

# Cyril Briggs: Guns, Bombs, Spooks and Writing the Revolution

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Against a backdrop of violent race riots, lynching, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, Cyril Briggs and his black radical associates in New York dared to imagine not only a world of racial equality, but also a world in which black people were empowered and militant. What Cyril Briggs shared with his black radical associate turned nemesis, Marcus Garvey, was a commitment to black sovereignty and international recognition. Both men believed that black nationalism was key to the deliverance of black people in Africa and the Caribbean from colonialism. In their roles as race leaders, with shared ambitions for black nationalism, and statehood – and in Briggs’s case black federation – both emerged on a young J. Edgar Hoover’s watch list of New Negro subversives.

If New Negro radicals like Garvey and Briggs contributed to and drew on imaginaries of black sovereignty, then US and British Intelligence agencies responded to them as threats to their national and imperial sovereignties. Garvey and Briggs as heads of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) respectively propagated the view of their organizations’ threats to the status quo; in turn, such propaganda fed intelligence agencies’ interests in the UNIA, ABB and their members, creating something of a circular feedback loop in which black empowerment served as fuel to both black radical organizations and the intelligence networks which shadowed them.

Hoover’s entry into the Bureau in August 1919, amid the ‘Red Summer’, coincided with Briggs’s near one-year mark as editor of the radical black newspaper the *Crusader* and the designation of the *Crusader*’s office as the eastern office of the Hamitic League of the World, an Afrocentric organization committed to fostering black pride.<sup>1</sup> It is unsurprising perhaps that Briggs would end up on Hoover’s watch list given the former’s pioneering role within black radical circles and the latter’s interest in black radical literature from the outset of his tenure at the Bureau.

Cyril Briggs is primarily remembered for his journalism, but he also wrote two short stories published in early 1920 and mid-1921 respectively.<sup>2</sup> Both serialized over two issues, Briggs’s short stories resemble his journalism in that they laud black revolutionary action and black sovereignty. In both his fiction and non-fiction writing, Briggs paid heed to the lived reality of black oppression while simultaneously championing black states and federations that might challenge white supremacy and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 523.

<sup>2</sup> See notes 49 and 50.

hegemony. Briggs was somewhat ahead of his time, writing of a free black state as early as 1917 when working as a journalist for the *New York Amsterdam News* amid US engagement in the First World War. This may have contributed to his earning a reputation in intelligence circles as ‘one of the extreme radical leaders among the Negroes’.<sup>3</sup> Briggs’s founding and stewarding of the African Blood Brotherhood, alongside his editorials in the *Crusader*, the ABB’s organ from June 1921, however brought things to a tipping point, drawing the sustained attention of the BOI, US Military Intelligence Division (MID) and British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS).

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Born on 28 May, 1888, on the Caribbean island of Nevis, Cyril Briggs was the son of Mary M. Huggins, a mixed-race light-skinned woman of part African heritage, and Louis E. Briggs, a white Trinidadian who was bookkeeper and an overseer of a sugar plantation in Nevis.<sup>4</sup> Mary and Louis did not marry and it appears likely that Briggs had little contact with his father. Fair-skinned and phenotypically white, Briggs would be described by George W. Harris, an editor and publisher of the *Amsterdam News*, as an ‘angry blond negro’ in later life—a phrase that captures something of his juxtaposing characteristics: his militant black nationalist and internationalist politics, his white appearance, and his identification as black.<sup>5</sup> He also had a speech impediment, which made public speaking difficult and ruled him out of the kind of ‘stepladder’ speaking from which Afro-Caribbeans like Hubert Harrison and Garvey built their careers.

Briggs had a fairly typical colonial education, attending Christian-affiliated schools in Nevis before completing his schooling in St. Kitts in 1904. Ensclosed in this religious-colonial environment, Briggs had an early political dawning on reading Robert Ingersoll, an American radical and freethinker, who championed agnosticism and,

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<sup>3</sup> Col. Parker Hitt to Brig. Gen. Churchill, 23 June, 1920, 10218-424, Records Group 165, Military Intelligence Division, National Archives, Washington, D. C. [hereafter RG 165, MID, NA].

<sup>4</sup> There is some uncertainty as to Briggs’s place of birth. Most scholars state that Briggs was born in Nevis. However, some claim that he was born in St. Kitts, a statement which is itself ambiguous as this may be a shorthand reference for the country’s full title, St. Kitts and Nevis. I have not been able to locate a copy of Briggs’s birth certificate, but believe that Richard B. Moore’s ascription of him as Nevisian to be persuasive given his close association with Briggs in New York. Richard B. Moore, *The Name “Negro”: Its Origin and Evil Use* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1992), 15. James, for example, refers to Briggs as born in St. Kitts, see Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in America, 1900-1932* (London; New York: Verso, 1998), 157.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 316.

while not opposed to US expansionism, disagreed with US annexation through military force.<sup>6</sup>

In his mid-to-late teens Briggs worked in a variety of jobs, becoming a sub-reporter for the *St. Kitts Daily Express* and the *St. Christopher Advertiser* in 1905 and joined his mother in New York a year later, arriving in New York City on 3 July 1906.<sup>7</sup> Briggs joined a growing Caribbean diaspora in the metropolis. Succeeding Hubert Harrison by six years and preceding Claude McKay, W. A. Domingo, Marcus Garvey, Amy Ashwood and Amy Jacques Garvey, and Otto and Hermina Huiswoud, Briggs was one of the first émigrés of this coterie to seek residence in New York City.

While we do not know much about Briggs's early years in New York, *S. S. Trinidad's* ship's manifest gives his intended place of residence as 318 W. 145<sup>th</sup> Street, placing Briggs in the Sugar Hill area. Interestingly, the manifest reveals some familial anxieties, as his mother is noted as a 'friend' – her surname of Huggins perhaps an embarrassing reminder of his parents' unmarried status. Under a column labelled 'Race or people', the manifest also lists Briggs in ink as 'White', with 'W[est] Indi[an]' scrawled over the top in pencil, an archival palimpsest that highlights the ambiguities concerning Briggs's categorization. Perhaps the purser was confused about Briggs's identity, or noted down a preference by Briggs to be identified as Caribbean rather than white.<sup>8</sup>

In 1912, Briggs got his first break into US journalism, working for the *New York Amsterdam News*, a small independent black weekly newspaper founded in 1909. Briggs married Virginian-born Bertha Florence Johnson on 7 January 1914 and resigned from the *Amsterdam News* a year later to assume the role of editor of the

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Hill, 'Racial and Radical: Cyril V. Briggs, the Crusader Magazine, and the African Blood Brotherhood, 1918-1922,' in *The Crusader: A Facsimile of the Periodical*, ed. Robert Hill (New York and London: Garland, 1987), vii-viii.

