CHAPTER THREE

A race outcast from an outcast class: Claude McKay's experience and analysis of Britain

Winston James

I am ... a social leper, a race outcast from an outcast class. (Claude McKay, 1921)

The road to London

I've a longin' in me dept's of heart dat I can conquer not,
'Tis a wish dat I've have been havin' from since I could form a t'o't,
'Tis to sail athwart the ocean an' to hear de billows roar,
When dem ride aroun' de steamer, when dem beat on England's shore.

Just to view de homeland England, in de streets of London walk,
An' to see de famous sights dem 'bouten which dere's so much talk,
An' to watch de fact'ry chimneys pourin' smoke up to de sky,
An' to see de matches-children, dat I hear 'bout, passin' by.¹

These stanzas from McKay's poem – 'Old England' – express the conventional, British Caribbean and colonial view of the mother country. It was published in 1912. His opinions, however, were to change radically, especially after he visited the metropolis seven years later. He ended his days hating England and the civilisation it represented.

Unlike the other Caribbean intellectuals represented in this volume (barring only Padmore) McKay's journey to England was indirect: he journeyed not from the Caribbean, but from New York after an absence of more than seven years from his native Jamaica. For most of the time in the US he was part of America's black proletariat, earning his living, as his friend Max Eastman put it, 'in every one of the ways that northern Negroes do, from "pot-wrestling" in a boarding-house kitchen to dining-car service on the New York and Philadelphia Express'. McKay regarded himself as 'not only a Negro but also a worker', and we might add for greater precision, a *manual* worker, one of Afro-America's menials.²

By the time he arrived in London, he was no 'black Briton' except in the most formal, judicial sense of that term. He certainly was from the British Caribbean but his self-identification had expanded through experience, travel and conscious decision. He was a Pan-Africanist and a socialist – a race man and a class man, not merely a West Indian.³

His reflections on Britain and the British (especially the English) mark a historic departure. They break with the adulatory, often cloying celebration of Britain characteristic of most previous black writings, anticipating a sensibility that was to become more pronounced in the writings of the 1950s and 1960s. McKay's distinguished Caribbean predecessors, such as Henry Sylvester Williams and Theophilus Scholes, insofar as they were critical of Britain, by and large focused on imperial issues. McKay was the first Caribbean intellectual to describe what it meant to be black in Britain.⁴ He wrote with anger and bitterness – feelings that intensified the older he got.

In this respect McKay stands in striking contrast to C. L. R. James. In McKay there is no anglophilia, no celebration of 'Western Civilisation'.⁵ To McKay, England was, as he put it in one of his poems, the 'arch conspirator' in the oppression of black people. And when it came to 'Western Civilisation', he was on the side of Gandhi, who when asked what he thought of modern civilisation said it would be a good idea: in his novel, *Banjo*, McKay spoke through the character Ray when he remarked that 'there is no such animal as a civilized nation', and castigated 'Civilization'. Ray 'hated civilization'. 'Civilization is rotten', he declared. 'And the more he travelled and knew of it, the more he felt the truth of that bitter outburst.' Nor was it only in fictional form that he denounced civilisation. 'I loathe it', McKay wrote in a Harlem journal, 'and desire its disintegration and the birth of a proletarian order'.⁶

The man who went to London

McKay was born in Jamaica into a prosperous peasant family in 1889. He was educated by his eldest brother, Uriah Theodore. U. Theo, as he was known to all, had been a prize student at Mico College and became one of the island's outstanding schoolmasters; he trained Claude in the virtues of socialism, feminism and militant rationalism. After a brief stint in the constabulary, which radicalised him further, McKay emigrated to the United States in 1912 to study agriculture at Tuskegee Institute. Hating the 'semi-military, machinelike existence' of Booker T. Washington's school, he transferred to Kansas State College.⁷ But in 1914 he gave that up, too, for New York. Before leaving Jamaica, he had had a reputation as a poet and had published two volumes of verse to critical acclaim. To make a living in New York he laboured at the tasks

described by Eastman, stealing time on the job to work at the craft of poetry. His first American poems appeared in 1917; by 1919 he had become famous (and notorious) throughout America, mainly because of his militant sonnet, 'If we must die'.⁸

American racism shocked and appalled him. 'I had heard of prejudice in America but never dreamed of it being so intensely bitter', he wrote in 1918.⁹ He was attracted by Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, wrote for its newspaper, the *Negro World*, but never joined the organisation. However, while working in a Manhattan factory, McKay did join the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the most radical and inclusive working-class organisation in the US. The IWW embraced skilled and unskilled workers, men and women and – going against the American grain – white and black.

Before he left the USA, two events had crucially affected McKay and contributed to his deepening radicalisation. The first was the mass carnage wrought by the first world war. This 'great catastrophe', as he called it, had proved the 'real hollowness of nationhood, patriotism, racial pride and most of the things which one was taught to respect and reverence'. The war epitomised the 'blind brute forces of tigerish tribalism which remain at the core of civilized society'.¹⁰

But out of that catastrophe came the second event that fired McKay. This was the Russian Revolution. 'Holy' Russia, as he dubbed Soviet Russia in 1920, had returned to McKay his 'golden hope'.¹¹ He became an ardent enthusiast. Before the second anniversary of the Revolution he was debating the subject with the black nationalist Garveyites. He vigorously promoted the significance of the Revolution to the struggles of black people the world over. 'Every Negro', he wrote in a letter to the *Negro World*,

who lays claim to leadership should make a study of Bolshevism and explain its meaning to the colored masses. It is the greatest and most scientific idea afloat in the world today that can be easily put into practice by the proletariat to better its material and spiritual life. Bolshevism ... has made Russia safe for the Jew. It has liberated the Slav peasant from priest and bureaucrat who can no longer egg him on to murder Jews to bolster up their rotten institutions. It might make these United States safe for the Negro.¹²

McKay was not alone in advocating black liberation through Bolshevism. But he was one of the first black persons in the US to do so, vigorously and openly.¹³

The pogroms against black people in the United States, the so-called 'race riots' of 1919, also touched McKay profoundly. White mobs, led mainly by ex-soldiers, went on a rampage of unparalleled breadth and

savagery. Twenty-six riots – north and south, east and west – with their blood and fire, death and destruction, consumed urban America. These events of 1919 were dubbed the ‘Red Summer’ by James Weldon Johnson, black poet and executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.¹⁴ The Red Summer had a catalytic effect upon McKay. He was transformed into a revolutionary. It was his open, militant and courageous response that first brought him into the limelight. And it was for his reaction to 1919, ‘If we must die’, that he is most widely remembered.

