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**"Heaven grant you strength to fight the battle for your race":
Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and the First World War in the
Jamaican memory**

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Richard English and Graham Walker (eds.), *Unionism in Modern Ireland* (London: Palgrave, 1996), 99–114.

27 A point made in my *Ireland and the Great War*, 134–5.

28 George Boyce, *The Sure Confusing Drum: Ireland and the First World War* (University College of Swansea, 1993), 24. A revised version of this lecture was published under the title “That party politics should divide our tents”: Nationalism, Unionism and the First World War”, in Adrian Gregory and Senia Pasera (eds.), *Ireland and the Great War: ‘A War to Unite Us All?’* (Manchester University Press, 2002), 190–216.

29 This phenomenon was stimulatingly explored in Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain’s Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

30 Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boinncault to Friel* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 246.

31 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). For a robust historians’ critique of Fussell, see Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, ‘Paul Fussell at War’, in *War in History*, 1 (1), 63–80.

32 Frank McGuinness, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (London: Faber, 1986), 12, 50, 74.

33 *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 November 1922.

34 Of the 171 names on the war memorial, 15 have been identified as definitely Catholic. See Robert Thompson, *Coleraine Heroes 1914–1918* (Bushmills: privately published, 2004).

35 Eamonn Jordan, *The Feast of Famine: The Plays of Frank McGuinness* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), xxii.

36 Richard Morrison in *The Times*, 8 February 2000.

37 This process has been reinforced by the conflation of the war with ‘the Holocaust and the Gulag’ (Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 56).

38 *Corke Weekly Examiner*, 8 November 1924.

39 *Sligo Champion*, 8 September 1928.

40 Programme notes for ENO production; *The Times*, 8 February 2000.

41 See, for example, the *Irish Times*, 3 April 2001.

42 Jennifer Johnston’s play *How Many Miles to Babylon* (1993), based on her 1974 novel of the same name, rather gives this impression. Jerry Crowe, a Catholic republican, only enlists in the British army, he says, in order to learn to shoot a gun to use for the fight for Irish freedom.

43 As Barry has done in his novel *A Long Long Way* (London: Faber, 2005); see my review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 April 2005.

‘Heaven grant you strength to fight the battle for your race’: nationalism, Pan-Africanism and the First World War in Jamaican memory

Richard Smith

In 1981 the Iran–Iraq war (1980–8) had become mired in the trench warfare and gas attacks of an earlier era. The Jamaican writer John Hearne was moved to reflect on the nature and impact of twentieth-century warfare. Although he had been born eight years after the Armistice, the First World War had loomed as a ‘grey fear’ for Hearne, a stain on his childhood representing the abiding anxiety that his father, twice wounded in the conflict, would heed another call of Empire and not return.¹ This overwhelming anticipation of loss marred an otherwise idyllic journey from boy to man, which Hearne often spent in the company of a father he clearly adored. His upbringing in the higher reaches of Jamaican society was reflected in a nostalgia for mountain treks, horse riding, cricket and boxing, pastimes Hearne enjoyed during a decade of smouldering resentment at colonial rule which exploded in the 1938 labour rebellion.² But Hearne’s race and class interests were outweighed by more universal concerns. The imagined death of his father in some future war represented a lost innocence: a personal symbol for the millions Hearne believed had needlessly died in the name of ‘religions, political ideologies and national sovereignties’ during the twentieth century.³

