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### **Bio:**

Cathy Bergin is a Senior Lecturer on the Humanities Programme at the University of Brighton. Her research focuses on the relationships between African Americans and the Left in the US, with a particular focus on literary and cultural production. She has recently published a monograph *'Bitter with the Past but Sweet with the Dream'* (Brill Academic Publishers, 2015) and is working on a volume in the *Key Texts in Anti-Colonial Thought Series* for Edinburgh University Press entitled *African American Anti-Colonial Texts 1918-1939*.

## ‘Unrest among the Negroes’: The African Blood Brotherhood and the politics of resistance.

### Abstract:

*This article focuses on the impact of the Bolshevik revolution and Irish national liberation struggles on the black radical tradition in the US. Between 1919 and 1922 the African Blood Brotherhood published a monthly journal which attempted to forge a very specific race/class politics in the US. The Crusader, shaped its powerfully articulated vision of black liberation through its trumpeting of the Russian Revolution and the Irish anti-colonial struggle. If reparative history is a history which stresses the dialectical nature of ‘race’ and colonialism and the importance of recognising the agency of black subjects in transforming the politics of resistance, then the ABB are key to understanding the complex formations around race and class in the US in the early 20th Century.*

Keywords: African Blood Brotherhood, Bolshevism, Cyril Briggs, Irish Republicanism, racism, Tulsa Riot of 1921, class, anti-colonialism, US Communism.

On the morning of May 30 1921, an African American Dick Rowland, was delivering a package to the Drexel building in Tulsa. The elevator operator, a white woman named Sarah Page, screamed as apparently Rowland tripped and fell upon her, stamping on her

foot. He ran and as a large crowd gathered Sarah told them she had been ‘assaulted’, and the police were called.<sup>1</sup>

The next day Rowland was arrested and brought to the jail house. He insisted on his innocence of any assault on Sarah Page. The local press ran with the story as attempted rape, within hours a lynch mob was organised as ‘white womanhood’ had been violated and a large group of white men surrounded the court. There is nothing noteworthy about this scenario in Oklahoma in the 1920’s, what happened next was what alarmed the authorities.

A group of up to 30 African Americans approached the courthouse in order to protect Rowland from the lynch mob. They were initially persuaded by Barney Cleaver, Tulsa’s first black policeman, to disperse. However as rumours of the growing lynch mob circulated (approximately 2000) they returned later with more people, and approximately 75 African Americans, some of them armed, confronted the racists who were attempting to storm the jail in order to lynch Dick Rowland<sup>2</sup> According to one eyewitness there was an attempt to disarm an African American man which resulted in shots being fired.<sup>3</sup> In the ensuing fracas two black men were shot dead and a white bystander hit by a stray bullet. The black business area of the city, Greenwood was invaded by a white mob, local law enforcement and members of the national guard and within two days up to 300 African Americans had been murdered (up to 6000 were ‘detained’ after the riot) over 1,200 residences had been burned to the ground, 10,000 people were left homeless.<sup>4</sup> What happened at Tulsa was little less than a pogrom:

For many black citizens, there was literally no place to hide. Some fled the city and received rough treatment at the hands of whites in some of the smaller towns outside Tulsa. Some white vigilantes even roamed affluent white neighbourhoods to round up black live-in domestic workers. One carload of whites dragged a black corpse around the streets of downtown.”<sup>5</sup>

The memory of the Tulsa ‘riot’ was kept alive by its survivors and led to a recommendation for reparations in the 2001 Report of the Tulsa Race Riot Commission.<sup>6</sup>

Not unusually, the blame for so called ‘race riot’ was placed with African Americans, but unusually it was placed with a specific black organisation – The African Blood Brotherhood who had been identified by the authorities as ‘passing through Oklahoma about sixty days ago and organized a chapter a the secret society in Tulsa.’<sup>7</sup> Moreover, many of those African Americans who turned up at the courthouse were identified as ABB members who the *New*

*York Times* described as ‘highly aggressive’ in character, seeking to foment unrest among the Negroes’.<sup>8</sup> In this paper I want to investigate precisely what sort of ‘unrest among the Negroes’ the ABB were supposedly ‘seeking to foment’ and what it may tell us about race and resistance in the US in this period.

