55) meant to respond to the idea that blacks around the world weren't capable of, or even interested in, self-government; the history of the Haitian Revolution becomes in James's retelling a powerful argument that people of African descent have long desired and been willing to fight for freedom and independence. It was in this context of vindicating the race, as the assertion of grand historical accomplishments meant to counter stereotypes, that African American writers in the United States also turned during the 1930s to "Haitian history . . . to reflect not only the assertion of race pride but also, simultaneously, the possibility of revolutionary change" (Renda, 278).

If the U.S. occupation of Haiti is such an obvious context for the world out of which *The Black Jacobins* emerged, what are we then to make of the silence about this context, which dominates James's text itself, his own subsequent discussions of the text, and the critical engagements with the text ever since? For African Americans in the United States like James Weldon Johnson, the occupation of Haiti by racist white American marines could easily be imagined as part of the same struggle against lynching and Jim Crow taking place in "occupied" southern states. But the loss of sovereignty by the most important beacon of black nationhood in the Americas fit exceptionally poorly into the framework of anticolonial nationalism that *The Black Jacobins* would help to define; taking the occupation into account would have virtually undermined that discourse's basic assumptions. If, in Scott's definition, anticolonial romance "depended upon a certain (utopian) horizon toward which the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving" (8), then the idea that an independent nation once established might a century later be re-enslaved fundamentally undoes anticolonialism's teleology. James appears to regard the Haitian Revolution as too important a precedent that colonized people can overthrow their oppressors for him to fully engage with the idea that the formerly colonized can be colonized again.

Though James's explicit discussions of the origins of *The Black Jacobins* may be silent on the U.S. occupation, when James talks more broadly

about the contexts for the emergence of anticolonial nationalism of the 1920s and 1930s in the appendix to the 1963 edition of the text, he points to U.S. military actions in Haiti as a key part of this era. The appendix breaks West Indian history "between Toussaint L'Ouverture and Fidel Castro" into "three periods: I. The Nineteenth Century; II. Between the Wars; III. After World War II" (1963, 392). James's discussion of that second period—the period in which *The Black Jacobins* was written—begins: "Before World War I Haiti began to write another chapter in the record of the West Indian struggle for national independence. Claiming the need to recover debts and restore order, the Marines . . . invaded Haiti in 1913. The whole nation resisted. A national strike was organized and led by the literary intellectuals who had discovered the Africanness of their peasants as a means of national identity" (395). The version of the occupation is very similar to that seen in the final pages of the 1938 edition, in which it is a momentary invasion rather than a new colonization (and James once again gets the dates of the occupation wrong).

Nonetheless, the 1963 appendix comes closer to acknowledging the occupation as part of James's original context by crediting resistance to the occupation as inspiration for negritude. As he puts it: "In 1913 the ceaseless battering from foreign pens was reinforced by the bayonets of American Marines. Haiti had to find a national rallying-point. They looked for it where it can only be found, at home, more precisely, in their own backyard. They discovered what is known today as Negritude" (1963, 394). James goes on to discuss Jean Price-Mars's *Ainsi Parla L'Oncle* from 1926 as part of the "substitution of Africa for France" that started "long before the marines left Haiti" (395). The appendix moves immediately from the occupation to "two black West Indians [who] using the ink of Negritude wrote their names imperishably on the front pages of the history of our time": Marcus Garvey and George Padmore (397). The section on the intellectual scene between the wars finishes with the publication of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, which James notes was published one year after *The Black Jacobins* (402). Knowing James's close relationship to Padmore and his admiration for Césaire, James is implicitly positioning his own work within this intellectual context, as part of the unintended fruits of the U.S. occupation.

Yet after this 1963 appendix, the story that James would subsequently promote of the origins of *The Black Jacobins* is of the coming

African decolonization as the book's only context, which scholars have followed in emphasizing the Abyssinia crisis. By the 1970s and 1980s, James had clearly settled on this version, spending much time and energy working on an autobiography and giving interviews that return over and over to this origin myth. In the 1971 lecture "How I Wrote *The Black Jacobins*," James tells his audience that "I had in mind writing about the San Domingo Revolution as the preparation for the revolution that George Padmore and all of us were interested in, that is, the revolution in Africa" (2000, 72), and then later, "It was written about Africa. It wasn't written about the Caribbean" (73). Emphasizing this narrative allows James to conclude that "many in Africa read it, and it passed about among them and it contributed towards helping those who were taking part in the African revolution to understand what the movements of the masses was, how a revolution went. That is why I wrote the book, and that is the purpose that the book achieved" (73). This makes a good story, with *The Black Jacobins* appearing in 1938 at the onset of the wave of decolonization that by the 1960s had clearly swept the globe. The story has the added benefit of undoubtedly containing substantial truth. But as I've suggested, the origins of the book appear to have been messier than this retrospective account suggests: the first edition's references to Franco and Stalin, not to mention the brief mention of the occupation of Haiti, suggest that James's original focus was not only Africa. James's retroactive emphasis on Africa, whether in the 1971 lectures, in interviews, or in his unpublished autobiographical writing, appears to be more proof of anticolonialism's anxious response to the way the occupation of Haiti and the rise of U.S. imperialism throws into doubt the teleology of independence and national consolidation initiating a utopian future.