In 1925, Frank Cundall, pioneering historian of the island and chairman of the Jamaican War Memorial Committee, listed by parish the 1,130 or so Jamaicans who died in the First World War.⁴ Most had seen service in the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) which enlisted nearly 10,300 from the island. Established for the duration of the war only, the BWIR eventually comprised twelve battalions and recruited over 16,000 men from the West Indies, British Honduras, the Bahamas and Bermuda. The majority of Jamaica’s contribution were black and ‘coloured’ men of the peasantry, working or middle classes.⁵ All were volunteers and represented a fraction of

the 135,061 men aged between 16 and 45 registered for enlistment under the Jamaica Military Service Act of 1917, full conscription never having been implemented. However, Jamaica's veterans came to occupy a pivotal place in the national identity which became more prominent during the decades of Hearne's youth and which continues to be negotiated after the death of Stanley Stair, the last Jamaican veteran of the war, in May 2008.⁶ Jamaica's contribution to the war effort was deployed to support a gamut of demands from constitutional change and self-government to African liberation. Consequently, popular Jamaican war memories did not tend to accord with the 'grey fear' described by Hearne, a minority voice closer to the tragic representations dominant in Britain. However, a grey quality certainly abounds in the ambiguities and contradictions in Jamaican war memory and its politics of commemoration and sacrifice.

Although national commemorations of war and private processes of grief can initially seem to be at odds, a more fluid definition of mourning may regard post-war national or social struggles as collective grieving processes, striving to ensure that death, disfigurement and military service in general were not in vain.⁷ The place of the war in Jamaican memory points to this latter interpretation. In Jamaica, a colonial society whose dominant ideological forces were especially concerned to glorify imperial military achievement, the 'political symbolism'⁸ of war memory was particularly potent and conventional grieving was marginalised. Instead, the popular imagination appropriated the martial rhetoric and symbolism to seek rewards for wartime sacrifice. Consequently, war memory in Jamaica has a complex relationship with statehood. The meaning of Jamaican sacrifice in the First World War, although later recognised and even requisitioned by the national state formed in 1962, was at first contested between the imperial power and the mass movements central to its overthrow. But with the rise of a Pan-African dimension to Jamaican politics, particularly after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the symbolism of military service could transcend nationalist preoccupations and be mobilised in the service of more universal aims. This chapter examines the unstable nature of Jamaican war memory which has mirrored the changing preoccupations of veterans, political movements and diasporic communities.

EMPIRE, WAR AND JAMAICAN IDENTITY

In 1906, the travel writer and journalist John Henderson recorded the remarks of an unnamed Jamaican intellectual who epitomised growing aspirations to representative government:

The people of this island have every moral right to govern themselves . . . we are an educated people with ambitions . . . we recognise it is a fine thing to be part of the great Empire . . . but . . . a finer thing to be a free, unfettered nation. England will always have our heartiest support and affection.⁹

Among the Jamaican middle classes in general, affection for Britain and empire, and apprehension that enfranchisement of the peasantry and working class might impinge on their interests, muted the desire for self-government.¹⁰ On the eve of war in August 1914, intellectuals and progressives established the Jamaica League to promote Jamaican cultural achievements and campaign for social and economic reform within the existing imperial relationship. The League believed that self-government could only be considered once the masses had been thoroughly educated and infused with a sense of civic responsibility.¹¹ Almost simultaneously, Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) to 'promote the Spirit of Race Pride and Love'¹² and to 'establish educational and industrial colleges for the education of our boys and girls' and 'reclaim the fallen and degraded . . . and help them to a state of good citizenship'.¹³

Many Jamaicans looked to Britain to dispense equity and justice, particularly to curb the power of the local planter class and its representatives in the Jamaican Legislative Council. Faith in professed imperial values was underpinned by a strong identification with the monarchy, linked to the popular perception that William IV and Queen Victoria had delivered emancipation.¹⁴ This belief was exploited by speakers at wartime rallies seeking support for the war effort: they argued that a 'Prussian victory' would end the 'benign rule of the Empire'¹⁵ and lead to the reintroduction of slavery. 'Men of the Island of Jamaica, be not branded as cowards if you are needed for active service', counselled Ivanhoe Harry, a member of the Kingston fire brigade, urging fellow countrymen to 'be courageous, be firm, be resolute, prepare to defend your country with your life's blood'.¹⁶