The ABB was a proto-Communist, Black Nationalist organisation and is important for any scholar interested in the relationship between Communism and African American struggles. My interest in the organisation is in part, motivated by a desire to refute the tired stereotype of the Communist Party in the US as utilitarian manipulators of the ‘race question’ – a stereotype which dominated cold War and black nationalist scholarship until the recent past.<sup>9</sup> The ABB were an independent organisation, whom along with other black radicals in the United States in this period were central to the forging of an anti-racist politics which was far from commensurate with the race evasions of established Left. But also, if reparative history is a history which stresses the dialectical nature of race and colonialism and the importance of recognising the agency of black subjects in transforming the politics of resistance, then the ABB are key to understanding the complex formations around race and class in the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Cold War determination to construe Communism of the period as utilitarian and shady, stage managing questions of ‘race’ for reasons of realpolitik ensures that black American agency is *necessarily* absent and the impact of black Communists on the landscape of the American left footnoted to ‘manipulation.’ Tellingly this version of history rarely engages with the black radicals of the immediate post World War period, a moment precisely when the politics which would become instrumental to the CPUSA’s activities of race during the Depression, were fashioned by a variety of African American and Caribbean migrant activists. The characterisation of the relationship between African Americans and the Communist Party as manipulative is not an anachronistic one, recently Eric Arnesen has suggested that revisionist historians from below who worked to overturn the earlier accounts have overstated the significance of rank and file Party activity.<sup>10</sup> This is a rehash of the older arguments about CPUSA as Soviet puppet masters duping black activists. The complexities of the relationship between the Party and its Black members is best understood by recognising this period saw a dynamic, historically specific and contingent site of historical possibilities in relation to ‘race’ and class in the US. It is in *this* context, a necessarily political and historical context that I am interested in the genealogy of black

Communist political identity whose heyday was realised in the 1930's under the imperatives of a Stalinised Communism, but whose roots reside in an earlier rich and eclectic understanding of 'race', class and colonialism.

This article is not an historical account of the origins of the ABB, or a comprehensive overview of their politics.<sup>11</sup> Rather, in focusing on particular formulations of 'race' and colonialism presented in the pages of the ABB's magazine the *Crusader*, the intention is to trace how this magazine can function as document infused with a politics resistance in the context of reparative history. This concept of reparative history which organises this special edition of *Race and Class*, can be variously understood in relation to a recuperative project which seeks to stress the interconnectedness of ideas and struggles which informed anti-racist and anti-colonial histories. Indeed the framing story of Tulsa here is not random. That the cultural memory of the Tulsa riot has been retained, not least through the call for reparations, only makes it more incumbent for us to excavate further and recover these politics of radical political agency.<sup>12</sup> The African Blood Brotherhood as an example of an occluded left wing black radical tradition which has something to tell us about the confluence of class and race, is framed by a moment in American racist history which is still not of 'the past.' I focus on the nature of a black radical organisation which is variously glossed in relation to Tulsa but is often marginal in relation to historiographic accounts of the 'riot.'

The origins of the relationship between the CPUSA and African American activists are complex and the (Comintern inspired) adoption of the Self-Determination of Black Belt thesis in 1928 is generally seen as central to the CPUSA's race politics.<sup>13</sup> Yet any engagement with the black communist press of the Depression era reveals a very particular type of race/class rhetoric which we can trace to back to the *Crusader*.<sup>14</sup> This was a periodical which emerged in the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, the race riots of 1919 and the anti-colonial struggles of the period, specifically Ireland. The *Crusader* was illustrative of brilliantly eclectic politics of liberation which was inspired by the Russian Revolution, the fight for Irish Independence and the necessity for black self defence in the face of US racism in both the Northern and Southern States.