Foregrounding the U.S. occupation of Haiti emphasizes that U.S. imperialism did not merely succeed European colonialism but was at times parallel and coterminous with it. This long history of U.S. foreign interventions too often remains in the shadows of postcolonial studies; reading *The Black Jacobins* in the light of the U.S. occupation serves as a reminder of U.S. imperialism as a crucial if unspoken context for anticolonial discourses. And keeping the occupation in mind reframes how we understand James's anticolonialism. In *Conscripts of Modernity* Scott argues that James's historical context of the 1930s, when he could look forward to a romantic and redeeming anticolonial revolution that would

sweep away inequality and injustice, is "not [a moment] that we can inhabit today" (45). Reading *The Black Jacobins* only in relation to an ineluctable African revolution to come makes the text seem foreign to us, we contemporary intellectuals who no longer believe in this romantic teleology. Understanding the U.S. occupation of Haiti as central to James's 1930s problem-space—not instead of Abyssinia, but in addition to it—shows just how mixed a moment he inhabited, and how ambivalent and tenuous the narrative of anticolonial overcoming must have been, even to James. Haitian history becomes neither a romance of utopian overcoming nor a tragedy of unrealized potential: the abolition of slavery or the establishment of statehood is neither end nor beginning. The Haiti of James's day was still in the middle of history, once again, more than one hundred years after Dessalines declared independence, struggling with international domination and exploitation. During the 1930s, just as James was finishing the script for *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, Haitians were achieving a second independence that the protests of the late 1920s enabled; by the time *The Black Jacobins* was published, it had become clear that a renewed set of social movements, culminating in the student uprising in 1946, would be needed to further establish Haiti's political and economic sovereignty. That James could craft such a convincing and inspiring anticolonial romance even in such an uncertain moment, a moment in unexpected ways so much like our own, may be the most important lesson of *The Black Jacobins* for our own seemingly tragic world in which U.S. foreign policy can make the end of imperialism seem like a lost horizon.

This essay began with an epigraph by David Scott emphasizing how consciously James seeks to make *The Black Jacobins* speak to its historical context; another by Stuart Hall noting just how uncertain historians of James remain in understanding his context; and finally, a passage where James suggests his motives for writing *The Black Jacobins* are opaque even to him. The conception of *The Black Jacobins* must still be considered a mystery, in Fischer's sense; the origins of Caribbean anticolonialism in the U.S. occupation of Haiti cannot quite be spoken, or must be replaced by a repeatedly retold story that casts African decolonization as the real point of departure. Reading in terms of the other context I have suggested here would mean seeing *The Black Jacobins* not only as a precursor to the decolonization struggles that would follow, but also in relation to its own heterogeneous present in

which the future of freedom was always already under threat. If *The Black Jacobins* is able to tell a story of utopian romance, it is only able to do so by auspiciously omitting its own origins in the antiprogressive loss of sovereignty that defined the experience of the Haiti of James's lifetime. The story of how the rise of anticolonial writing—by James, but also by Padmore, McKay, Césaire, and others—was filtered through relationships between the United States and Haiti has not been told, and uncovering it will reshape understandings of the history of decolonization.

Raphael Dalleo is associate professor of English at Florida Atlantic University. He is author of *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere* (2011), coauthor of *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature* (2007), and coeditor of *Haiti and the Americas* (2013).

Notes

1. Hill argues for the invasion of Abyssinia as "the turning-point of nineteenth-century and post-war Black nationalism" and James's work as "one of the essential factors in clearly establishing the changed outlook" (69). Similarly, Bogues describes how the invasion "galvanized black anti-colonial intellectuals and activists in England" and how agitation against the invasion "served as one of the bases for the modern black anti-colonial movement" and works like "James's *The Black Jacobins* and *The History of Negro Revolt*" (40). Scott credits the Abyssinia crisis with radicalizing James beyond the positions of the League of Coloured People that he had joined upon first arriving in London: "Very importantly for James, Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia on October 3, 1935, . . . became a flashpoint for anti-imperialist and anticolonialist agitation and organization"; the invasion "altered the character and mood of black and anticolonial sentiment in Britain as well as across the black diaspora, and called into being a more radical response. C. L. R. James . . . was to be a central part of furnishing that response" (28).