<sup>7</sup> Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 31. Briggs's arrival in New York City is generally believed to be 4 July 1905. However, this date seems questionable, given that no such record of Briggs's arrival is noted in the New York passenger arrival lists for Ellis Island until the following year. *S. S. Trinidad* ship's manifest records his arrival as 3 July 1906. In a letter to Theodore Draper, Briggs stated 'I came to the United States in 1905 (4 July)'. Cyril Briggs to Theodore Draper, Theodore Draper papers, 4 June 1958, Box 31, Hoover Institution Archives. In a 1910 census, Briggs's arrival date in the US is recorded as 1906, however on both the 1920 and 1930 censuses his US arrival date is noted as 1905. This suggests that from 1920 onwards, Briggs misremembered his true arrival date. It's possible that this was a second visit, but at present I have been unable to locate evidence to prove this. 1910 United States Census, New York, Population, Commerce and Labor, Digital image, 17 April 2019, <http://ancestry.com>. 1920 United States Census, New York, Population, Commerce, Digital image, 16 April 2019, <http://ancestry.com>. 1930 United States Census, New York, Population, Commerce, Digital image, 16 April 2019, <http://ancestry.com>.

<sup>8</sup> The manifest has '318 145 W NY' penned on it, which I interpret as 318 West 145<sup>th</sup> Street. Passenger record for Cyril Briggs, arr. 3 July 1906, manifest of *S. S. Trinidad*, from West Indies to New York, 16 April 2019, <http://ancestry.com>.

*Colored American Review*, a business magazine billed as ‘A Magazine of Inspiration’. Briggs’s praise of black enterprise and condemnation of white exploitation in the magazine caught the attention of fellow Caribbean journalist, Hubert Harrison. Writing of the new periodical in the *New York News* in glowing terms, Harrison was briefly taken on as a contributing editor. Mysteriously, however, Briggs resigned after the magazine’s second issue, probably on account of a difference of opinion between himself and its owner, Ernest Touissant Welcome, a black property developer.<sup>9</sup>

Briggs became a naturalized US citizen on 24 February 1916 and returned to the staff of the *Amsterdam News* four months later. On 22 January 1917, three months prior to the US’s formal entry into the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson delivered his ‘Peace without Victory’ address to Senate, which was the first of many speeches defending the right of nations to self-determination. Despite later claims that he had ‘refused to fight for a democracy denied my people’, Briggs registered for the draft on 5 June 1917 without any notable resistance.<sup>10</sup> By September 1918, he had made a volte-face and was a fierce critic of Du Bois, who advocated black soldiers to join in the war effort in an article, entitled ‘Close Ranks’.<sup>11</sup>

The eruption of race riots in East St. Louis in May and July 1917 and Houston in August 1917 combined with the secret execution of thirteen black soldiers of the Third Battalion by the state in December for their role in the Houston riots galvanized black radicals. Following Wilson’s response to Pope Benedict XV’s peace appeal in late August 1917, Briggs called for the creation an independent black nation within the United States in a two-part editorial “‘Security of Life” for Poles and Serbs – Why Not for Colored Americans?’. Briggs’s innovative notion of black self-determination within the US pre-dated the official position adopted by the Workers’ (Communist) Party in 1928 by eleven years. Comprising ‘one-tenth of the population’, blacks in the US, in Briggs’s view, could justifiably ‘demand’ ten per cent of US territory. Briggs contended that ‘a colored autonomous State’ be established in the states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho combined, or better still, California and Nevada – preferable on account of the warmer weather and its location between a reimagined US and Mexico. While the article does not advocate violence to achieve such ends, it nevertheless suggests self-sacrifice might be necessary: ‘[t]he race is more in need of martyrs than of leaders’.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hill, ‘Racial and Radical,’ x.

<sup>10</sup> Hill, ‘Racial and Radical,’ xi.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Digest of Views,’ *Crusader* I, no. 1 (September 1918): 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> “‘Security of Life” for Poles and Serbs – Why Not for Colored Americans?’, *New York Amsterdam News* (1917): transcribed copies, Theodore Draper papers, Box 31, Hoover Institution Archives.

In January 1918 Wilson delivered his Fourteen Points, which proposed an ‘impartial adjustment of all colonial claims’ and the creation of a League of Nations.<sup>13</sup> In that same year Briggs became increasingly critical of US double standards abroad and particularly in the Caribbean.<sup>14</sup> In a letter to the *Globe* published in January 1918 and entitled significantly ‘Africa for the Africans’, Briggs argues for self-determination in Africa.<sup>15</sup> Briggs’s *Globe* letter led indirectly to the creation of the *Crusader* magazine, as a West Indian merchant, Anthony Crawford, wrote to Briggs on 24 January 1918 offering to finance ‘an organ – especially suited to your propaganda of “Africa for the Africans” – to educate the Caucasian in African history’.<sup>16</sup>

With \$200 donated by Crawford and another \$200 loaned, the *Crusader* was launched in September 1918. Alongside an avowed petition for African sovereignty, the *Crusader*’s first issue lists among its aims an awakening of ‘the American Negro to the splendid strategic position of the Race in the South American and West Indian Republics’.<sup>17</sup> In this opening issue, Briggs also declares his support for the Socialist candidates A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen on a ‘Pro-Negro’, rather than a ‘pro-Socialist’ stance – the capitalization of the ‘p’ in the former clear emphasis of where Briggs’s priorities lay.<sup>18</sup>

In December 1918, the *Crusader* was named the ‘Publicity Organ of the Hamitic League of the World’. Leading with an article which publicized the League, it lists Briggs as the organization’s vice-president.<sup>19</sup> Briggs had formed an alliance with the organization’s creator, George Wells Parker, a businessman from Omaha who had founded the League in 1917. While one advertisement states that Briggs was one of the original founders of the League, there is no evidence of Parker and Briggs’s association prior to 1918, when the League was revived after a period of dormancy.<sup>20</sup> The League undoubtedly served as a template for the African Blood Brotherhood that Briggs later founded in 1919. Briggs and Parker shared an ideological outlook that combined Pan-African liberation, race pride and something like the ‘race first’ principles espoused by Hubert Harrison from the mid-1910s onwards.

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<sup>13</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Address of the President of the United States, Delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress, January 8, 1918* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 6.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Liberty for all,’ *New York Amsterdam News* (1918): transcribed copies, Theodore Draper Collection, box 31, folder Briggs.

<sup>15</sup> Cyril Briggs, ‘Africa for the Africans,’ *New York Globe*, 23 January 1918. Quoted in Hill, ‘Racial and Radical,’ xiii-xiv, liii.

<sup>16</sup> Hill, ‘Racial and Radical,’ xvii.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Aims of the Crusador [sic],’ *Crusader* 1, no. 1 (September 1918): 4.