Despite some dispute amongst historians about the exact date of its formation, it is generally thought that The African Blood Brotherhood was formed sometime in 1919 following the

racial violence of that year, where the ‘red summer’ saw an onslaught of racist violence across the US in at least 25 and up to 40 ‘race riots’ in the US.<sup>15</sup> The aims of the organisation were as follows:

- ‘1. A liberated Race
2. Absolute race equality
3. The Fostering of racial self respect
4. Organised and uncompromising opposition to the Ku Klux Klan
5. A united Negro Front
6. Industrial development
7. Higher wages for Negro Labour, Shorter hours and Better Living Conditions
8. Education
9. Co-operation with other darker races and with class-conscious white workers.’<sup>16</sup>

The membership was ‘confined to persons of African blood’, but as point 9 above suggests there was no bar on working in an inter-racial class framework. The organisation often greatly exaggerated its size, with claims of up to 23,000 members ‘world-wide’, however most historians put the membership at between 3,000 and 8,000 members.<sup>17</sup> Similarly inflated claims were made for the readership of the *Crusader*, 33,000 according to the journal itself, though in April 1920, the circulation was 4,000 copies.<sup>18</sup> However as Makalani has argued ‘the ABB’s size belied its significance to the New Negro movement and black radical thought more generally.’<sup>19</sup>

The membership of the organisation was made up predominantly of Caribbean migrants, most of whom went on to join the Communist party. The influence of Caribbean radicals on the nascent black Communist movement is beyond of the scope of this article, but it cannot be underestimated, and will be reflected upon below in relation to the organisation’s support for Irish Republicanism.<sup>20</sup> Leading figures in the ABB were Claude McKay, Hubert Harrison, W.A. Domingo and Richard B Moore - all of whom hailed from the Caribbean and many of whom would go on to join the Communist Party. The most important Caribbean migrant in relation to the *Crusader* was its editor Cyril Briggs. Briggs was born in the Caribbean Island of Nevis in 1888 and emigrated to NY in 1905. He worked as a journalist in the States, most famously for the *Amsterdam News*, and is an prodigious

presence in the *Crusader*.<sup>21</sup> Briggs's voice dominates the magazine, he writes under his own name and at least two pen-names (C Lorenzo and C. Valentine). His powerfully articulated vision is of a race/class emancipatory politics which seeks to speak to both the experience of 'race' and more abstract politics of freedom. The agitational term of address in the *Crusader* is combined with a sophisticated attempt to marry a variety of political traditions adequate to the task of black liberation.

Bolshevism was particularly attractive to Briggs and the ABB for a variety of reasons. First and foremost was the publication of Lenin's *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1914) which explicitly situated anti-colonialism as a precondition to anti-capitalism

If the proletariat of any one nation gives the slightest support to the privileges of its 'own' national bourgeoisie, that will inevitably rouse distrust among the proletariat of another nation; it will weaken the international class solidarity of the workers and divide them, to the delight of the bourgeoisie.<sup>22</sup>

As Robert Hill has noted, it was the Bolshevik politics on the *national* question which proved so attractive to early black Communists in the US.<sup>23</sup> Secondly was the *reputation* of the Bolsheviks in defending minorities . As Claude McKay stated it in 1919,

Every Negro who lays claim to leadership should make a study of Bolshevism and explain its meaning to the coloured 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.<sup>24</sup>

McKay's vision of Bolshevism here, is not merely that it has the capacity to vanquish racism, but also that has a role in breaking the monolith or race through its *class* politics. It is hardly a stretch here, to read the 'Slav peasant' in terms of the 'poor white'. These early articulations of the connections between class and 'race' in the service of a politics which refused to collapse 'race' into class reductionism are extremely significant in relation to the very particular purchase that black radicals placed on the dynamics of 'race' and class. As we shall see below, class was a problematic for the *Crusader* in terms of the concrete conditions of American racism, but in Bolshevism they identified a politics which eschewed liberal

handwringing and presented an active role for the black working class in liberating both themselves and *potentially* their deluded racist white counterparts.

Finally there was also the Bolshevik tradition's stated commitment to anti-colonialism and anti-racism in the form a plethora of decrees and resolutions which were made from the moment of the Comintern's inception in 1919. The Comintern or the Third International was created to promote international revolution at a time where such an event seemed imminently possible. This was the first socialist movement which attempted to link the cause of the industrial proletariat with anti-colonial struggles.<sup>25</sup> The Comintern insisted on anti-imperialism as a condition of membership.