2. "The material was not in the Caribbean and there may have been some material in S.D. [San Domingo] itself but it was a wild place, a dictatorship. I went there once but that was not a place to go and stay. I had decided to write that book years ago. There was no material in the Caribbean. I came to England in 1932 and there was no material in England. I went to France in 1933 and found a mass of material. I spent six months in France working on that material with great speed. There was a mass of it but one thing that happened—there were many people who had worked on that material before, not on S.D. particularly but on French colonialism, and some S.D. people—and their books were there" (C. L. R. James Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library in the City of New York, box 12, folder 14).

3. Hall connects James to the U.S. context but not the occupation, noting that "the collective memory of the Haitian revolution itself was powerful in the twenties and thirties" (18). Hall speculates that "the Haitian revolution was a recurring motif" in Harlem renaissance writers because "African-American history wasn't able to provide them with an equivalent moment—with an equivalent imaginative possibility—of astonishing hope; there was one episode of the reach or scope that Haiti provided" (18). Since this interview with Hall, Renda's *Taking Haiti* has made an overwhelming case that Haiti's availability as this kind of raw material for U.S. artists is not separable from its status as U.S. political possession. Høgsbjerg is the only commentator I have seen mention the occupation in relation to *The Black Jacobins*, only to say that James in the early 1930s was "no doubt mindful of the plight of Haiti itself—since 1915 under American military occupation" (6).

4. McKay's *Home to Harlem*, published in 1928 during the U.S. occupation of Haiti, contains a story much like the one James narrates in *The Black Jacobins*, and explicitly connects its desire to tell that story to the need for West Indian vindication. The Haitian character, Ray, is introduced when the novel's African American protagonist, Jake, meets him on a train. Jake is initially suspicious of this French speaker from a place he's never heard of, but Ray impresses him by teaching him "many facts of Hayti" including how "the universal spirit of the French Revolution had reached and lifted up the slaves far away in that remote island" and how "Black Hayti's independence was more dramatic and picturesque than the United States' independence" (131). After this story, Jake goes from thinking that "West Indians were monkey-chasers" (134), to giving respect to this neighbor from "a little island of freed slaves [that] had withstood the three leading European powers" (132).

5. Høgsbjerg's edition of James's 1936 play was published after this essay was completed; I have added page references to that edition since it is now available. My discussion of the play is based on the scripts I read in the C. L. R. James Collection in the Alma Jordan Library of the University of the West Indies, Saint Augustine, and the C. L. R. James Papers in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Columbia University. The playbill to *Toussaint L'Ouverture* cited above was found in the Paul and Eslanda Robeson Collection of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C., box 37. I greatly appreciate the help of the staff at each of these archives.

6. Although De Boissiere introduces this context of U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean, and although the language he uses to denounce "American finance" directly echoes James Weldon Johnson's famous articles in the *Nation*, De Boissiere does not mention the occupation of Haiti in his article on Cuba, which had ended only weeks before De Boissiere's article was published. This absence is especially glaring since he actually brings up Haiti in the essay, contrasting the Haitian Revolution as a "genuine, organised expression of the will of a people" (298) with this twentieth-century "Cuban revolt," which has been manipulated by imperial powers. De Boissiere's anticolonial radicalism, likes James's, seems unable to come to terms with how the events of his own lifetime suggested the potential precariousness of Haiti's heroic historical accomplishment.

7. Glissant writes: "The most important example of the effect of diversion [Détour] is the case of Frantz Fanon. A grand and intoxicating diversion" (25).

8. C. L. R. James Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library in the City of New York, box 12, folder 14. In other interviews, James describes the conception of *Toussaint L'Ouverture* differently: "The material I was working on, I thought the public should know about it. It was going to take a time to finish the book, the biography, but I could make it into a play. I wrote the play and started to circulate it, chiefly with the idea of making propaganda. I did not write the play for Paul Robeson—that I did *not* do" (C. L. R. James Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library in the City of New York, box 12, folder 13).

9. C. L. R. James Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library in the City of New York, box 4, folder 7, p. 54. In the foreword to the 1980 edition of *The Black Jacobins*, James connects collaboration with Padmore directly to its composition: "I was therefore specifically prepared to write *The Black Jacobins* not the least of my qualifications being the fact that I had spent most of my life in a West Indian island, not, in fact, too unlike the territory of Haiti. At the same time I was writing, I was working closely with George Padmore and his black organization which was centred in London. As will be seen all over and particularly in the last three pages, the book was not written with the Caribbean but with Africa in mind" (1980b, vi).