<sup>18</sup> ‘The Negro Candidates,’ *Crusader* 1, no. 1 (September 1918): 8.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Negroes of the World Unite in Demanding a Free Africa,’ *Crusader* 1, no. 4 (December 1918): 3.

<sup>20</sup> Hill, ‘Racial and Radical,’ xxi.

Unlike Briggs's journalism in the *Crusader* in early to mid- 1919, the *Amsterdam News* had come under increasing pressure from the Translation Bureau of the Post Office. On 12 March 1919, Briggs's 'League of Thieves' *Amsterdam News* editorial explicitly denounced Wilson's proposals for a League of Nations. The issue was detained by the postal authorities, and, by April, according to Briggs, he was facing the second of two interviews with federal employees over the content of an April article concerning the ill-treatment of black officers serving in France.

While it's difficult to date Briggs's draw to international communism precisely, the timing of his 'League of Thieves' article—published six days after the close of the founding congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow, 2-6 March 1919—appears more than merely fortuitous. In contrast to the Second International, Lenin's International was unapologetically anticolonial, its manifesto a revolutionary call to arms for non-European colonials: 'Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of triumph of the Proletarian Dictatorship of Europe will also be the hour of your liberation.' Briggs's 1958 claim that his 'interest' in communism was inspired by the 'national policy of the Russian Bolsheviks and the anti-imperialist orientation of the Soviet State', suggests that he was initially attracted to the international communist movement which was kick-started by the 1917 October Revolution, and re-fired by the emergence of Comintern in March 1919.<sup>21</sup> Briggs review of a play 'Darkest Russia', featured in the March 1919 *Crusader*,—denouncing Czarist Russia and praising Bolshevik rule—followed by the publication of an anonymous poem, 'The Bolsheviki' in the May 1919 *Crusader*, hint at Briggs's admiration of the achievements of Lenin's Bolshevik Party.<sup>22</sup>

While Briggs found an outlet for Bolshevik sentiment in the *Crusader*, the screws began to tighten at the *Amsterdam News*, as the 29 May and 12 June issues were held up by the Post Office on account of their being judged by Post Office Solicitor, W. H. Lamar, as 'nonmailable'. Refusing to capitulate to pressure from the authorities, Briggs resigned in July 1919.<sup>23</sup>

In April 1919, the MID, disregarding orders not to spy on civilians, produced a report on 'Negro Agitation'. It was apparently based on British intelligence and information prepared by Rev. R. D. Jonas, a Welshman who shared information with US intelligence services while working as a British undercover agent. The report exposes Anglo-American anxieties about the spread of 'Pan-Negroism' globally and the contact of this movement with Bolshevism and other oppressed national groups,

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<sup>21</sup> Cyril Briggs to Theodore Draper, Theodore Draper papers, 17 March 1958, Box 31, Hoover Institution Archives. Hill, 'Racial and Radical,' xxv.

<sup>22</sup> Cyril Briggs, 'Darkest Russia,' *Crusader* 1, no. 7 (March 1919): 24-25. 'The Bolsheviki,' *Crusader* 1, no. 9 (May 1919): 6.

<sup>23</sup> Hill, 'Racial and Radical,' xxiii.

namely the Irish, Jews and Hindus. In it, the *Crusader* is defined alongside another black periodical, the *Challenge*, as a 'very extreme magazine', with 'much abuse of Great Britain'.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps reading this as a British imperial affair, the MID took no immediate action against the magazine.

On 2 July 1919, three weeks before the biggest of the Red Summer riots, Robert A. Bowen, Director of the Post Office's Bureau of Translations and Radical Publications in New York, produced a report on 'Radicalism and Sedition Among the Negroes as Reflected in Their Publications'. Bowen expressed concerns that the 'radical movement in the negro press' had 'become remarkably accelerated during the past six months'. Bowen also grouped the *Crusader* bizarrely among the more conservative publications, such as the *Amsterdam News* and the *Crisis*, against which the *Negro World* was seen as a necessary remedial by black radicals.

In October, an advert for the 'African Blood Brotherhood for African Liberation and Redemption' featured in the *Crusader*. It caught the attention of MID Director, Brigadier General Marlborough Churchill, who, thinking the advert 'revolutionary in nature', ordered an investigation into the organization.<sup>25</sup> This and subsequent adverts for or statements about the ABB would keep federal authorities exercised for the next four years. The advert's open-ended call for applicants only 'willing to go to the limit!' undoubtedly unnerved intelligence operatives.<sup>26</sup> Both the MID and BOI filed a serialized short fiction piece, "'Punta" Revolutionist', by St. Thomas-born Romeo L. Dougherty from the October *Crusader*—Dougherty's last instalment despite expressed intentions to continue the serial.<sup>27</sup> This final episode expands on the plans of Punta Hernandez, the eponymous Caribbean revolutionary hero, to initiate a 'Black Revolution' delivering 'freedom to black men'.<sup>28</sup> Specifically, this instalment details how Punta intends to realize his vision: through the construction of a 'deadly aerial bomb' that will be shipped to Africa and guided by 'wireless station' on an uninhabited island off Miami.<sup>29</sup>

The MID's and BOI's cataloguing of "'Punta" Revolutionist' raises several questions. Were these US intelligence agencies specifically interested in such fiction? Or did they

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<sup>24</sup> Capt. John B Trevor to Brig. Gen. Churchill, 5 April, 1919, 10218-324, RG165, MID, NA. Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. I, 405. Theodore Kornweibel, *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 133.

<sup>25</sup> Brig. Gen. Churchill to Maj. H. A. Strauss, 13 October, 1919, 10218-349, RG165, MID, NA.

<sup>26</sup> 'Mr. Cyril V. Briggs, Editor of the *Crusader* Announces the Organization of the African Blood Brotherhood for African Liberation and Redemption,' Advertisement, in *Crusader* (October 1919), 27.

<sup>27</sup> Romeo L. Dougherty, "'Punta" Revolutionist,' *Crusader* 2, no. 2 (October 1919): 15-16. *Crusader*, 1919, 10218-349, RG165, MID, NA. *Crusader*, 1919-1920, OG387162, RG65, BOI, NA.

<sup>28</sup> Romeo L. Dougherty, "'Punta," Revolutionist,' *Crusader* 2, no. 1 (September 1919): 16. The punctuation of the serial title slightly alters on each instalment—note the inclusion of a comma after "Punta" in the September issue.