Acknowledging this growing pro-war sentiment, UNIA declared its belief in 'the great protect[ing] and civilizing influence of the English nation and people . . . express[ing] our loyalty and devotion to His Majesty the King, and Empire . . . pray[ing] for the success of British Arms on the battlefields of Europe and Africa, and at Sea'.¹⁷ In a letter to the *Daily Gleaner*, Sidney Mossy urged Jamaican 'Sons of Liberty' to heed the 'Motherland's Call' to enlist and ensure they did not become 'slaves beneath a foreign sway'.¹⁸ In the midst of these pro-imperial sentiments, nascent Jamaican national identity and Pan-Africanism were increasingly evident. There was an expectation that both would be invigorated by military service

and post-war redemption would ensue. The trade unionist and early UNIA activist W. G. Hinchcliffe exemplified this mood when, in 1916, he praised Jamaicans who had heeded calls to volunteer, for 'on them the laurels will fall, which must eventually lift the standard of the African race, and cause oppression into oblivion to fall'.¹⁹

But the politics of war identity for Jamaican volunteers would be more complex than Hinchcliffe had envisaged as they faced a continual struggle to be regarded as front-line soldiers rather than plantation labourers. On 28 August 1914, the Indian Expeditionary Force 'A' was dispatched to France, presenting an opportune moment for the Colonial Office to suggest the raising of West Indian overseas contingents to the War Office. The proposal was rebuffed: many in the military establishment remained hostile to the deployment of non-white troops in Europe, fearing the imperial racial hierarchy might be called into question. Others resorted to racial stereotypes, as in the Army Council's assertion that 'coolness, courage and initiative are at premium [in the front line] — qualities of which the ordinary coloured labourer is deficient'.²⁰ Such pronouncements did not dissuade Jamaicans and other West Indians from journeying to Britain to enlist. But their offers of service were accepted according to the whims and prejudices of local recruiting officers because military law was unclear whether a volunteer regarded as 'a negro or person of colour' was a British subject or an alien.²¹

Fearful of the potential for disaffection if such volunteers were rejected, the West Indian governors collectively promoted the formation of West Indian contingents. But only in May 1915, after King George V declared his support for West Indian recruitment, did the War Office adopt a more pragmatic approach. The creation of the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) was subsequently announced in the *London Gazette* on 26 October 1915. By the spring of 1916, the West Indian contingents had arrived in sufficient numbers in Seaford on the south coast of England to enable the dispatch of two battalions to Egypt. The first Jamaican contingent for the new regiment departed in early November 1915, an event captured on newsreel by the Fox Film Company, which was making the first 51 million movie, *A Daughter of the Gods*, on the island. The newsreel was shown to Jamaican audiences from February 1916, with shots of the many thousands who gathered to bid farewell to the troops.²² Interest in the contingent was also kept alive by the publication of letters from Jamaicans once they arrived in Egypt. Private Seaford Johns reported the expectation of battle, affirming: 'we all have a fixed determination that we unite under the same old flag to fight for one King and one Empire, with one hope and one desire and with gallantry we'll march along, until we conquer, win or die'.²³

Formally regarded as an infantryman, a BWIR private received the shilling a day paid to his counterpart in other British units. However, separation allowances paid to wives and dependants, determined by colonial governors rather than the War Office, were set at lower rates on the grounds that the cost of living in the colonies was cheaper. British commanders and officials tended to regard the BWIR as an inferior 'native' unit, despite its infantry designation. Medical and recreational facilities were generally substandard, and increases in pay and allowances, granted to the rest of the British army from 1917, were withheld until conceded after lengthy protests.²⁴ Men who were not believed to be of pure European descent were unable to rise beyond non-commissioned rank.²⁵ More significantly, a continued reluctance to deploy West Indian soldiers on the front line meant that nine of the twelve BWIR battalions were deployed as labour units on the Western Front and later at Taranto in southern Italy, a key port for the British Mediterranean lines of communication. Duties included road building and railway construction, digging trenches, unloading ships and trains, and carrying shells to the front line.