England, their England

But McKay wanted to get away from the horror of 1919; he wanted to get away, too, from both his fame and notoriety. An admirer gave him the money for a passage to England in the autumn of 1919. American friends provided him with contacts in London and letters of introduction. Frank Harris, editor of *Pearson's Magazine* and a staunch supporter of McKay's, wrote letters to George Bernard Shaw (whom McKay was to meet shortly after his arrival) and the publisher Grant Richards. Harris asked Richards to introduce McKay to Siegfried Sassoon. ‘See that he gets a good welcome[,] will you’, Harris wrote, in a tone at once beseeching and commanding.¹⁵ Max Eastman and his sister Crystal Eastman, editors of the *Liberator* to which McKay had contributed, knew Sylvia Pankhurst and, though less formal in smoothing the way for McKay, would have encouraged him to drop in on their revolutionary friend. The associate editor of the *World Tomorrow*, Walter Fuller, the English husband of Crystal, was a close friend of Charles Ogden, editor of the *Cambridge Magazine*. ‘I am asking my friend, Mr. Claude McKay’, he wrote to Ogden, ‘the bearer of this letter, to call on you during his visit to London because I feel sure that you will be glad to know one another.’ Fuller also wrote to the publishers Allen and Unwin on McKay's behalf.¹⁶

These introductions to the representatives of the literary world suggest certain privileges. They did nothing, however, to mitigate the profane realities of racism. McKay soon became acquainted with the English version. He was denied long-term lodgings – and all the while in England he rented from foreign landladies, who, in at least one instance, were taunted by their English neighbours for doing so. He was refused service in pubs. He was insulted while accompanying white women in the streets, on more than one occasion physically attacked, and was ‘nearly mauled in Limehouse’. It is little surprise that McKay was forced to conclude of England: ‘One must always be on one's guard’.¹⁷ At the time he had lodgings with a German family at Provence

Street in Islington. Despite its alluring name, Provence Street was a 'hideous little gutter street near the Angel'.¹⁸ In February 1920 he claimed that he did not mind living there; a few months later, however, he was more ambivalent, making sure that he got home before it was too late at night. By then he was hoping to move further to the west of London, where it was 'a little safer' and '[t]he grown-ups are more sensible & the children are not so disgustingly provocative & bad-mannered'.¹⁹ In London McKay often felt like a man under siege.

The Workers' Socialist Federation and the Workers' Dreadnought

Soon after his arrival, McKay made contact with Sylvia Pankhurst and before the end of 1919 began to work with her party, the Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF), and on the newspaper she edited, the *Workers' Dreadnought*. The following summer he attended the historic Communist Unity Convention in London, which laid the foundations for the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

McKay's job at the *Dreadnought* entailed covering the volatile labour situation on the London docks, getting news from 'coloured' and white seamen. He was also assigned the task of reading the foreign press, with an eye for items about the empire. He wrote book reviews on topics ranging from the shop stewards' movement to Gorky on Tolstoy; and he published a large number of poems, including some of his most revolutionary. Pankhurst entrusted him with great responsibility and he privately complained of being overworked. 'I should have written before', he told Ogden,

but I have been kept so frightfully busy by Sylvia Pankhurst since she came back [from abroad]. She has been experiencing all sorts of domestic and business difficulties, due to her own erratic nature, & all the routine work of getting out the paper falls upon me in consequence.²⁰

As a disciplined revolutionary McKay attended WSF meetings. He was responsible for selling his quota of *Dreadnoughts* on the streets. He recalled selling the paper along with Pankhurst's pamphlet, *Rebel Ireland*, and Herman Gorter's *Ireland: the Achilles heel of England* at a big Sinn Féin rally in Trafalgar Square in the summer of 1920.²¹ McKay's involvement with the *Dreadnought* group clearly involved far more than 'a little practical journalism' that he later claimed. British intelligence exaggerated when they later alleged that McKay had entertained ambitions of taking over the leadership of the WSF from Pankhurst. But McKay's deep involvement with the British far left is incontrovertible.²²

The WSF was one of the most radical political formations in Britain. 'Left-wing communists', Lenin called them as he chided Pankhurst and her followers for boycotting parliamentary elections and rejecting affiliation to the Labour Party. Of all the currents on the British left, 'the WSF came out by far the most strongly in support of the Irish Easter Uprisings'.²³ It was quickest in supporting the Bolsheviks. Resolutely anti-imperialist, it explicitly called for self-determination for India and Ireland.²⁴

Under the leadership of Sylvia Pankhurst, the *Dreadnought* was the most principled anti-racist organ on the left. At the height of the madness in June 1919, when attacks on black communities in Britain flared up, Pankhurst produced a bold editorial in the *Dreadnought*. In 'Stabbing Negroes in the London dock area', she submitted 'a few questions for the consideration of those who have been negro hunting':

Do you think that the British should rule the world or do you want to live on peaceable terms with all peoples?
Do you wish to exclude all blacks from England?
If so, do you not think that blacks might justly ask that the British should at the same time keep out of the black peoples' countries?
Do you not know that capitalists, and especially British capitalists, have seized, by force of arms, the countries inhabited by black people and are ruling those countries and the black inhabitants for their own profit? ...
Are you afraid that a white woman would prefer a blackman to you if you met her on equal terms with him?
Do you not think you would be better employed in getting conditions made right for yourself and your fellow workers than in stabbing a blackman ...?²⁵

Uncommonly courageous and decent, Pankhurst sought to lead, not follow – to break the prejudices among her own constituents in the East End rather than remain silent. To her eternal honour, wherever imperialism 'got drunk and went wild among native peoples, the Pankhurst paper would be on the job'.²⁶ Small wonder that the WSF proved the most congenial political home for McKay.

His membership of the WSF provided McKay with important insights into the politics of the metropolis. He found himself in 'the nest of extreme radicalism in London'. He got to know the politics and personalities of Britain's far-left groups. He also became acquainted with different sections of the trade union movement – especially with the shop stewards, which appealed to his syndicalist predilections. And he became deeply familiar with London proletarian life. Pankhurst and the WSF had their base in Old Ford Road in Bow, in London's East End, where he lived for a time. His view of Britain was dominated by this perspective.