10. The precise date of the reunion between James and Padmore is unclear. Bogues describes "their fortuitous 1934 London meeting recounted by James himself" (188), but the version James gives points to 1933. Padmore's biographer, James Hooker, puts the meeting in September 1932, since Padmore was in London during that month, but this visit seems to be the missed opportunity James refers to in his version of the meeting. James describes how Padmore "told me that a year before he had been in London looking for lively recruits to take to Moscow to be trained; and he said that if he had met me he would most certainly have asked me. I did not tell him that if he had asked me in 1932 I most certainly would have gone with him. In 1932 I knew nothing of Communism, but by 1933 things were different" (1992, 291). This story certainly suggests that the actual meeting took place in 1933, though Hooker cites the chairman of the Independent Labour Party, C. A. Smith, who remembers James and Padmore reconnecting at Padmore's September 1932 London speech. Padmore would have been back in London in 1933, after the Hamburg offices of the *Negro Worker* were closed down by the Nazis and Padmore was deported to England.

Works Cited

Alexander, Charles. 1931. "Negro Workers in Cuba." *Negro Worker* 1 (October–November): 18.

Angell, Katharine Sergeant. 1922. "The Great Ditch of Haiti." *New Republic* 30 (March 22): 107–9.

Barlovatz, A. 1934. "Hayti." *Keys* 2, no. 2: 38. Reprinted in *The Keys: The Official Organ of the League of Colored Peoples*. Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1976.

Bogues, Anthony. 1997. *Caliban's Freedom: The Early Political Thought of C. L. R. James*. London: Pluto Press.

Boyle, Sheila Tully, and Andrew Bunie. *Paul Robeson: The Years of Promise and Achievement*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001.

Buck-Morss, Susan. 2009. *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

"Conference Report." 1933. *Keys* 1, no. 1: 3–8. Reprinted in *The Keys: The Official Organ of the League of Colored Peoples*. Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1976.

De Boissiere, Jean. 1978. "Cuba's 'New Deal.'" In *From Trinidad: An Anthology of Early West Indian Writing*. Ed. Reinhard Sander, 298–300. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. 2003. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Transnationalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Farred, Grant. 2003. *What's My Name? Black Vernacular Intellectuals*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fischer, Sibylle. 2004. *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Glissant, Edouard. 1989. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Trans. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Hall, Stuart. 1998. "Breaking Bread with History: C. L. R. James and *The Black Jacobins*. Stuart Hall Interviewed by Bill Schwarz." *History Workshop Journal* 46 (Autumn): 17–31.

Heinl, Robert, and Nancy Heinl. 1996. *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492–1995*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America.

Hill, Robert. 1986. "In England, 1932–1938." In *C. L. R. James: His Life and Work*. Ed. Paul Buhle, 61–80. London: Allison and Busby.

Høgsbjerg, Christian. 2013. Introduction to C. L. R. James, *Toussaint Louverture*, 1–39. Durham: Duke University Press.

Hooker, James. 1967. *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism*. New York: Praeger.

James, C. L. R. 1931. "The Intelligence of the Negro." *Beacon* 1 (August): 6–10.

———. 1938. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 1st ed. London: Secker and Warburg.

———. 1963. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 2nd ed. New York: Vintage Books.

———. 1980a. "Discovering Literature in Trinidad: The 1930s." In *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings*, 237–44. London: Allison and Busby.

———. 1980b. Foreword to *The Black Jacobins*. London: Allison and Busby.

———. 1992. "Notes on the Life of George Padmore." In *The C. L. R. James Reader*. Ed. Anna Grimshaw, 288–25. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.

———. 2000. "How I Wrote *The Black Jacobins*." *Small Axe* 8:65–82.

———. 2013. *Toussaint Louverture*. Ed. Christian Høgsbjerg. Durham: Duke University Press.

Johnson, James Weldon. 1920. *Self-Determining Haiti: Four Articles Reprinted from The Nation Embodying a Report of an Investigation Made for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*. New York: The Nation, Inc.

MARHO, eds. 1984. "C. L. R. James." In *Visions of History,* 263–78. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

McKay, Claude. 1987. *Home to Harlem*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

"Misrepresenting Haiti." 1929. *New Republic* 59 (June 5): 58–59.

O'Neill, Eugene. 2005. *Three Great Plays: The Emperor Jones, Anna Christie, and The Hairy Ape*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover.

Padmore, George. 1931a. "Hands off Liberia!" *Negro Worker* 1 (October–November): 7.

———. 1931b. "Imperialism in the West Indies." *Negro Worker* 1 (January): 16–18.

Renda, Mary. 2001. *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1949*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Scott, David. 2004. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Supplice, Daniel. 2001. *Dictionnaire biographique des personnalités politiques de la République d'Haïti (1804–2001)*. Belgium: Imprimerie Lannoo.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the Past*. Boston: Beacon Press.

"A Wave of Terror Is Sweeping over Haiti." 1930. *Negro Worker* 3 (February–March): 15–16.