The first, second and fifth (reserve) battalions, however, eventually saw front-line action in Palestine and Jordan. They won some official praise, most notably from Major-General Edward Chaytor, who led the successful campaign against the Turkish forces in 1918. Chaytor remarked that the BWIR had 'won the highest opinion of all who have been with them during our operations'.²⁶ A small detachment of the regiment also served alongside the 2nd West India Regiment (WIR) in the East African campaign.²⁷ The Jamaican press reproduced medal citations alongside official reports of actions involving local volunteers, including the 'spirited bayonet charge' by the 1st BWIR in September 1918 at Jisr Ed Damieh, a key bridgehead on the river Jordan.²⁸ For the majority of the veterans, struggling with the disappointment and humiliation of not being recognised as front-line troops despite routine exposure to shellfire, such accounts would provide a ready vocabulary and imagery for years to come. In 1938, a former BWIR sergeant recalled how the volunteers had sung 'we are going to catch the Kaiser if we only get a chance' as they left Jamaica. Some had made the 'supreme sacrifice', while others returned 'with Victory on the point of our Bayonet'.²⁹ Such sentiments showed how these colonial veterans had become attached to the European heroic discourse which conflated 'war' with 'combat'.³⁰ Expressed in conventional military argot, the post-war Jamaican memory tended to neglect the contribution of those deployed on auxiliary duties and those who had succumbed to disease, rather than to wounds.³¹ However, the adherence to such narratives also illustrated how it was necessary to highlight the front-line heroism in order to stress post-war entitlement.

POST-WAR RADICALISATION AND DEMANDS FOR LAND

While Jamaican popular sentiment celebrated the front-line achievements of the men serving abroad, the reality in the war zone was different. Discrimination in pay and conditions, the dishonour of being treated as labourers rather than fighting men, and poor access to recreational and medical facilities contributed to the mutiny of BWIR battalions stationed at Taranto shortly after the Armistice. Wage and ration improvements were granted to disgruntled Italian and Maltese labourers employed by the British in the supply lines. Alongside them, BWIR troops were increasingly humiliated by the harsh disciplinary measures and the increasingly menial duties they were expected to perform. On 6 December 1918, Lieutenant-Colonel Willis, commander of the 9th Battalion and a notoriously brutal officer, ordered his men to clean latrines used by Italian labourers. They refused and some men surrounded his tent, slashing it with knives and bayonets, before dispersing. There was some 'promiscuous shooting' as well as threats 'to kill every white man' if measures were not taken to complete demobilisation and repatriate men to the West Indies by Christmas.³² The next day, the 9th and 10th battalions refused to work, but were forcibly disarmed and ordered on a route march. A battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment, accompanied by a machine gun company, was dispatched to forestall further unrest.³³ Although the mutiny was brought swiftly to an end, harsh sentences were meted out to the forty-seven men found guilty of involvement. Private Arthur Sanches, regarded as the ringleader by the military, received a death sentence which was later commuted to twenty years' imprisonment.³⁴

On 16 December, sixty West Indian sergeants at Taranto formed the Caribbean League to promote 'all matters conducive to the General Welfare of the islands constituting the British West Indies and the British Territories adjacent thereto'.³⁵ The League was greeted with cautious approval by the military authorities, who obtained a report of the inaugural meeting from an informer. However, the reported assertion at a subsequent meeting 'that the black man should have freedom to govern himself in the West Indies and that force must be used, and if necessary bloodshed, to attain that object'³⁶ gave more cause for concern. Cited in reports circulated by the War Office to the Colonial Office, it prompted some panic among the West Indian governors.