The International Socialist Club

The International Socialist Club (ISC) was McKay's primary redoubt in London. Crystal Eastman almost certainly told him about the club before he left the US. Eastman was in Britain in the summer of 1919 and she knew the radical scene there well. McKay joined the club soon after arriving and quickly became a familiar presence. It was at the ISC that he established some of his most enduring friendships across the Atlantic, and it was there, he said, that he made his most interesting contacts in Britain.²⁷ At the ISC he heard some of Britain's most distinguished left-wing orators of the day, including J. T. Walton Newbold, Britain's first Communist MP; Indian-born Shapurji Saklatvala, who in 1922 was elected an independent MP for Battersea and soon thereafter switched to the CP; A. J. Cook of the Miners' Federation of which he later became leader; Jack Tanner, a leader of the shop stewards' movement; Guy Aldred, the editor of the anarchist organ, the *Spur*; Arthur MacManus and William Gallacher, labour agitators from the Clyde; George Lansbury, editor of the *Daily Herald*; and Sylvia Pankhurst herself.²⁸

McKay paints a vivid portrait of life at the ISC. It was 'full of excitement with its dogmatists and doctrinaires of radical left ideas: Socialists, Communists, anarchists, syndicalists, one-big-unionists and trade unionists, soap-boxers, poetasters, scribblers, editors of little radical sheets which flourish in London'.²⁹ He noted that foreigners formed the majority of the membership, among which predominated Jews. He was the only 'African' when he joined and he introduced others, including the remarkable radical black seaman, Reuben Gilmore.³⁰

The club had a two-fold impact upon McKay, one political, the other intellectual. As he recalled later, it was the first time that he had found himself in an atmosphere in which people 'devoted themselves entirely to the discussion and analysis of social events from a radical and Marxian point of view'. He sought his reading ticket from the British Museum largely in order to keep up with the comrades at the club. 'I felt intellectually inadequate', he confessed, 'and decided to educate myself.' He read Marx systematically for the first time at the British Museum.³¹

C. K. Ogden and the 1917 Club

Outside the radical circles around Pankhurst and the ISC, C. K. Ogden was the only British writer with whom McKay had sustained relations. As a student at Cambridge University in 1909 Ogden became the co-founder of the Heretics Society, which aspired to lift the smothering hand of religious orthodoxy from British intellectual and political life. Before graduation he was recognised as an outstanding intellect and he

was offered the opportunity to edit a journal of his own, *The Cambridge Magazine*, in 1912. A gifted linguist, and anti-racist and cosmopolitan in outlook, Ogden carried news from all over the world through the translation and republication of articles from the foreign press, including anti-war writings from Germany. Because of his outspoken pacifism, Ogden earned ferocious opposition from jingoists who wrecked his offices on Armistice Day. He is best remembered as a polymath, talented in the fields of linguistics, aesthetics and psychology. He was the first to translate the then-obscure Austrian engineer and mathematician, Ludwig Wittgenstein, bringing to the English-reading world the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1922. With his close friend and collaborator, I. A. Richards, he published *Foundations of Aesthetics* (1921) and *The Meaning of Meaning* (1922).

Politically Ogden had much in common with McKay. He was an agnostic, a supporter of birth control, an outspoken advocate of women's suffrage and, like McKay, he deplored the futility and devastation of the war. McKay first made contact with Ogden in February 1920. His primary reason for going to London was, McKay claimed, to publish his poetry. He turned to Ogden, sending him Fuller's letter of introduction and some of his poems. McKay explained that he hesitated in contacting Ogden because 'I don't think it right to bother with business matters persons to whom one is practically a stranger'.³² He need not have worried. Ogden responded enthusiastically, they met and became good friends. Ogden offered to help get McKay's poetry published. 'Thanks very much for devoting so much time and being so naturally nice to me', McKay told him.³³

By May 1920 arrangements were well under way for the publication of the book. Ogden allocated a generous spread in the *Cambridge Magazine* for twenty-three of the poems, providing McKay a splendid introduction to the British reading public in a prestigious publication.³⁴ By September 1920 Grant Richards had brought out *Spring in New Hampshire*, McKay's first book since *Constab Ballads*, which came out the year he left Jamaica.³⁵ Ogden not only helped to choose the poems, but he edited the volume as a whole, and persuaded his friend, I. A. Richards, to write a preface.

But McKay had substantial disagreements with Ogden over *Spring in New Hampshire*. Though intellectually adventurous and politically courageous, Ogden had difficulty accepting McKay's more revolutionary poems. He regarded them as 'propagandistic' and thought them best excluded. Ogden rejected a number of poems on these grounds, including the most famous of all, 'If we must die'. In agreeing to this, for the sake of getting the volume published, McKay made what he always regarded as a grievous error, which he continued to regret. (He also con-

ceded over the title: McKay had originally planned it be called *Songs of Struggle*.) Though it does contain some fine lyrics, including some of his finest pastoral and nostalgic verses, *Spring in New Hampshire* is a tarnished book, and unrepresentative of McKay's poetry at the time. It is more Ogden's book than McKay's.

After his offices were ransacked, Ogden began spending more time in London. His primary locale was the 1917 Club, where he frequently met McKay.³⁶ Located in Soho's Gerrard Street, the 1917 Club was founded by Leonard Woolf and friends in December 1917. In contrast to the Athenaeum – the 'nadir of respectability', Woolf called it – the 1917 Club was the 'zenith of disreputability'. Woolf recalled that Gerrard Street in those days was 'the rather melancholy haunt of prostitutes daily from 2:30 p.m. onwards'.³⁷ The membership of the club, he said, was a 'curious mixture': 'mainly political and the politicals were mainly Labour Party, from Ramsay [MacDonald] downwards. But there was also an element of unadulterated culture, particularly at tea time, so that if one dropped in about 4 o'clock and looked round its rooms, one would hardly have guessed that it was political'. Virginia Woolf and the Stracheys, including Lytton and his 'retinue of young women and young men', were frequently there.³⁸ In short, the 1917 Club was the primary haunt of Fabians and the Bloomsbury set.