<sup>29</sup> Dougherty, "'Punta" Revolutionist,' 15.

not discriminate between different genres of writing in radical magazines? A report by an unidentified MID agent on 20 October 1919 contains some clues. In the agent's view, the 'story by Mr. Dougherty' was 'directly connected' with the October ABB advert and functioned 'purely and simply [as] propaganda to arouse interest in the plan of the young Negroes of this country.'<sup>30</sup>

While we do not know about the precise origins of the ABB, the placement of the October advert and Briggs's recollection that the organization was founded some months after the *Crusader* was inaugurated, point towards its foundation in early to mid-1919. Founded by Briggs as a protective black organization, the ABB contained features of a secret society, fraternal order and paramilitary organization. Divided into posts located throughout the US and Caribbean and headed by commanders, the ABB probably had no more than 3,000 members at its peak, with perhaps no more than 50 members in its headquarters, Harlem's 'Menelik Post'.<sup>31</sup>

In a June 1920 *Crusader* article, the ABB's 'sole purpose' was defined as 'the liberation of Africa and the redemption of the Negro race'.<sup>32</sup> No original document of the ABB's 1920 programme exists, however post-1920 and undated sources attribute a nine- and eight-point agenda with broadly anticolonial, socially progressive and black emancipatory aspirations to a 1920 convention.<sup>33</sup> Membership of the ABB was restricted to those of 'African blood', but, unlike Garvey's UNIA, co-operation between the races was encouraged.<sup>34</sup> Like the UNIA, the ABB had a significant number of members hailing from the Caribbean. Early and founding members included Theophilus Burrell, Benjamin E. Burrell, Richard B. Moore, W. A. Domingo, Claude McKay, Arthur Reid, Grace P. Campbell, and Joseph P. Fanning.<sup>35</sup> The overlap between Harrison's Liberty League, Garvey's UNIA and the ABB cannot be overstated; Reid joined Harrison's league, drifted into Garvey's UNIA, and left the UNIA to become an ABB member; Domingo (Liberty League and ABB member) and

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<sup>30</sup> Unidentified MID operative to ?, 20 October, 1919, 10218-349, RG165, MID, NA.

<sup>31</sup> Makalani has speculated that the ABB might have had up to 8,000 members, but 3,000 is generally deemed the upper limit. Hill, 'Racial and Radical,' xlvi. Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*: 45.

<sup>32</sup> 'The African Blood Brotherhood,' *Crusader* II, no. 10 (June 1920): 7.

<sup>33</sup> Two slightly divergent ABB programs were published in 1924: Preuss cites a letter by Briggs attributing nine aims to a 1920 convention; Whitney cites an eight-point programme seized in a 1922 raid on a Communist party convention. McDuffie has located a nine-point programme in CPUSA records, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. See Arthur Preuss, *A Dictionary of Secret and Other Societies* (St. Louis; London: B. Herder Book Co., 1924), 4-7. R. M. Whitney, *Reds in America* (New York: Berkwith Press, 1924), 190-192. Erik S. McDuffie, "'[She] devoted twenty minutes condemning all other forms of government but the Soviet": Black Women Radicals in the Garvey Movement and in the Left during the 1920s,' in *Diasporic Africa: A Reader*, ed. Michael A. Gomez (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 240.

<sup>34</sup> Joyce Moore Turner and W. Burghardt Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>35</sup> Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. I, 523.

Harrison were close to all three organizations at different stages, if not strictly members.

Among the range of black and red groups with heartlands in New York, the ABB occupied a position which overlapped with the 'race first' policies of the Liberty League and UNIA and the socialist and communist orientation of a range of black radicals, including socialists A. Philip Randolph, Chandler Owen, W. A. Domingo, and communists Otto Huiswoud and Harry Haywood. While initially race-conscious and broadly socialist in orientation, the ABB shifted to the left roughly two years after its inception, becoming a communist cell in mid-1921.<sup>36</sup>

Taking the *Crusader* as a barometer of Briggs's mindset, and by extension the political leaning of the ABB, its October 1919 issue illustrates the magazine's non-doctrinaire position on the spectrum of black-red politics. Officially affiliated to the Hamitic League (an association that lasted until December 1920), the issue contains the editorials 'Bolshevist!!!' and 'Negro First!' While the latter advocated a race first policy, the former was not strictly an endorsement of the Bolshevik Revolution, but rather a criticism of its application to all suspected 'bad agitators'. Published roughly a month on from the formation of both the Communist Party of America (CPA) and the Communist Labor Party of America, amid the splintering of the Socialist Party of America (SPA), the October *Crusader* issue significantly came out in support of the SPA and declared that there was 'no finer man' in the US than the SPA leader, Eugene Debs.<sup>37</sup> Hence whatever Briggs's admiration for Lenin's successes abroad and international communism at this stage, he was evidently not closely allied to any of the actors involved in the formation of the US communist parties.

MID correspondence concerning the October ABB advert cast doubts on the ABB's threat to the US government specifically, seeing it as 'aimed solely at the European governments' with colonies in Africa; nevertheless it confirmed a 'definite movement on foot [sic] between intelligent Negroes of the United States, the West Indies and Africa'.<sup>38</sup> A flurry of activity in that month raised the *Crusader's* and Briggs's profiles in intelligence circles transnationally. A British SIS report, 'Unrest Among the Negroes', of 7 October 1919, was passed on to the MID. The British report borrowed heavily from an August report by Major Walter H. Loving, a distinguished black MID

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<sup>36</sup> A contention exists concerning the ABB's affiliation to the US Communist party, with most historians agreeing with Theodore Draper's observation that the ABB joined with the US Communist party in 1921. Contesting Draper's thesis, Robert Hill argued that the ABB was closely tied to the US Communist party in late 1919, an argument most convincingly rebutted by Winston James. Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 326. Hill, 'Racial and Radical,' xxiv-xxvii. James, *Holding Aloft*: 161-163.

<sup>37</sup> 'Martyrdom,' *Crusader* 2, no. 2 (October 1919): 10. 'What Your Vote for the Socialist Party Would Do,' *Crusader* 2, no. 2 (October 1919): 11.

<sup>38</sup> Unidentified MID operative to ?, 20 October, 1919, 10218-349, RG165.

officer who had served in the Philippine Constabulary. Mirroring Loving's report, the British report describes the *Crusader* as 'radical', but lacking the influence of the *Messenger* or the *Crisis*.<sup>39</sup>

The passing of Poindexter's resolution on 17 October – a Republican manoeuvre to pressure Wilson's government to take action against 'Reds' – led to Palmer's report a month later, *Investigation Activities of the Department of Justice*, and undoubtedly induced Palmer to begin his raids in November. *Investigation Activities* made public the work of the BOI and the Post Office Department, raising the profile of the *Crusader* considerably as a seditious magazine. The report included a section entitled, 'Radicalism and Sedition Among the Negroes as Reflected in Their Publications', which was a much expanded version of Robert Bowen's 2 July report of the same name. Palmer's report stated that 'the Negro' identified 'with such radical organizations as the I. W. W.', noting 'outspoken advocacy of the Bolsheviki or Soviet doctrines'. Distinct from Bowen's 2 July report, the Palmer report describes the *Crusader* as 'full of significant material' and offers something approaching a close ghostreading.<sup>40</sup>