Alongside the factors mentioned above, which came in the form of reports from Russia about Bolshevik anti anti-semitism and documents from the Comintern, there was also the onslaught of anti-Bolshevism which followed in the wake of the revolution in Europe and the US. As Winston James has argued: 'The Bolsheviks...were the deadly enemies of black people's enemies, which meant that Lenin and Trotsky were their friends'.<sup>26</sup> The *Crusader* loudly proclaimed its Bolshevik sympathies in its signature declamatory style

Bolshevist is the epithet that present-day reactionaries delight to fling around loosely against those who insist on thinking for themselves and on agitation for their rights. We do not know exactly what the reactionaries desire to convey by the term - we do not think they know themselves. However, if, as appears by its frequent use against those who are agitating in the people's interests and for justice for the oppressed, the term is intended to cover those 'bad agitators' who are not content that the people shall forever be enslaved in the clutches of the cut-throat, child-exploiting, capitalist-imperialist crew, then assuredly we are Bolsheviks. This epithet nor any other holds any terrors for us. If to fight for one's rights is to be Bolsheviks, then we are Bolsheviks and let them make the most of it.<sup>27</sup>

Or, more succinctly 'Don't mind being called 'Bolsheviki' by the same people who call you "nigger". Such affiliation in itself won't solve our problems, but it will help immensely.'<sup>28</sup> This commitment to Bolshevism worked in parallel with enthusiastic support for the Irish Republican struggle (indeed Irish Republicanism was also an inspiration for the leading black nationalist of the period Marcus Garvey). The history of radical African American politics is certainly not simply a national one.

Most obviously the connection to the Irish struggle in part reflects the Caribbean constituency of these left wing radicals who had grown up under British rule. The fact that these radicals could imagine the Irish as brothers in anti-colonial struggle was facilitated by their Caribbean heritage in a myriad of ways, one of them being the fact that unlike American born black radicals they did not have the history and experience of Irish-American racism to interrupt this radical vision of international brotherhood. American born black activists WEB DuBois and A Philip Randolph were more caustic in their approach to the Irish with the latter calling the Irish ‘the race which Negroes...dislike most.’<sup>1</sup> It is what is symbolised by Irish Republicanism which inspires the ABB, *not* specific encounters with particular activists. As Bruce Nelson points out Irish republicanism signified in different ways to these radicals.<sup>29</sup> For the Jamaican Poet and writer Claude McKay it was a romantic idea embodied in the Irish themselves as fighters against colonial rule. As McKay states it in his 1921 article for Eastman’s *Liberator* “How Black sees Red and Green”

I react more to the emotions of the Irish than to those of any other whites, they are so passionately primitive in their loves and hates. They are quite free of the disease which is known in bourgeois phraseology as Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy. I suffer with the Irish. I think I understand the Irish. My belonging to a subject race entitles me to some understanding of them. And then I was born and reared a peasant; the peasant’s passion for the soil possesses me, and it is one of the strongest passions in the Irish revolution.<sup>30</sup>

For Briggs it was the tradition of armed struggle and secrecy in the IRB which was the main inspiration. Robert Hill has characterised Briggs as “representative of a black Fenianism inside the New Negro movement.”<sup>2</sup> Briggs’s articles in the *Crusader* hold a particular invective for England, which is variously described in scathing terms. But more than this, what the *Crusader*’s championing of the Irish struggle is indicative of is a politics of ‘race,’ class and nation as a manifest commitment to an internationalist anti-racism which insists on the primacy of ‘race’ but does so in order to broaden the boundaries of race politics in the US.<sup>31</sup>

The Irish people and the Negro people have much in common. To begin with, they are both oppressed by stronger groups. Secondly the oppressors, in the main, of both Celt

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson 206

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Zumoff p. 203

and Negro, are identified with the Anglo-Saxon race. Thirdly, the great enemy of the Irish people is also the greatest enemy of the Negro people. Not only does Great Britain tyrannize it over more Negroes and other colored races than are ruled by any other nation in the world, but Great Britain is also the bulwark of the Anglo-Saxon White Guards and of all the reactionary things for which they stand.<sup>32</sup>

In the pages of the *Crusader* Irish Republicanism offers an example of Anti-colonial bravery, as Russian Communism offers a model for challenging racism. It's important here to note that the *Crusader's* allegiance was *not* to the Communist Party *per se* but the Communist *International*. As Briggs later recalled 'My interest in Communism was inspired by the national policy of the Russian Bolsheviks and the anti-imperialist orientation of the Soviet State birthed by the October Revolution'.<sup>33</sup> Similarly support for the Irish Cause and the symbolism of the Easter Rising were trumpeted as part of an international revolutionary anti-colonial call.