But to McKay the 1917 was hardly different from the Athenaeum: it was posh – 'nice society', he called it – very different from the ISC.³⁹ With the help of Ogden, he did, however, manage to get a small exhibition mounted there of the work of his anarchist-artist friend, Henry Bernard.⁴⁰ Even here, though, he came up against abuse, on this occasion from an "'extreme left" fellow'. He was sanguine: 'I am always coming up against his type and worse – in America & also here, so I'm used to it. My colour alone makes me so conspicuous; I must reconcile myself to such things.'⁴¹

The Drury Lane Club

In addition to the ISC and the 1917, McKay for a short time frequented a small club on Drury Lane specially established for non-white colonial and Afro-American soldiers. Organised by the YMCA, it was run by a patronising English woman – she called the men her 'coloured boys' – who, after reading McKay's critical article on the place in the *Negro World*, banned him from the place. McKay, however, had had enough time to get to know the black soldiers and hear of their terrible experience of racism in the British army during the war and on the streets of London after the armistice. McKay was himself a witness to one of these nasty moments in London. After one of the men from the club

defeated an English rival in a boxing match, a cockney admirer came through the knot of black friends to congratulate the boxer. But when the boxer introduced his English wife to his white fan, the man called the boxer a 'damned nigger'. McKay was shocked and angered by the men's racist ordeal during the war but was glad that in the hearts of black men the 'grievances against things British' were 'rapidly growing greater instead of disappearing'. He gave the men radical literature and invited the most 'forward-thinking' among them to the ISC. His encounters with these men had a profound impact upon McKay.⁴² Regarding them as too conservative, and too given to petitioning rather than fighting, McKay kept clear of the members of London's small, but important, black middle class. He preferred the company of the black soldiers and boxers, and comrades at the ISC.

Grievances against things British

In April 1920 French troops, retaliating against German violation of the Versailles treaty, extended their control of the Rhineland by occupying the major cities on the east bank of the Rhine. Only 25,000 of the quarter of a million French troops in the Rhineland were non-Europeans (mainly north Africans), of which only 5,000 were black west Africans – a mere 2 per cent of the French forces.⁴³ But the presence of *black* troops occupying part of a European nation created a storm of controversy. In Britain, the principal figure who orchestrated this reaction was E. D. Morel – a man of pacifist and anti-imperialist inclinations, who had done much to alert the British public to the atrocities committed in King Leopold's Congo.

After a clash between French troops and German civilians in Frankfurt in the spring of 1920, the *Daily Herald*, the British labour movement's newspaper, reported the incident in racial terms. 'Frankfurt Runs With Blood / French Black Troops Use Machine Guns on Civilians', it announced on the front page. George Lansbury, the *Herald's* editor, was a close friend of Morel's and the headline was probably inspired by Morel himself, who fed his material to Lansbury. The following day, Morel spoke in his own voice, again on the front page. He was not interested in the rights and wrongs of shootings in Frankfurt. Morel was pre-occupied with the matter of sex: more specifically, with relations between black soldiers and white women in occupied Germany. 'Black Scourge in Europe / Sexual Horror Let Loose by France on the Rhine', the headline declared.⁴⁴ 'My information is not yet as complete as I should wish', Morel confessed, but he could not wait: '[T]he news in to-day's papers, to the effect that France is thrusting her black savages still further into the heart of Germany, is such that I do not propose to hold my hand

any longer'. As his article made clear, there were no reliable reports, let alone substantiated charges, of rapes by African troops. But this was beside the point. 'The abundance or otherwise of specific reports is immaterial.' The mere presence of Africans, occupying a portion of Europe, was cause enough for alarm. 'The African race is the most developed sexually of any. These levies are recruited from tribes in a primitive state of development ... Sexually they are unrestrained and unrestrainable. *That is perfectly well known.*'⁴⁵ The very *presence* of the black troops, 'unrestrained and unrestrainable', was tantamount to their having committed rape. Morel was not bothered to ask what French troops were doing in the Rhine, but only what the black troops *might do*. He condemned the 'French militarists', but only for their use of 'black savages' in Europe, thus their responsibility for 'perpetrating an abominable outrage upon womanhood, upon the white race, and upon civilisation'. The black troops, 'primitive African barbarians', 'have become a terror and a horror unimaginable to the countryside, raping women and girls'. He explained the dangers arising from the racial dimension: 'for well-known physiological reasons, the raping of a white woman by a negro is nearly always accompanied by serious injury and not infrequently has fatal results'.

Morel ended with an appeal to the British working class. For the use of these 'negro mercenaries ... from the heart of Africa, to fight the battles and execute the lusts of capitalist Governments in the heart of Europe is ... a terrific portent'. The workers of Britain, France and Italy would be 'ill-advised if they allow it to pass in silence because to-day the victims happen to be German'. He appealed to white women whose 'decent instincts', he believed, needed to be mobilised.

Lansbury, in an editorial note accompanying Morel's article, declared that the *Herald* was not in the business of encouraging colour prejudice. On the editorial page itself, he returned to the subject. Under the heading 'A New Horror', he stated:

We are not amongst those who consider that because a man's skin is black he should be considered as an inferior human being to a white man; but nature has given us all qualities of temperament suitable to the conditions and climate in which we are born.

It is an odious outrage to bring thousands of children of the forests from Africa to Europe *without their womenfolk*, and settle them down as enemies amongst the women and children of Germany ...

For organised Labour there is another question, too. If the manhood of these races, not so advanced in the forms of civilisation as ourselves, are to be used against Germans, *why not against the workers here or elsewhere?*⁴⁶

Thus, by his ostensibly anti-racist words, Lansbury revealed his racist self.

McKay picked up the *Herald* and was appalled. The following day, after consulting friends, he dispatched a letter to the editor. Lansbury refused to publish it, apparently never even replying to McKay.⁴⁷ Sylvia Pankhurst, once again, came to the rescue and published the letter in the *Workers' Dreadnought*.

Under the heading, 'A black man replies', McKay revealed that he first wrote to the *Herald*, 'but apparently the *Herald* refuses a hearing to the other side, which is quite inarticulate'. He told Lansbury that the 'odiousness' of Morel's article was not mitigated by his editorial denying encouragement of race prejudice and asserting his championing of native rights in Africa. 'If you are really consistent in thinking that you can do something to help the white and black peoples to a better understanding of each other', McKay wrote, 'there is much that you might learn from Liberal and Conservative organs like the *Nation*, the *New Statesman* and the *Edinburgh Review*, which have treated the problem ... in a decent and dignified manner'. McKay confessed ignorance of the 'well-known physiological reasons that make the raping of a white woman by a negro resultful of serious and fatal injury'. Any violent rape, he said, 'whether by white, yellow or black, civilised or savage man, must entail injury, serious or fatal, especially if the victim be a virgin'. In short, 'Why all this obscene, maniacal outburst about the sex vitality of black men in a proletarian paper?' He concluded:

I do not protest because I happen to be a negro (I am disgusted when I read in your columns that white dockers would prohibit their employers using Chinese and Indian labour), I write because I feel that the ultimate result of your propaganda will be further strife and blood-spilling between the whites and the many members of my race, boycotted economically and socially ... I have been told in Limehouse by white men, who ought to know, that this summer will see a recrudescence of the outbreaks that occurred last year. The negro-baiting Bourbons of the United States will thank you, and the proletarian underworld of London will certainly gloat over the scoop of the Christian-Socialist-pacifist *Daily Herald*.⁴⁸

What disheartened McKay most was the fact that such blatantly racist propaganda could so easily penetrate the workers' movement. At the annual meeting of the Trades Union Congress in September 1920, covered by McKay for the *Dreadnought*, the Standing Orders Committee gave permission to the Union of Democratic Control, Morel's publishers, to present each delegate with a copy of his pamphlet, *The Horror on the Rhine*. According to one of Morel's friends, the item was enthusiastically received and 'produced a profound impression ... I was astonished at the number who came and expressed their views about it'. It left the trade unionists with 'a feeling of physical and spiritual revulsion' that such things could happen on European soil.⁴⁹ Even

a man such as Robert Smillie, president of the Miners' Federation, whom McKay admired and praised on the front page of the *Dreadnought* – ascetic, incorruptible, a cross between Gandhi and Big Bill Haywood of the IWW – even he was caught up in the sordid business, lending his name to Morel's campaign.⁵⁰ As he reported to Leon Trotsky, McKay noted with disgust and horror that in 1922, even the *Communist*, the paper of the newly-formed CPGB, had joined the racists.⁵¹

Looking back at the furore, McKay admitted that maybe he was not 'civilized enough to understand why the sex of the black race should be put on exhibition to persuade the English people to decide which white gang should control the coal and iron of the Ruhr'.⁵² The ease with which the labour movement fell prey to such a primitive racism shocked McKay beyond all measure, and went deep into his imagination, influencing for the rest of his days his bitter distrust of the English.

The *Spectator's* review of *Spring in New Hampshire* only confirmed his worst views of the English. Declaring the book 'extrinsically as well as intrinsically interesting', it drew readers' attention to the fact that the book was written by 'a full-blooded negro'. The *Spectator* continued:

Perhaps the ordinary reader's first impulse in realizing that the book is by an American negro is to inquire into its good taste. Not until we are satisfied that his work does not overstep the barriers which a not quite explicable but deep instinct in us is ever alive to maintain can we judge it with genuine fairness. Mr. Claude McKay never offends our sensibilities. His love poetry is clear of the hint which would put our racial instincts against him whether we would or no.⁵³

In *A Long Way From Home* McKay discloses his verdict:

My experience of the English convinced me that prejudice against Negroes had become almost congenital among them. I think the Anglo-Saxon mind becomes morbid when it turns on the sex life of colored people. Perhaps a psychologist might be able to explain why.⁵⁴

George Bernard Shaw, his childhood hero, asked him why he did not pursue pugilism instead of poetry. Despite the 'bestial modern white savagery' of the first world war, H. G. Wells had the nerve, McKay noted, to wonder 'whether the Negro is capable of becoming a civilized citizen of a world republic'. The depth to which racism saturated the British social fabric is perhaps best illustrated by the case of J. T. Walton Newbold, the country's first Communist MP. In 1922 at a congress in Moscow, a Chinese delegate pleased to meet the comrade from Britain greeted him, 'Hello Comrade Newbold'. 'Hello Chink', Comrade Newbold replied. To their eternal credit, the leading Bolsheviks gave Comrade Newbold a good going over. Less than two years later

Newbold wrote to the CP leadership: 'I am, perhaps, too English in outlook and in thought too grounded in insularity and tradition to be a good Communist. Therefore, I am saying, farewell.'⁵⁵

McKay described his time in London as 'that most miserable of years'; an 'ordeal'. Even the 'suffocating' fog of London – which 'not only wrapped you around but entered your throat like a strangling nightmare' – seemed to McKay more welcoming than the Londoners themselves: 'The feeling of London was so harshly unfriendly to me that sometimes I was happy in the embrace of the unfolding fog'. 'Oh blessed was the fog that veiled me blind!', he rejoiced in a poem on the city. To him, the English as whole were 'a strangely unsympathetic people, as coldly chilling as their English fog'.⁵⁶

McKay's disappointment with England stems not only from his experience but also from his expectations. Just as the stark reality of US racism shocked him despite having prior information about the situation there, so was he taken aback by British racism despite an abstract knowledge of its existence before arriving in London. But in the end, he felt more cheated – conned, even – than disappointed. In retrospect he felt angry that his teacher in Jamaica paraded him and his schoolmates, singing 'Rule Britannia', in the breathless celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in the Clarendon hills in 1897.⁵⁷ He felt angry because the colonial Jamaican notion that England was the mother country was so distant from the facts of life as a black Jamaican on the ground in London, where he had to dodge cockney mobs who saw him as nothing more than a nigger, at best a darky, paradigmatically foreign, not British at all.

Given this hostile environment, it is not surprising that it was in London that he wrote his most powerful poetry of nostalgia – 'The Spanish needle', 'Flame-heart', 'Home thoughts', 'I shall return', even 'The tropics in New York' – reliving in his imagination the distant pleasures of his homeland. These sorrow songs issued not only from the necessary distance, perspective and loss that exile brings but also from a new discovery: the discovery of his un-Britishness and the simultaneous discovery of a more thoroughly Caribbean, Jamaican and black identity. They are the fruits of a reverie of reminiscences, triggered by the search for oases of solace. It was also in London, not Marseilles, as is commonly believed, that McKay first developed a powerful identification with Africa. It was there that he first expressed a desire to visit his ancestral homeland. His befriending of west African soldiers at the Drury Lane Club combined with British racism probably contributed to the yearning. Almost a decade before the publication of *Banjo*, McKay confided to Ogden his intention of going to Africa before returning to the US and his wanting to 'keep my poor people awake and discontented'.⁵⁸

London, McKay wrote, 'was not wholly Hell, for it was possible for me to compose poetry some of the time. No place can be altogether a God-forsaken Sahara or swamp in which a man is able to discipline and compose his emotions into self-expression'.⁵⁹ That may be true as far as it goes. But why would he repeatedly take refuge in an idealised Jamaican past if London were not a 'God-forsaken Sahara or swamp'? Why the emotional retreat? Why did he write not even one poem about London or Britain during his stay? 'I had to realize', he subsequently wrote, 'that London is a cold white city where English culture is great and formidable like an iceberg. It is a city created for English needs, and admirable, no doubt, for the English people. It was not built to accommodate Negroes. I was very happy when I could get out of it to go back to the Negro pale of America', where life was more robust and less hypocritical.⁶⁰