*Investigation Activities* is critical of the *Crusader's* attacks on the conservative negro press and singles out an article in the September 1919 issue, 'Why Lynching Persists' which lambasted the *Amsterdam News* – Briggs's old employer – for an unctuous editorial which praised the government and condemned radical journalists. Such a 'lick-spittle' attitude, Briggs stressed, explained why white superiority and, by extension, lynching continued.<sup>41</sup> Palmer's report presents the *Crusader* as typical of radical black publications in its critique of the conservative black press and old guard representatives like Booker T. Washington. As such, it purveys considerable animosity to the most politicized wings of the New Negro. According to Justice Department officials, the *Crusader's* publishing of McKay's 'If We Must Die' – which was ubiquitous within black radical periodicals – served as shorthand for the magazine's dangerous radicalism. To make its point, the report quotes the *Crusader's* use of the sonnet in full alongside Andy Razafkerief's poem 'Don't Tread on Me'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> This document borrows heavily from Loving's 'Negro Subversion' report of 6 August 1919. See Hulme's essay from this volume. Directorate of Intelligence, 'Unrest Among the Negroes,' 7 October, 1919, Special Report No. 10, Public Records Office, Cabinet Papers 24/89/89. Maj. W. H. Loving to Brig. Gen. Churchill, 6 August, 1919, 10218-361, RG165, MID, NA.

<sup>40</sup> US Department of Justice, *Investigation Activities of the Department of Justice* (Washington, D. C.: Govt. Print. Off., 1919), 162, 166. Maxwell defines ghostreading as 'a duplicitous interpretative enterprise' and has argued that the Bureau is one of 'the most dedicated and influential forgotten' critics of African-American literature. William J. Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 5, 127.

<sup>41</sup> C. Valentine [Briggs], 'Why Lynching Persists,' *Crusader* II, no. 1 (September 1919): 6.

<sup>42</sup> US Department of Justice, *Investigation Activities*: 166-167.

# THE CRUSADER

VOL. 2

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NO. 3



Figure 1. 'The Worm Turns', *Crusader* 2, no. 3 (November 1919).

What was most offensive about the *Crusader* according to Palmer's report was its use of an 'obnoxious' cartoon in its November issue which illustrates a white lyncher from the US South being chased by a gun-wielding black man all the way to the Capitol Building, the seat of the US Congress (fig. 1). The cartoon registers a new militancy among New Negroes, depicted by the lyncher's caption which reads, 'Hey! Help! Help! This nigger problem has changed'. Beneath the cartoon is an editorial by Briggs critical of the repressive powers of the Lusk Committee—established in 1919 by the New York State Legislature to investigate sedition in the state—and the US government's approach to race relations in the wake of the race riots. Briggs's editorial notes the 'strange' irony that a 'call for a Congressional investigation' came from the South that 'squealed at the first taste of Negro steel'.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Briggs outlined how the editors of the *Crusader* and the *Messenger* were questioned, threatened with fines or imprisonment and denied legal counsel by the Lusk Committee on 17 October.

<sup>43</sup> 'Congress, the Lusk Committee and the Radical Leaders,' *Crusader* 2, no. 3 (November 1919): 5-6.

Notably, Briggs did not name the editors, who were principally A. Philip Randolph, Chandler Owen and himself; as a contributing editor of the *Messenger*, and an implicated figure in the Rand School raid, Domingo may well have been among the interviewees. This 'antifile' is barely mentioned in Palmer's report which papers over the inconvenient truths raised by the editorial, and instead casts it as 'boasting of the success the negro has attained . . . in bringing the negro problem before Congress.'<sup>44</sup>

By late 1919, Briggs, the *Crusader* and the ABB were now firmly on the radar of several intelligence outfits: the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), the Lusk Committee of the New York State Legislature, and three US organizations: the MID, Post Office and Justice Department's BOI. Although the MID reported concerns about the worldwide spread of 'negro propaganda' in early 1920, it faced sharp cuts.<sup>45</sup> The BOI filled this apparent intelligence gap. In August 1919 during his first month as Director of the newly established Radical Division, J. Edgar Hoover targeted black radicals specifically and had hoped to indict the *Messenger* editors under the Espionage Act. That month, a Bureau agent interviewed Robert Bowen, who described the *Crusader* as 'entirely radical, pro-Negro and pan-African' as well as 'entirely sympathetic with Bolshevism, Sinn Fein, Jewish agitation'.<sup>46</sup>

In January 1920, the BOI made a small breakthrough: infiltration of Briggs's circle by a black Bureau operative, William A. Bailey ('W.W.'). From January through to March, Bailey divided his time between gathering information on Briggs, Garvey, W. A. Domingo and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Volunteering in the *Crusader* office, which was just a block away from the *Messenger* office, Bailey enticed Briggs with an offer to increase the *Crusader's* circulation.<sup>47</sup> Talking to Domingo in late January, Bailey also got wind of the short-lived weekly that Domingo would edit, the *Emancipator*.<sup>48</sup> Two months later, Bailey stated that 'Briggs is a Socialist as also is Domingo' and made reference to the *Emancipator* being supported by the SPA.<sup>49</sup>

Bailey's observations about Briggs's socialist orientation in 1920 are more or less corroborated by the *Crusader's* output. The February 1920 *Crusader* published the first instalment of Briggs's short fiction, 'The Ray of Fear' – filed along with the October 1919 instalment of "'Punta" Revolutionist!' by the BOI – which presents a revealing

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<sup>44</sup> US Department of Justice, *Investigation Activities*: 168. I am borrowing the term 'antifile' – a form of writing back to intelligence agencies – from Maxwell. Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes*: 7, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Kornweibel, *Seeing Red*: 135.

<sup>46</sup> Agent M. J. Davis to Bureau, 29 August, 1919, OG387162, RG65, BOI, NA. Kornweibel, *Seeing Red*: 134. Regin Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2004), 201.

<sup>47</sup> WW to Bureau, 6 February, 1920, OG258421, RG65, BOI, NA.

<sup>48</sup> WW to Bureau, 30 January, 1920, OG258421, RG65, BOI, NA.

<sup>49</sup> WW to Bureau, 20 March, 1920, OG258421, RG65, BOI, NA. Kornweibel, *Seeing Red*: 136-137.

insight into Briggs's black nationalist and class politics.<sup>50</sup> The story opens with the decision made by the Congress of the 'Black Republic' to go to war against 'Central, Western and Southern Europe' and European forces in Africa. Paul, a close friend of the President and suitor of his daughter Mazima/Nazima, relates how the Republic intends to deploy a secret weapon, the Ray of Fear, alongside 'super-airships' equipped with 'aerial torpedoes, machine guns and bomb-throwers' and '50,000 bombing-planes'. Notably, the Republic aims to form allegiances with 'Soviet Russia, Japan, Siam, Turkey, China . . . India, Persia and Ireland' and produce a manifesto 'for presentation to the Socialists and Liberals of Europe and America'.<sup>51</sup> Briggs's choice to have the black President negotiate with Soviet Russia and yet liaise with socialists and liberals is telling. It mirrors Briggs's early journalism in the *Crusader* in its pro-Bolshevist sentiment, but generally socialist, rather than communist, leaning.