The mighty tyrant is not to be toppled over by an unaided Ireland, however courageously her valiant sons may fight; nor yet by an Africa or India unaided. England menaced in ONLY ONE QUARTER AT THE SAME TIME can successfully defend her ill-gotten spoils and her bleeding conquests - can easily maintain her grave-yard peace – her boasted *pax Britannica*. But England menaced on many quarters AT THE SAME TIME, faced by the determined bayonets of ALL her 'subject peoples' would be an England AT THE END OF ROPE. And until England is brought to the end of her rope there will be no freedom for Ireland, India or Africa.

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This startling passage which is calling for an internationalist uprising to *lynch* British imperial rule is a localised global vision in which the Irish, Indian, African and African American have not only a shared aim, but a shared interest. England must be menaced from every corner of the empire, and by extension all British colonial subjects must imagine their local struggles in terms of an international one. This internationalist framing of American racism, not only as an element of the global class struggle but also into a world wide movement of the racially oppressed, was to become an overriding element of US Communist discourse in the early 1930s despite the complex ways in which it overlapped with the imperatives of Mother Russia under Stalin. The *Crusader's* early impassioned demand for racial solidarity where 'race' is reframed in relation to the 'Anglo Saxon' is a very particular

type of anti-colonial ‘race’ politics which foregrounds both a shared oppression and a shared oppressor as the basis for solidarity.

The Irish fight for liberty is the greatest Epic of Modern History. It is a struggle that should have the sympathy and active support of every lover of liberty – of every member of an a oppressed group. The Negro in particular should be interested in the Irish struggle, for while it is patent that Ireland can never escape from the menace of ‘the overshadowing empire’ so long as England is able to maintain her grip on the riches and manpower of India and Africa it is also clear that those suffering together under the heel of British imperialism must learn to CO-ORDINATE THEIR EFFORTS before they can HOPE TO BE FREE.<sup>35</sup>

However if the faraway white Irish could be imagined as heroic anti-colonial brothers, what of white Americans, or more specifically white American workers? The magazine’s relatively infrequent stated commitment to inter-racial class politics is quite different in tone from that which structured Communist Party publications and activities during the Depression, where the call for (anti-racist) inter-racial class solidarity was pervasive.<sup>36</sup> In the *Crusader’s* rhetorical identification of the white working class as potential allies, it certainly stood apart from the main current of black nationalist thought of the day (Garveyism in particular).<sup>37</sup> But the articulation of this cross race class alliance is one which constantly prioritises race loyalty and there is a very particular inflection in the *Crusader’s* gestures to white workers which both prefigures and differs from Depression Communist inter-racial class solidarity. It is first and foremost a *tactic* to break the monolith of Whiteness. As Briggs states it in November 1921

WE MUST AIM to encourage existent divisions and even to foster new divisions in the ranks of the white race. To this end we must refrain from chauvinistic utterances and threats of ‘what we are going to do when we win Africa’ etc., that would have the effect of forcing together the much-divided ranks of the white race. We must aim to keep White Labor and Capital apart by showing White Labour that its interests are identical with our own, inasmuch as we are both seeking freedom from Capitalist oppression and exploitation and neither the Negro nor White Labor can achieve that freedom without the aid of the other.<sup>38</sup>

The lived experience of 'race' in the US complicated any ideal discursive formation of white workers as natural allies. 'At the present time' Briggs wrote in July 1921 'it is still true that every white person is a *potential* enemy of the Negro. This does not mean, however that every white person is an *actual* enemy.'<sup>39</sup> The *Crusader's* commitment to working-class unity did and indeed could not find expression in any ideal form but in the politics of pragmatism, albeit a pragmatism allied to a very particular vision of internationalism.