Yet despite his hurt and professed hatred of the English, McKay engaged in working-class revolutionary activity in Britain. It is an apparent contradiction – how could he collaborate with those he deemed 'congenitally' racist? – but not a real one. In December 1919 McKay sent a remarkable letter to Marcus Garvey, enclosing a report and editorial from the *Herald* sharply critical of British policy in India. 'I think it is a splendid thing to have the representative organ of British Labour denouncing so strongly Imperial abomination and endorsing the self-determination of Britain's subject peoples', he told Garvey. He continued:

As I have said before in your paper, radical Negroes should be more interested in the white radical movements. They are supporting our cause, at least in principle. To me they are the great destructive forces *within*, while the subject races are fighting without. I don't mean that we should accept them unreservedly and put our cause into their hands. No: they are fighting their own battle & so are we; but at present we meet on common ground against the common enemy. We have a great wall to batter down and while we are working on one side we should hail those who are working on the other. We need have no fear if, as a race, we have ability to safeguard our own peculiar rights.

It is amusing, but very pathetic, to see Negroes under British rule wasting valuable money sending deputations & petitions to the Imperial capitalists in Downing Street. For, after all, what are we but poor black devils whom our exploiters put a little lower down in the scale of human life than their poor white devils. And if, in spite of the fact that they have robbed us for centuries, they have been unable to make existence for their masses worth-while, can we reasonably expect improvement of our conditions at their hands?

He signed off: 'Yours for an awakened Negro race'.⁶¹ For McKay, the critical insight was the need to defeat what he called here 'the common

enemy', even if it meant working with those who regarded him as a social leper.

McKay's meditation on Britain did not end with departure from London. The fact that the British, in connivance with the French authorities, harried him, especially during his time in Morocco, caused him much anguish. For example, after he informed British consulate officials in Morocco in 1928 of his wish to travel to Liberia and Sierra Leone, 'to visit the land of his ancestors', the Foreign Office duly banned him from all British colonies *except* his native Jamaica. The decision reached McKay in garbled form: he was informed in writing that he had been banned from *all* British colonies. Angered, McKay privately referred to his British tormentors as 'dogs', and 'those dirty British bastards working respectably in the dark'. The abusive language, though never exchanged between the parties, was not one-sided. The British vice-consul at Fez, who went through McKay's luggage, read some of his poems and saw the radical literature, called him a 'nasty dangerous fellow'. When McKay's French *carte d'identité* and his British passport were stolen from his house near Tangiers in 1932, he suspected the British.⁶²

McKay's grievances remained with him. Rather than heal, his wounds festered. He grew more bitterly anti-British, his animus almost pathological in intensity by the end.⁶³ He never ceased watching the British ruling class, noting its misdeeds at home and abroad.

His claim that he had 'looked upon the face of the British nation, fulfilling [his] boyhood wish' is, however, questionable. He had never secured lodgings in a British, let alone English, home. He spent much of his time with black soldiers at the Drury Lane Club and elsewhere, and the remainder at the International Socialist Club. Because of this involvement, each 'overwhelmingly foreign', McKay felt that he was 'living on foreign instead of English soil'.⁶⁴ His friends were mainly foreigners or, in one way or another, outsiders. Among his 'little group that stuck together' at the ISC, Frank Budgen was the only white Englishman among them – a man of unusually cosmopolitan temperament. '[A]lthough I could say I lived in London', he told Nancy Cunard, 'it was altogether in a foreign milieu – chiefly Russian-Jewish – except for the little time I worked with a Miss [Nora] Smyth on Sylvia Pankhurst's *Workers' Dreadnought*. And that was very uncongenial.'⁶⁵

In short, McKay can hardly be said to have known the British at large, for the British would not let him. This has been the general pattern with non-European immigrants, including Caribbean intellectuals. They occupied the outhouses of the great British mansion. The few allowed into the main edifice were locked out of so many rooms, especially the more salubrious ones, that they barely knew the place. Marginalisation

and isolation set these Londoners apart, not their loneliness. McKay never complained of loneliness; he complained of hostility.

He had arrived in London at a particular dark moment, a time of racist upsurge, during the riots of 1919 and 1920. The East End, McKay's primary site of work and recreation, was particularly hostile to black people and non-Europeans in general. The dockers were notoriously racist. Unemployment among them had increased dramatically with the end of the war; retail prices in 1920 were 176 per cent higher than they had been in 1914. The cost of food had almost tripled, that of clothing more than quadrupled over the same period. Rent had also increased, though not as steeply.⁶⁶ For the wageless, including the large number of ex-servicemen, this was no consolation – and black men became a convenient scapegoat. The East End was probably the worst place in the country for a black man to be. Considerations of time and place, then, must temper McKay's more far-reaching extrapolations. One can only speculate as to what his reaction would have been had he arrived at a more favourable moment and had stayed in a less inhospitable part of Britain.

This is not to diminish what McKay had to say about Britain: his experiences were his experiences and he had every right to relate them as he saw fit. It is a codicil to his more sweeping generalisations, for their foundations are narrow and unsteady. He spent just over a year in Britain (December 1919 to January 1921); except for passing through for a week on his way to Russia in 1922, he never returned. His view was necessarily partial. Even so, McKay's keen powers of observation come through all his work. One is repeatedly struck by the fine nuances of British society that he picked up. In *Banjo*, a Briton is overcharged in a Marseilles bar and complains vehemently. He explains to Ray that he 'didn't care about the few sous, but it was the principle of the thing'. 'You English certainly love to play with that word "principle"', was Ray's only comment.⁶⁷

There is certainly bitterness in McKay's reflections. But who can blame him? As he noted in another context, 'if the Negro is a little bitter, the white man should be the last person in the world to accuse him of bitterness'. He averred that what matters is not so much the bitterness, but rather 'how one has developed out of it'.⁶⁸ Despite his outbursts, he remained profoundly human. Indeed, his bitterness arose from his humanitarian impulses and uncommonly fine sensibilities. Intensely alive, McKay loved music, he loved to dance and to swim. His love poems are as passionate as those of revolt. Friends recall his gift of laughter and mischievous sense of humour. It is precisely because of all this that he hated a civilisation that exploited, excluded and humiliated. His anger reached boiling point when this basic right to what the

Spirituals call 'the tree of life' – 'ain't we got a right to the tree of life?' – was denied people because of the colour of their skin; racism, he said, was the worst superstition in the world.