Similar in many respects to Dougherty's "'Punta Revolutionist'" with its detailing of advanced weaponry of a black army, Briggs's 'The Ray of Fear' could be read as propaganda. Briggs's and Dougherty's fiction reflects a genre of black war and romance fiction which combine details of scientific innovation and aspects of speculative and science fiction. With events often poised on the brink of a race or revolutionary war, the stories pivot on the roles of secret societies or plans. Borrowing from thriller fiction, Briggs's and Dougherty's serials' most obvious forerunner is Martin Delany's *Blake; or, The Huts of America*. Serialized in 1859 and 1861-2, *Blake* is the story of Henry Blake, a free-born, Afro-Cuban who, with a mixture of rationalism, sharp intellect and astronomical knowledge, liberates slaves and plans a large-scale slave rebellion in the United States and Cuba.<sup>52</sup>

In "'Punta" Revolutionist' and 'The Ray of Fear', revolutionary war is initiated by black and mixed-race armies in response to a legacy of white imperialism. However, in Briggs's 1921 serialized short story, 'Secret Service', a 'colored' chambermaid, Nada, uncovers the plot of 'a secret Cracker organization' – a thinly veiled Ku Klux Klan (KKK) – to initiate a race war. To achieve this end, the organization's 'Wizard' and Nada's employer, Mr. Graham, scheme on getting white mobs to black up and attack white women throughout the US. The attacks are thwarted, however, as Nada aids in

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<sup>50</sup> *Crusader*, 1919-1920, OG387162, RG65.

<sup>51</sup> C. Valentine [Briggs], 'The Ray of Fear,' *Crusader* 2, no. 6 (February 1920): 18-20. The President's daughter's name is inconsistently spelt as Mazima and Nazima. See also C. Valentine [Briggs], 'The Ray of Fear,' *Crusader* 2, no. 8 (April 1920): 11-12. For further discussion of 'The Ray of Fear', see Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 35-38.

<sup>52</sup> Martin Robison Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America: A Corrected Edition*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017).

the photographing of the white supremacists' plans which are sent to 'a secret Negro organization' who take appropriate counter measures.<sup>53</sup>

Briggs's emphasis on the role that secret Negro societies had to play in protecting black people obviously had parallels in his formation of the Brotherhood, which was modelled on a secret society. In June 1920, Briggs claimed that the ABB was 'probably the first Negro *secret* organization' to be founded in the Western world, and often publicized the organization's protective capabilities and secrecy—however contradictory the latter gesture.<sup>54</sup> Briggs's fiction indicated the hypothetical role that the ABB might play, foiling organizations like the KKK, as well as readying black people for armed resistance when racially-motivated violence broke out. As authors of fictional propaganda, Dougherty and Briggs could clearly sidestep official censure and avoid criminal charges. Briggs's use of his middle name and adoption of the pseudonym, 'C. Valentine', for his short fiction, suggests that he pre-empted the interest of intelligence agencies in this material, and wanted to place distance between himself and his revolutionary fiction.

The *Crusader's* fiction can also be read as a counter to Anglo-Saxonism, which had romanticized and propagated the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon, Nordic or Teutonic people over all other ethnic groups. In 'The Ray of Fear', Mazima/Nazima is a beauty known as the 'Rose of Africa', which bears its obvious parallel in an 'English Rose'—used to describe an unadorned, rare English beauty. Briggs's adoption of the rose, a plant native to north Africa, Asia and Europe, to portray the African-born Mazima/Nazima, raises doubts about the entrenched geography associated with this signifier of English beauty. The President also rhapsodizes about Ethiopia—the name derived from the ancient Greeks to refer to the lands of black Africans—in ways which echo Thomas Carlyle's encomiums about Britain and the Teutonic world: 'Ethiopia of old, "the most just of nations"'.<sup>55</sup> In promoting fiction about black heroes, heroines, soldiers and revolutionaries, Briggs appears to have been rebalancing the books in terms of racial representation, endowing black people with noble and attractive qualities hitherto seen as the preserve of white characters. While US intelligence agencies may have perceived a racial ideology at work in such fiction, they would have been unlikely to examine the reasons—however compelling—for such pro-Negro sentiment, preferring indubitably to brand this material as straightforwardly anti-white and, therefore, seditious.

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<sup>53</sup> C. Valentine [Briggs], 'Secret Service,' *Crusader* IV, no. 3 (May 1921): 14-15. See also C. Valentine [Briggs], 'Secret Service,' *Crusader* IV, no. 4 (June 1921): 11-12.

<sup>54</sup> 'The African Blood Brotherhood.'

<sup>55</sup> C. Valentine [Briggs], 'The Ray of Fear,' *Crusader* 2, no. 6 (February 1920): 19. Thomas Carlyle, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle (Complete)* (New York: P. F. Collier, 1897), 281, 564.

In late March 1920, tensions between Garvey, and Domingo and Briggs arose, as the latter pair headed a campaign in the *Emancipator* to expose Garvey over misleading claims about the Black Star Line's ownership of the S. S. Yarmouth. A month later, Bailey was replaced by BOI operative, William E. Lucas ('P-135'), who became a contributor to the *Crusader*, his name featuring on the magazine's masthead until June 1920 when his undercover operations at the magazine ceased.<sup>56</sup>

On 31 May 1921 a bloody race riot erupted in Tulsa after a small band of armed blacks arrived at a jail to protect a potential black victim from a lynch mob. On the 4 June 1921, the *New York Times*, led with a front-page article which implicated the ABB as fomenting the riot.<sup>57</sup> In his press statement for the *Times* on 5 June, Briggs denied the ABB's involvement, but used the opportunity to promote the Brotherhood. The *Times* articles gave the ABB a national prominence it had never had, and Briggs wasted no time in touting the size of the Brotherhood which he claimed comprised 150 branches and 50,000 members. Furthermore, Briggs asserted the ABB's support for black armed self-defence, asking, a generation before Malcolm X: 'Haven't negroes the right to defend their lives and property when these are menaced[?]'<sup>58</sup>

While Briggs denied that members of the Brotherhood's Tulsa branch were 'aggressors' in the riots, he later traded on its association with the riots in the *Crusader* and elsewhere.<sup>59</sup> In a letter intended to woo Garvey to the ABB, Briggs wrote that while claims that the Brotherhood 'fomented and directed the Tulsa riot,' were 'not literally true', they did provide 'an idea of the nature of our organization'.<sup>60</sup> Briggs understood that notoriety – however misinformed – had propagandistic value. This was not Hoover's view, however, who took seriously Briggs's 'pernicious activities' when forwarded Briggs's letter by an African-American attorney, William C. Matthews.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps to capitalize on the ABB's sudden fame, Briggs chose the June 1921 issue of the *Crusader* to announce its status as the 'Organ of the African Blood Brotherhood'. In jettisoning the latter's secret status, the ABB paralleled the US Communist party's move from an underground to an aboveground, legal party. These developments led inevitably to reenergizing the BOI's interest in the ABB. In June 1921, an undercover operative, Jamaican-born Herbert S. Boulin ('P-138'), succeeded in infiltrating the ABB and turned Hubert Harrison's friend, Edgar Grey, into an informant. Through Grey,

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<sup>56</sup> Kornweibel, *Seeing Red*: 137-138.