As, for the purpose of throwing off our oppression, the enemies of the capitalist system are our natural allies by virtue of being in the same camp and opposed to the same enemy, so the enemies of the Klan are our friends in that they fight the foe we fight. The Negro masses must get out of their minds the stupid idea that it is necessary for two groups to love each other before they can enter into an alliance against their common enemy. Not love or hatred, but *identity of interest at the moment* dictates the tactics of practical people.<sup>40</sup>

In the pages of the *Crusader* calls for approaching white labour sit side by side with an always articulated emphasis on of the primacy of race identity and a clarion call for racial pride. The examples of this in the magazine are ubiquitous and indeed the concept of race pride is one which structures the magazine as a whole, as Briggs states it: 'Let it be understood then that I am a Negro – *Negro first last and all the time*. Negro by birth, choice and by the treatment which denies to Negroes the right of being American citizens.'<sup>41</sup>

Allied to the magazine's black pride was the assertion of a radical politics of self-defence, prefiguring not just the Communist politics of the Depression era but the Black Power rhetoric of the late 1960's. In an article about resisting the Ku Klux Klan, Briggs insists that

With us it will be a fight for life as well as for rights. And to the race fighting against mighty odds for its existence the use of any and every weapon at hand is not only permissible but compulsory. With the murderer clutching at our throats we cannot afford to choose our weapons, but must defend ourselves with what lies nearest, whether that be poison, fire or what.<sup>42</sup>

From the beginning the *Crusader* affirms its commitment to a politics of resistance insisting that '*organised force* is the only language intelligible to *all* the world (the only language that Europeans understand in dealing with Colored races) and the foundation upon which all white civilisation is in reality based.'<sup>43</sup>

In the pages of the *Crusader* there are an diverse range of articles from omnipresent declarations of ‘race’ pride to castigating the black middle class ‘misleaders’ to articulations of proto-Fanonian concepts of black selfhood and a range of cultural interventions in relation to the negative representations of African Americans in US popular culture. When it ceased publication in 1922, it was six years before the CP adopted the Self Determination for the Black Belt thesis and seven years before the CPUSA’s black communist newspaper *The Liberator*, also edited by Cyril Briggs.

The race/class politics which emerged and developed throughout the *Crusader*’s four years were a politics which insisted upon ‘race’ pride and active resistance to racism but which also placed itself within the context of a global anti-colonialism, and eventually an anti-capitalism. By 1922 the majority (but not all of the ABB) had joined the CPUSA. These unashamedly eclectic and Marxist inspired declarative politics of liberation allow us access to a much neglected aspect the of African American radical tradition.

When the authorities in Tulsa identified the ABB as the ‘trouble makers’ in the aftermath of the white riot, the claim was exaggerated. Although there was a branch of the ABB there, the organisation did not have a strong base outside of New York.<sup>44</sup> However, the July 1921 issue of the *Crusader* dedicated over 6 pages to the Tulsa riot in a masterful example of rhetorical provocation and evasion. Briggs’s editorial insists that the charge of ABB instigation is ‘false, and the white authorities of Oklahoma and all of their cracker brethren in other southern states know it to be such.’<sup>45</sup> The ‘Commander’ of the ABB in Tulsa argues that:

To the accusation that the Tulsa Post of the African Blood Brotherhood ‘fomented’ and directed the Tulsa riot, the first part is a lie and whether we directed Negroes in their fight in self-defence is certainly no crime in Negro eyes, and is left for the white Oklahoma authorities to prove. For ourselves we neither deny or affirm it.<sup>46</sup>

The magazine uses the occasion of their supposed part in the riot to launch a blistering attack on white racism in the South and assert a manifesto to black agency and self-determination.

We do not have to foment unrest among the Negroes when unrest already exists among them. Agitation is not needed since the white man’s many acts of injustice and malicious cruelty serve the purpose all too effectively...Negroes do not have to be told that lynching and mob murders are barbarous acts of injustice.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to insisting on the rights of African Americans to defend themselves from racist attack by any means necessary, in the aftermath of the riot the ABB organised public meetings in Harlem which collected money for the survivors of Tulsa and provided a platform for them to relate their stories.<sup>48</sup>

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the call for reparations in relation to Tulsa has insured that the cultural memory of this racist assault has been retained.<sup>49</sup> The ‘riot’ was a sustained attack on the black businesses and black communities of the area.<sup>50</sup> Moreover in the wake of the ‘riot’ the destruction of the black commercial district was trumpeted as necessary in a *Tulsa Tribune* editorial entitled “It Must not Be Again” in somewhat eugenic terms on June 4 1921:

Such a district as the old “Niggertown” must never be allowed in Tulsa again. It was a cesspool of iniquity and corruption...Commissioner Adkinson had said that he knew of the growing agitation in “Niggertown” some time ago and that he and the Chief of Police went down and told the negroes that if anything started they would be responsible. That is a first class conversation but rather weak action. Well, the bad niggers started it. The public would like to know: why wasn’t it prevented.<sup>51</sup>

Here, explicitly, black death and the near destruction of the African American community in Tulsa is lamented only in that it didn’t happen sooner. The terms of the reparations claim has been to correctly contend that this was a targeted effort to ensure that African American economic progress was halted and thus this has had real effects in terms of poverty for the descendants of those killed, injured and deprived of their livelihood.<sup>52</sup> The story of the Tulsa riot is not a story of agency but of death. The aim of this article is not to create a triumphant or redemptive history out of an act of racist terror. It is to argue that at the margins of this event, in the attempt of the authorities to evoke ‘outside agitators’ we can access an historically specific and compelling politics of resistance that has been too often subsumed in the larger narratives that frame the complex history of relations between African Americans and the Left. The point here is not to present a celebratory portrait of the *Crusader*, though there is much to celebrate in its searing vision of anti-racist, anti-colonial revolution. The point is, along with other essays in this issue of *Race and Class*, to look to those particular moments where certain formulations of race, class, labour and resistance interrupt dominant historiographic paradigms and point to a dialectical history of rich interconnections.

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- <sup>1</sup> R. Halliburton, Jr "The Tulsa Race War of 1921" *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Mar., 1972), p.335
- <sup>2</sup> Scott Ellsworth *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* p.46
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid p.52
- <sup>4</sup> Halliburton op cit. pp. 337-9
- <sup>5</sup> Ellsworth op cit. p. 61
- <sup>6</sup> See Addendum in Hannibal B. Johnson *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District* (Fort Worth Texas, Eakin Press: 1998) and <http://www.okhistory.org/research/forms/freport.pdf>
- <sup>7</sup> *New York Times* June 4, 1921
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid .
- <sup>9</sup> In addition to the seminal work done in revising this narrative by scholars such as Robin Kelley, Mark Solomon, Martha Biondi and Mark Naison, there has been much recent scholarship which has built on this earlier work. See for example Holger Weiss *Framing A Radical African Atlantic* (Leiden, Brill, 2013); Minkah Makalani *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Michelle Stephens *The Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States 1914-1962* (Durham North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2005)
- <sup>10</sup> Eric Arnesen 'No "Graver Danger": Black Anticommunism, the Communist Party, and the Race Question', *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, Vol 3 no. 4 (2006) , pp. 13-52
- <sup>11</sup> Jacob Zumoff has recently provided a rich account of the ABB's emergence in 'The African Blood Brotherhood: From Caribbean Nationalism to Communism' in *The Journal of Caribbean History* 41:1 and Robert A Hill's introduction to *The Crusader* presents an engaging portrait of Cyril Briggs' politics in relation to the ABB - 'Racial and Radical: Cyril V. Briggs, *The Crusader* Magazine, and the African Blood Brotherhood, 1918-1922.' Introductory Essay to *The Crusader*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987)
- <sup>12</sup> See Charles J. Ogletree 'Tulsa Reparations: The Survivors' Story' in *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 13, 2004 pp. 13-30
- <sup>13</sup> Mark Solomon *The Cry Was Unity* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1998) pp. 38-52.
- <sup>14</sup> For a study of the black Communist newspaper *The Liberator* see Cathy Bergin 'Race/class politics: the Liberator, 1929-1934' in *Race & Class* (April 2006) pp. 86-104
- <sup>15</sup> Jan Voogd *Race Riots and Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2008) p.2. Barbara Foley *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008) p.13
- <sup>16</sup> Summary of the Program and Aims of the African Blood Brotherhood cited in Robert Hill, op cited p.xxviii
- <sup>17</sup> Jacob Zumoff *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919-1929* (Leiden: Brill, 2014) p.299, Hill op cited p.xlvi., Minkah Makalani *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2011) p.50
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid. Circulation numbers are not necessarily indicative of readership in relation to the radical press of the period in terms of both literacy challenges and high levels of 'pass-along' rate
- <sup>19</sup> Makalani *In the Cause of Freedom* op. cit pp.50-51
- <sup>20</sup> See Winston James magisterial account of Caribbean radicalism in the US *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century America* (London & New York, Verso, 1998) and more recently Joyce Moore Turner's *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Urbana & Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2005)
- <sup>21</sup> Hill op. cit. pp. v-xlvi
- <sup>22</sup> V.I. Lenin *The Right of Nations to Self Determination* in Julius Katzer (ed ) *V.I. Lenin Collected Works* Vol.20 (Moscow, Progress Press, 1964) pp. 424-5
- <sup>23</sup> Hill op cited. p.xxvi
- <sup>24</sup> Claude McKay *Negro World* Sept 20<sup>th</sup> 1919 quoted in Bill Schwarz (ed) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003) p.73
- <sup>25</sup> Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International, 1919-1943, Documents* Vol. 1 ( London: Oxford University Press, 1956) p.170..