In personal relations he transcended the narrow boundaries of nationality and race. Like Ray, he

would have considered the white world an utterly contemptible thing from its attitude toward the black if it were not for his principle of stressing the exception above the average ... He often pondered if an intellectual life could have been possible for him without that principle to support it.⁶⁹

He explicitly addressed this problem. 'In ordinary propaganda language', he wrote to a friend in 1924,

we say white vs. black but we know that it is more than that. The Irish and Indian peoples hate the English nation because they visualize it as the Power oppressing them. It is only from that point of view that their nationalist movement is at all tenable because when we look at facts we find many members of the English nation working for Irish and Indian Independence. And it is thus also with Negroes – the whites *en masse* represent a system that oppresses Negroes, but it is a system that a great body of thinking whites were accidentally born into and would like to change ... But it isn't an easy matter and in the common fight we use the ordinary phrases – black vs. white and working class vs. bourgeoisie – that are not at all correct. For life isn't narrow and definite like that.

He bemoaned the fact that 'the really fine people in this world are so few and *so powerless* that sometimes one is seized with a fit of despair in contemplating life'.⁷⁰

In the same year McKay wrote a poem which stands in marked contrast to the one he had entitled 'Old England'. His experience of living in England divides the two. It has never been published before. It is simply called 'England'.

How like a fixed and fortified rock she stands,
Cliff-featured arrogance against the world
Of change the striving human spirit demands!
Lofty Reaction! When shall she be hurled
From her pedestal proud, whence she sways power
Over the millions raped of strength and will,
And trained before her armored pride to cower,
Yet whose low murmurings she cannot still.

How like a rock against the tides of change
She rises up from out the Northern sea,
The universe a lottery in her range;
The waters billow round her angrily,

A RACE OUTCAST FROM AN OUTCAST CLASS

The castled lord entrench behind their walls,
But the mean multitude about her base,
Where rage the violent storms, the thunder falls,
Upon that rock can find no sheltered place.

The angry tempest will not lash in vain,
Against thy granite, arch conspirator,
Scheming to shackle men with the ancient chain.
Afar the slaves revolt, the distant roar
Tocsins thy plundered native multitude,
That reach out hungry for thine ancient crown,
Thine ancient titles, with strong hands and rude,
From thy high eminence to dash thee down.⁷¹

Notes

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- 1 Claude McKay, *Songs of Jamaica* (Kingston: Aston W. Gardner, 1912), p. 63.
- 2 Max Eastman, 'Introduction' to Claude McKay, *Harlem Shadows: the poems of Claude McKay* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), pp. xvi–xvii. McKay to Max Eastman, 23 March, 1939; McKay Manuscripts, Manuscripts Department, Lilly Library, University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana. The McKay/Eastman correspondence cited in this chapter is from this collection.
- 3 These facts escape Wayne Cooper and Robert Reinders, who in their article on McKay's visit to England, frame their argument around the notion of a black Briton coming home only to be disillusioned. It is as if McKay had not changed between 1911, when he wrote 'Old England', and December 1919, when he arrived in London. Wayne Cooper and Robert C. Reinders, 'A Black Briton comes "home": Claude McKay in England, 1920', *Race*, 9:1 (1967), pp. 67–83.
- 4 In 1909 a Sierra Leonean, A. B. C. Merriman-Labor, published *Britons Through Negro Spectacles or A Negro on Britons* (London: Imperial and Foreign Company, n.d. [1909]). Though it carries interesting anecdotes it lacks analysis.
- 5 I dealt with this problem in the work of C. L. R. James elsewhere: 'C. L. R. James and the spell of "western civilisation": paper presented at the conference, 'C. L. R. James: his intellectual legacies', Wellesley College, April 1991. I never claimed, contrary to Paget Henry's caricature of my argument, that James's celebration of Western civilisation 'has its roots in Eurocentric tendencies that James inherited from Marxism': Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: introducing Afro-Caribbean philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 48. I know better than that and made it clear in my paper.
- 6 Claude McKay, *Banjo: a story without a plot* (New York: Harper, 1929), pp. 163, 274; McKay, 'English journalists investigate Bolshevism', *Crusader*, June 1921.
- 7 McKay, 'Claude McKay describes his own life', *Pearson's Magazine*, 39:5 (1918).
- 8 McKay, 'If we must die', *Liberator*, July 1919.
- 9 McKay, 'McKay describes his life'.
- 10 McKay, 'McKay describes his life'; McKay, *A Long Way From Home* (New York: Lee Furman, 1937), p. 55.
- 11 McKay, 'To "Holy" Russia', *Workers' Dreadnought*, 28 February 1920.

- 12 *Negro World*, 20 September 1919; quoted in A. Mitchell Palmer, *Letter From the Attorney General Transmitting In Response to a Senate Resolution October 17, 1919: a report on the activities of the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice against persons advising anarchy, sedition, and the forcible overthrow of the Government* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), pp. 163–4.
- 13 Theodore Kornweibel, *No Crystal Stair: black life and the Messenger, 1917–1928* (Westport: Greenwood, 1975); Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean radicalism in early twentieth-century America* (London: Verso, 1998), and idem, 'Being red and black in Jim Crow America: on the ideology and travails of Afro-America's socialist pioneers, 1877–1930', in Charles Payne and Adam Green (eds), *Time Longer than Rope: a century of African American activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).
- 14 See James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Knopf, 1930), p. 246; and his *Along This Way: the autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (New York: Viking Press 1933), p. 341.
- 15 Frank Harris to Grant Richards, 8 November 1919, Frank Harris Papers, Albert H. Small Collections Library, University of Virginia; McKay to Grant Richards, 31 August 1920, C. K. Ogden Fonds, William Ready Divisions of Archives and Research Collections, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University. All the McKay correspondence with Ogden cited here is from this collection.
- 16 Fuller to Ogden, 11 November 1919; McKay to Ogden, 17 August 1920; both in the Ogden Fonds.
- 17 McKay, 'Up to date' [1934] (Fragment of an unpublished sketch of his time in Britain); Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. McKay to Ogden, 2 April 1920.
- 18 McKay to Ogden, 25 February 1920.
- 19 McKay to Ogden, 2 April 1920.
- 20 McKay to Ogden, 9 October 1920.
- 21 McKay to Max Eastman, 18 May 1923; McKay, 'How black sees green and red', *Liberator*, June 1921.
- 22 A detailed examination of these matters is to be found in my forthcoming study, *Claude McKay: the making of a black Bolshevik, 1889–1923*.
- 23 V. I. Lenin, 'Left-Wing Communism': *an infantile disorder* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970; first published 1920), pp. 60–73; Raymond Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 168. Mark Shipway, *Anti-Parliamentary Communism in Britain: the movement for workers' councils in Britain, 1917–45* (London: Macmillan, 1988), provides the most detailed analysis of the disagreement between Lenin and Pankhurst.
- 24 *Workers' Dreadnought*, 1 June 1918.
- 25 *Workers' Dreadnought*, 7 June 1919. For a comprehensive analysis of the riots see Jacqueline Jenkinson, 'The 1919 race riots in Britain: their backgrounds and consequences' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1987).
- 26 McKay, *Long Way*, pp. 76–7.
- 27 McKay, 'Up to date', p. 4.
- 28 McKay, *Long Way*, pp. 69–70.
- 29 McKay, *Long Way*, p. 68.
- 30 McKay, *Long Way*, p. 70; idem, 'Up to date', p. 4; for more on Gilmore see Ken Weller, 'Direct action and the unemployed', *Solidarity*, July 1964; and idem, *'Don't be a soldier!' The radical anti-war movement in North London, 1914–1918* (London: Journeyman Press, 1985), and James, *McKay: the making of a black Bolshevik*.
- 31 McKay, *Long Way*, pp. 68–9.
- 32 McKay to Ogden, 18 February 1920.
- 33 McKay to Ogden, 7 March 1920.
- 34 *Cambridge Magazine*, 10:1 (1920).
- 35 Claude McKay, *Spring in New Hampshire and Other Poems* (London: Grant Richards, 1920).
- 36 McKay to Ogden, 25 February 1920. For Ogden's relation to the 1917 Club, see P.