<sup>57</sup> 'Military Control is Ended at Tulsa,' *New York Times*, 4 June 1921, 1, 14.

<sup>58</sup> 'Denies Negroes Started Tulsa Riot,' *New York Times*, 5 June 1921, 21.

<sup>59</sup> 'Denies Negroes Started Tulsa Riot.' Andrea [Andy] Razafkeriefo, 'Black Tulsa's Answer,' *Crusader* IV, no. 6 (August 1921): 6. 'Communists Champion Negro,' *Crusader* IV, no. 6 (August 1921): 12.

<sup>60</sup> Briggs's 15 August letter is replicated in 'Garvey Turns Informer,' *Crusader* V, no. 3 (November 1921): 5.

<sup>61</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. IV (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 196.

secretary of Harrison's Liberty League, Boulin also got wind of what is likely to have been Briggs's first contact with the CPA wing seeking aboveground status. According to Grey, Rose Pastor Stokes, a CPA founding member, invited Briggs, Harrison, W. A. Domingo, Claude McKay and Grey to supper at her home in Greenwich Village in either late May or early June. The aim of the meal was to see whether either the League or the ABB would assist with 'spreading communism among negroes' – an offer apparently refused by Harrison, but accepted by Briggs. Grey further claimed that the ABB was 'financed by' and a 'mouthpiece of the Communist Party'.<sup>62</sup>

As Briggs's association with US communists became closer, the content in the *Crusader* rapidly evolved. In an April 1921 editorial, Briggs discussed the merits of an independent black 'Socialist Co-operative Commonwealth' in Africa, South America or the Caribbean with reference to Soviet Russia and communist states in Africa.<sup>63</sup> By August 1921, his editorials took a sharp turn. The SPA was rebuked as betraying revolutionary socialism, just as US communism was embraced.<sup>64</sup> Hence, Briggs's and the ABB's association with the US Communist Party was consolidated in the summer of 1921.

As the ABB moved closer to the US communist movement, so the BOI's surveillance of its members increased. In August 1921, the ABB was shadowed by four BOI operatives: Boulin, P-134, P-137 and, crucially, James Wormley Jones (aka '800'). Jones was the first black, full-time BOI agent and had served as a captain in the US Army in the First World War. Using his military background, he maintained a public persona as 'Captain Jones' and, after infiltrating the UNIA, became head of its African Legion by June 1920. On becoming a full-fledged member of the ABB in August he effectively became a double agent between the two rival black organizations, while remaining a loyal agent of the US Justice Department.<sup>65</sup>

In mid-August 1921, ABB members attended the UNIA convention with the aim of influencing its delegates. In his letter to Garvey, Briggs held out an olive branch, asking the UNIA leader to consider an ABB-UNIA coalition: 'think of what we might be able to do for the race through conscious co-operation'.<sup>66</sup> Yet, in spite of this conciliatory gesture, ABB members' criticisms of Garvey and his management of the

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<sup>62</sup> P-138 to Bureau, 13 July, 1921, Bureau Section case file [hereafter BS] 202600-2031, RG65, BOI, NA. Kornweibel, *Seeing Red*: 141-143.

<sup>63</sup> 'The Salvation of the Negro,' *Crusader* IV, no. 2 (April 1921): 8-9.

<sup>64</sup> 'The Socialist Surrender,' *Crusader* IV, no. 6 (August 1921): 8-9. 'Communists Champion Negro.' 'Congress of the Communist International,' *Crusader* IV, no. 6 (August 1921): 12-13.

<sup>65</sup> Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey and his Dream of Mother Africa* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), 220-221. Kornweibel, *Seeing Red*: 145-147.

<sup>66</sup> 'Garvey Turns Informer.' Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*: 67.

Black Star Line increased. Relations reached their nadir as ABB delegates were publicly expelled from the convention.

What followed was a war of words between Briggs and Garvey that turned litigious. In early September 1921 Briggs sent an open letter to William Ferris, *Negro World* editor, critical of Garvey's and the *Negro World's* conservatism and the Ferris's insinuations that the *Crusader's* editorials were anti-American.<sup>67</sup> By October, BOI agent Jones was stirring the pot: 'I have been telling Briggs that the article in the *Negro World* about Briggs being a white man was libel, Briggs went to the district attorney and he issued a summons for Garvey'.<sup>68</sup> With Jones's encouragement, Briggs sued Garvey for libel, taking his mother to court as proof of his 'colored' (mixed-race) status.<sup>69</sup>

On 4 September 1921, Jones turned in a curious report concerning Briggs's apparent paramilitary ambitions for the ABB. Jones claimed that Briggs was considering ordering two Thomson sub-machine (Tommy) guns and organizing rifle clubs in the US south and west. Jones was to teach members the guns' 'nomenclature' and serve as a field agent. Up until this point, Jones's report resembles Boulin's from a month before; Boulin had claimed that Briggs had showed him a Tommy gun from a catalogue and ordered 300 for ABB members.<sup>70</sup> Jones's report becomes more spectacular, however, as a near-bomb plot is unveiled: 'he [Briggs] said had it not been for the famine in Russia there would have been a bomb set off in this country that would have opened the eyes of the world.'<sup>71</sup>

Jones's report is a conundrum. On the one hand, it could be entirely fabricated—driven by the fear of submitting nothing substantial to the Bureau. On the other hand, Jones's account may be accurate. Briggs, knowing full well or suspecting Jones of being an agent, may have been stringing him along. Another and arguably more plausible hypothesis is that Briggs did have some paramilitary ambitions for the ABB, and was exaggerating for effect to keep Jones, the ex-Captain and a useful agent against Garvey, on board. Briggs was prone to magnifying the size and the threat posed by the ABB and had employed the same tactic when making overtures to Garvey.

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<sup>67</sup> When the *Negro World* failed to publish Briggs's letter, Briggs published it in the *Crusader*: Cyril Briggs, 'An Open Letter to Marcus Garvey and His Man "Friday"', *Crusader* V, no. 2 (October 1921): 30-31.