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- <sup>26</sup> Winston James op .cit p.167
- <sup>27</sup> Editorial *The Crusader* October 1919 p.9
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid June 1920
- <sup>29</sup> Bruce Nelson *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race* (Princeton University Press, 2012) pp.201-6
- <sup>30</sup> Claude McKay "How Black sees Green and Red", *Liberator* 4 June 1921 pp.17-21
- <sup>31</sup> Ireland was not the only anti-colonial struggle which informed the anti-colonialism of *The Crusader*. For a detailed account of the internationalist vision of the ABB see Minkah Makalani 'Internationalizing The Third International: The African Blood Brotherhood, Asian Radicals, And Race, 1919-1922' in *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 96, No. 2 (Spring 2011),
- <sup>32</sup> Editorial 'The Irish Boycott on British Goods' *The Crusader*, March 1921, p.9
- <sup>33</sup> Letter From Briggs to Theodore Draper March 1958.  
<http://www.marxisthistory.org/history/usa/groups/abb/1958/0317-briggs-todrapaper.pdf>. The reluctance of American Communists in the early 20's to address 'race' was instrumental in the very particular relationship black radicals forged with the Comintern. See Makalani *In the Cause of Freedom* p.100
- <sup>34</sup> Cyril Briggs 'Heroic Ireland' *The Crusader* February 1921 p.1
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> See Bergin op. cited
- <sup>37</sup> It's beyond the scope of this article to detail the ABB's ambiguous and often fraught relationship with Garveyism. See Hill op. cited pp. xl-xlvi
- <sup>38</sup> Cyril Briggs 'Lessons in Tactics' *The Crusader* November 1921 p.15
- <sup>39</sup> Editorial 'The Acid Test of White Friendship' *The Crusader* July 1921 p.9
- <sup>40</sup> Robert Hill Introduction to the *Crusader* op cit. lxviii
- <sup>41</sup> Cyril Briggs 'Americans?' *The Crusader* June 1919 p.5
- <sup>42</sup> Cyril Briggs 'The Ku Klux Klan' *The Crusader* January 1921 p.154
- <sup>43</sup> 'Aims of The Crusader' *The Crusader* October 1918 p.1
- <sup>44</sup> Makalani 'Internationalizing The Third International' op.cit. p. 154
- <sup>45</sup> Cyril Briggs 'The Tulsa Riot and the African Blood Brotherhood' *The Crusader* July 1921 p.10
- <sup>46</sup> Commander, Tulsa Post African Blood Brotherhood, (name deleted) 'The Tulsa Riot' *The Crusader* July 1921 p.6
- <sup>47</sup> Cyril Briggs 'The Tulsa Riot and the African Blood Brotherhood' *The Crusader* July 1921 p.10
- <sup>48</sup> Makalani *In the Cause of Freedom* op.cit p.75
- <sup>49</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/20/us/20tulsa.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/20/us/20tulsa.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)
- <sup>50</sup> Halliburton, op. cit. pp. 346-7
- <sup>51</sup> Cited in Hannibal B Johnson above cited pp.81-2
- <sup>52</sup> <http://www.hannibalbjohnson.com/reparations-and-the-1921-tulsa-race-riot-righting-the-wrongs-of-history/>