A RACE OUTCAST FROM AN OUTCAST CLASS

- Sargent Florence, 'Cambridge 1909–1919 and its aftermath', in Florence and J. R. L. Anderson (eds), *C. K. Ogden: a collective memoir* (London: Elek Pemberton, 1977).
- 37 Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: an autobiography of the years 1911 to 1918* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 216.
- 38 Woolf, *Beginning Again*, p. 217.
- 39 McKay to Ogden, 26 March 1920.
- 40 McKay to Ogden, 26 March and 14 April 1920.
- 41 McKay to Ogden, 26 March and 2 April 1920.
- 42 McKay, *Long Way*, pp. 67–8; McKay, 'Our London letter', *Negro World*, 13 March 1920. Although McKay's letter, which is in fact a long article on the club, was published in March 1920, it is datelined, 'London, Jan. 14, 1920'; 'Pismo Mek-Kaia Tovarishu Trotskomu' ['Letter from McKay to Comrade Trotsky'], *Pravda*, 1 April 1923.
- 43 Sally Marks, 'Black Watch on the Rhine: a study in propaganda, prejudice and prurience', *European Studies Review*, 13:3 (1983), p. 299.
- 44 *Daily Herald*, 9 and 10 April 1920.
- 45 *Daily Herald*, 10 April 1920. All emphases in these articles are from the original.
- 46 *Daily Herald*, 10 April 1920. Note the seamless shift from 'children of the forests' to 'manhood of these races'.
- 47 Privately, Lansbury claimed that the letter was too long and that McKay refused to shorten it. Cutting of letter by A. W. Simpson to unidentified newspaper. Cuttings Album (F15/3/4), E. D. Morel Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London.
- 48 Claude McKay, 'A black man replies', *Workers' Dreadnought*, 24 April 1920.
- 49 Quoted in Robert Reinders, 'Racialism on the left: E. D. Morel and the "Black horror on the Rhine"', *International Review of Social History*, 13 (1968), p. 6.
- 50 C. E. Edwards [McKay], 'Robert Smillie', *Workers' Dreadnought*, 14 August 1920; McKay, *Long Way*, pp. 80–1; Woolf, *Beginning Again*, pp. 219–21; Reinders, 'Racialism on the left', p. 8.
- 51 'Pismo Mek-Kaia Tovarishu Trotskomu' ['Letter from McKay to Comrade Trotsky'], *Pravda*, 1 April 1923; *Communist*, 8 April 1922.
- 52 McKay, *Long Way*, p. 75.
- 53 [Unsigned], 'Poets and poetry', *Spectator*, 23 October 1922, p. 539.
- 54 McKay, *Long Way*, p. 76.
- 55 See James, *McKay: the making of a black Bolshevik*.
- 56 McKay, *Long Way*, pp. 63–7, 123, 303; McKay, 'London', in his manuscript, 'Cities'; McKay Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
- 57 See McKay's untitled review of Lytton Strachey's book, *Queen Victoria*, in *Liberator*, September 1921; and Winston James, *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice: Claude McKay's Jamaica and his poetry of rebellion* (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 93–8.
- 58 McKay to Ogden, 25 February 1920.
- 59 McKay, *Long Way*, p. 73.
- 60 McKay, *Long Way*, p. 304.
- 61 McKay to Marcus Garvey, 17 December 1919; copy in Hubert Harrison Papers. My thanks to Jeffrey Perry, the custodian of the Harrison Papers, for giving me a copy of this letter.
- 62 McKay touches upon his Moroccan troubles in *Long Way*, pp. 300–4. The South African authorities, on hearing rumours that McKay might slip into the country, had banned the 'notorious negro and Communist' as early as March 1924. See Winston James, *Claude McKay: from Bolshevism to black nationalism, 1923–1948* (forthcoming).
- 63 See letter from Mary Keating to Wayne Cooper, 4 March 1964; quoted in Cooper and Reinders, 'Black Briton comes "home"', p. 83.
- 64 McKay, 'Up to date', p. 4; McKay, *Long Way*, p. 67.
- 65 McKay to Cunard, 30 April 1932. Cunard Collection.
- 66 Gordon Phillips, 'The social impact', in Stephen Constantine, Maurice W. Kirby and

WINSTON JAMES

- Mary B. Rose (eds), *The First World War in British History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), pp. 106–40.
- 67 McKay, *Banjo*, pp. 142–3.
- 68 McKay, 'A Negro writer to his critics', *New York Herald Tribune Books*, 6 March 1932.
- 69 McKay, *Banjo*, pp. 275–6.
- 70 McKay to Josephine Herbst, 18 August [1924], emphasis in original; Josephine Herbst Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
- 71 McKay, 'England' [1924], in 'Cities'. Quoted with permission of the estate of Claude McKay.