<sup>68</sup> 800 to George F. Ruch, 18 October, 1921, 61-826, Freedom of Information Act request, Federal Bureau of Investigation (hereafter FOIA, FBI). Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. IV, 125.

<sup>69</sup> Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. IV, 139-141.

<sup>70</sup> P-138 to Bureau, 26 August, 1921, BS202600-2031, RG65, BOI, NA.

<sup>71</sup> 800 to George F. Ruch, 4 September, 1921, 61-826, FOIA, FBI.

In a certain light, Jones's report has some parallels with Briggs's fictional story, 'The Ray of Fear'. Where the Black Republic aims to start a global race war and petition socialists and liberals in Briggs's serial, Jones's report hints at a communist-ABB attack designed to initiate a race war in the US South. In both accounts, Soviet Russia forms an alliance (albeit one that it can't follow through with in Jones's narrative) with black-led forces. While clearly different genres, both draw on an imaginary of black power, with Briggs's fiction celebrating what Jones presents as a national menace.

From September through to November 1921, Briggs and Garvey's feud escalated. In late September Briggs asked Jones for insider information, requesting the names of UNIA division presidents. Briggs aimed to send them copies of the *Crusader* so as to smear Garvey. Jones sought some guidance from his headquarters in Washington D. C. before doing as Briggs requested, torn on account of his equal aversion to both.<sup>72</sup> Briggs learnt of Garvey's offering up of Briggs's August 1921 letter to the authorities – most probably through Jones – and accused the UNIA leader of being an informer and a traitor to his race in the November *Crusader*.<sup>73</sup> Attempting to settle the score, Garvey took Briggs to court for libel over an October article in the *Crusader* that implied that Garvey abandoned his wife and raped a white woman in London.<sup>74</sup> Briggs might have occupied the moral high ground were it not for his own provision of evidence that the government eventually used to convict Garvey of mail fraud in June 1923. The hostility appeared to work against both men; while Garvey would be deported in 1927 after serving a two-year jail sentence, Briggs had turned the *Crusader* into a repository of anti-Garvey sentiment, a move which did not help its languishing sales. A few months before the *Crusader's* last issue of January-February 1922, Briggs had tried and failed to drum up funding for a weekly newspaper, 'The Liberator'.<sup>75</sup>

By April 1922, Jones's reports on the ABB ceased. The *Crusader* was no more, and in the void BOI attention shifted to Garvey. A few months before, in December 1921, Briggs had apparently admitted to Jones that he aspired to draw Garvey's followers to the ABB and therefore continued his propaganda against Garvey. That month, writing under a pseudonym of C. Lorenzo in the communist magazine *The Toiler*, Briggs asserted that the ABB was 'the only Negro organization that the capitalists view with any degree of alarm' in stark contrast with Garvey's apparently moribund

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<sup>72</sup> 800 to George F. Ruch, 23 September, 1921, 61-826, FOIA, FBI. 800 to George F. Ruch, 29 September, 1921, 61-826, FOIA, FBI.

<sup>73</sup> 'Garvey Turns Informer.'

<sup>74</sup> Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. IV, 232.

<sup>75</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. XI (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 202.

UNIA.<sup>76</sup> Hinting that the organization's reputation in the wake of the Tulsa riots had played its part, Briggs still flirted with the image of the ABB's potential menace.

In the wake of the *Crusader*, Briggs continued to run the Crusader News Service bulletin, which circulated news to more than one hundred black newspapers. By September-October 1923, the entire ABB's Supreme Executive Council – with the exception of Domingo and McKay – had joined the Workers' (Communist) Party.<sup>77</sup> In 1924, Briggs attempted to organize the Negro Sanhedrin conference in Chicago with the aim of creating a federation of black organizations. As secretary, Briggs had a very different political orientation to the conference head, Kelly Miller, who managed to circumvent the most leftwing and communist black radicals' plans.<sup>78</sup> By 1924 the ABB was virtually dissolved, and would be replaced in 1925 by the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC), a communist party organization intended to recruit black members and propagandize communist causes. Briggs became editor of the ANLC organ, *Negro Champion*, and realized his goal in 1929, when the *Negro Champion* was succeeded by a weekly founded by the ANLC, the *Liberator*. Briggs was editor of the newspaper until 1933 and, while not an official Communist party newspaper, the periodical was clearly aligned with Communist Party USA (CPUSA) politics.<sup>79</sup>

In the 1930s, Briggs's race-conscious politics clashed with that of his communist colleagues. In 1930, Earl Browder named him as a comrade susceptible to 'the propaganda of the Negro bourgeoisie' in his direction of 'race hatred . . . against all whites without distinction'.<sup>80</sup> In 1939, he was expelled from the Party, along with ex-ABB members Richard Moore and Otto Hall, after quarrels with the leading black CPUSA member, James W. Ford, over black nationalist matters. In 1944, Briggs moved west to Los Angeles and worked for *Now* magazine, followed by the *California Eagle*. In 1948, he rejoined the CPUSA, and became an active member of the Ella May Wiggins Club of the L.A. County Communist Party. By December 1950, as a second Red Scare set in, Briggs began operating in the Communist party underground.<sup>81</sup> As a result of this and his communist past, Briggs earned himself an interview with the House of Un-American Activities on 3 September 1958. In response to the Chairman's claim that communists were insincere in their 'efforts to improve' the lot of black people, Briggs answered accordingly:

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<sup>76</sup> C. Lorenzo [Briggs], 'The Negro Liberation Movement,' *The Toiler* IV, no. 200 (10 December, 1921): 7.

<sup>77</sup> Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. I, 525.

<sup>78</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. V (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 558.

<sup>79</sup> Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. I, 525-526.

<sup>80</sup> Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*: 165.

<sup>81</sup> Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. I, 526.

I don't know what Communists or communism have to do with my position because this has been my position since 1912 before there was, as I understand it, a Communist Party in the United States. It will continue to be my position despite any attempt by this committee to intimidate me. . . . it is said that the Communist Party is exploiting the Negro people.

I think, gentlemen, that the Negroes would be very glad to accept such exploitation at the hands of the Republicans.<sup>82</sup>

Spoken eight years before his death, this speech conveys something of Briggs's independent spirit. Whilst he had obviously come to believe that the 'Negro's' lot would be best improved through communism, it was his loyalty to black people that remained paramount. His ironic play on exploitation, while intended to highlight Republican neglect of black causes, also contains the seeds of his openness to other political pathways. In many senses, the statement is consistent with Briggs's outlook from the 1910s onwards: that he would serve whatever cause that he believed best served black folk.

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<sup>82</sup> House of Representatives, *Investigation of Communist Infiltration and Propaganda Activities in Basic Industry (Gary, Ind., Area)* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1958), 78.

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