Closer analysis suggests that many League members adopted a non-violent, reformist approach that anticipated working alongside, or at least not in direct opposition to, the colonial governments. This was evident when some members suggested that the recently mutinous rank and file

should not be canvassed for support lest they 'not understand the peaceful purpose of the league'.³⁷ Whereas the convicted mutineers had been private soldiers to a man, the League wholly comprised non-commissioned officers, many of whom seemed intent on preserving the limited authority they held within the military hierarchy. The domination of the League leadership by the Jamaican sergeants – Cecil Collman, Harold Leopold Brown and Arthur P. Jones – caused some dissatisfaction and dissent among members from the other West Indian territories. Sergeant Leon Pouchet, the Trinidadian informer who kept the military abreast of the League's activities, was clearly rankled by this issue.³⁸

The Caribbean League did not survive demobilisation, which was completed by August 1919. However, although the League was short-lived, it demonstrated the emergence of a distinct racial consciousness brought about by the hardships of war and by discrimination at the hands of the military establishment. A certain confidence had also developed from having served alongside white European troops abroad and having observed their human frailties at first hand. This mood was captured in a poem written during the rebellion by Sergeant Henry Benjamin Monteith of the mutinous 9th battalion:

Lads of the West, with duty done, soon shall we parted be
To different land, perhaps no more each other's face to see,
But still as comrades of the war our efforts we'll unite
To sweep injustice from our land, its social wrongs to right.³⁹

These words reflected a personal transformation for Monteith. As an elementary teacher in civilian life, he had contributed poems of a distinctly pro-imperial tone to the *Jamaica Times*, praising the heroism of Britain and her allies, 'Who, ere we sheathe our sword shall see – A beaten, powerless Germany'.⁴⁰ But in 1919, Monteith expressed a nascent Pan-Africanism and the aspiration for federal West Indian self-government.

The modest collectivist vision of veterans such as Monteith was at odds, however, with that of the colonial state, which reiterated the discourse of individual industry and tended to downplay any direct suggestion of entitlement by virtue of military service. But the options for enterprising endeavour were limited, and most returning veterans faced either backbreaking casual work at low pay or unemployment. In the face of these demoralising circumstances, and despite the injustices endured in the army and the rejection of military authority at Taranto, the veterans clung to the rhetoric of heroic military sacrifice as both an emotional and a strategic tool to demand economic improvements and citizenship rights in the post-war decades.

Many Jamaican veterans – 4,036 of the 7,232 who returned – chose to migrate to Cuba, encouraged by a government keen to disperse potential agitators.⁴¹ For those who remained, cultivable land – the mainstay of peasant self-sufficiency since slavery – became the central demand. In May 1919, Governor Probyn hailed the first group of demobilised Jamaicans and announced employment and land settlement schemes, promising a future of prosperity 'to run from the day on which Jamaica's brave sons came back from the war.'⁴² But it was not until 1924 that the Jamaican Legislative Assembly began to make tentative steps to implement the settlement hinted at in Probyn's welcoming platitudes. In that year, the Governor and soldier representatives from the Old Comrades' Association agreed a scheme for five-acre allotments to be offered to veterans with savings of at least £10 and means of support before the first harvest. Loans, repayable over twelve years, were available to purchase additional acres. The Jamaican government also allocated £20,000 for road-building and bridges on the three Crown estates earmarked for the scheme.⁴³ However, the settlements at Rio Grande in Portland failed to thrive. Most plots were many miles from the nearest main roads. Poor communications were compounded during the five-month rainy season when two local rivers became impassable and the legislature's pledge to fund improvements was overruled by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Seventy-two veterans acquired allotments, but just three endured the five years necessary to earn full title to the land.⁴⁴

By the early 1930s, the ranks of the veterans were augmented by men forcibly repatriated as the Great Depression afflicted the Cuban sugar industry. In May 1933, the Ex-British West Indies Regiment Association led several hundred veterans, including some in wheelchairs, on a hunger march from the Kingston racecourse to the Legislative Council chamber. A petition to Governor Ransford Slater outlined the hardships endured by Jamaicans and insisted that the sacrifices in the First World War should be recognised:

We are quite sanguine of the acute depression which the island is passing through at the moment, but we are asking most respectfully that immediate relief, however small it may be, be granted to the men who served their King and country during the Great World War and who are now in dire need! We are now beseeching the members of the Council to help us financially as the men and their families are starving and many of them shelterless, while our children cannot go to school for want of clothes and food.⁴⁵

In July, the Association met with Sir Ian Macpherson MP, a former British minister of pensions who was touring Jamaica, and demanded new lands be

made available with a fund to assist cultivation. The delegation also suggested that the Jamaica War Contribution, paid annually at the rate of £60,000 to the imperial government since the end of the war, be suspended for five years and the funds diverted to benefit ex-servicemen.⁴⁶ Under the terms of the land settlement scheme which the government approved after these protests, 3,406 ex-servicemen received free plots of five acres and a loan of £5, advanced in thirty-shilling instalments. These included members of both the BWIR and the WIR, the latter having been disbanded at the end of 1926. Some 400 ex-soldiers in a model settlement at Coolshade, Saint Catherine, received an additional loan of £4.⁴⁷

Peasant proprietorship had become ideologically attractive to some sections of the colonial administration. A self-sufficient and relatively prosperous peasantry, with an emotional attachment to the land, was regarded as a buffer against the increasingly turbulent disenfranchised working class and rural poor. Sir Edward Denham, governor from 1934 until his death in June 1938, epitomised this attitude, asserting, 'The saving grace in Jamaica is the Jamaican's passion for the land and to own a bit of it, and the provision of land settlement is the best bond between Government and governed.'⁴⁸

But the new settlement scheme, like those preceding it, was beset by poor land quality, deficient water supplies and inadequate communications. By 1938, of 2,506 men still in possession of their lands, only 1,800 were actively cultivating and barely 400 were residing on their properties.⁴⁹ The poor quality of land and lack of sufficient financial support was highlighted by Hubert Reid, a veteran of the West India Regiment who had received the Distinguished Conduct Medal for gallantry in the East African campaign.⁵⁰ He noted:

[I]t has taken 17 years of untold petitions, marchings through the streets of the City as well as agitations, before we were told off to some of the most remote parts of worthless lands without even a well-needed £5 note to assist in making a ramshackle [sic] place of abode, much less in trying to cultivate the place for an existence... In some cases, not even wild birds would care to inhabit them. Not even an inch is suitable for cultivation, and as far as roads are concerned, the inaccessibility of the places renders that impossible.⁵¹

Reid was leader of the Jamaica Ex-Service Men Labour Union founded by Canute McKenzie in 1935. The Labour Union represented the former regular soldiers of the disbanded WIR, rather than the BWIR veterans of 1914–19. The professional soldiers of the WIR felt a degree of superiority over the former volunteers of the BWIR. As a result, the Labour Union

tended to pursue privileges for its members rather than forging links with other Jamaican workers. During the labour rebellion of May 1938, the Labour Union opportunistically forged closer ties with the white employers, working as strike-breakers on the United Fruit Company wharves.

CITIZENSHIP OR PAN-AFRICANISM?

While the Labour Union sought primarily to benefit those who had undertaken military service, the war memory could not be contained within such limited bounds and ultimately resonated far beyond Jamaican shores. The labour struggles of the late 1930s, in which veterans had played a fundamental part, gave rise to further industrial militancy during the Second World War, leading to the introduction of the universal franchise in 1944. This was a major concession to the citizenship claims of the Jamaican masses. Previously, the electorate had been dominated by the white elite and the 'coloured' middle classes who could meet the prohibitive property and tax qualifications. Thus, in the 1935 elections, only around 10 per cent of the adult population was registered to vote for the fourteen electable seats on the Legislative Council. Low voter turnout meant that active participation in the electoral process was closer to 4 per cent.⁵² Jamaicans who fought in the First World War were granted a temporary dispensation entitling them to vote in the Legislative Council elections of 1920, regardless of property. Alfred Mends, a pioneering trade unionist and later adviser to Reid's Labour Union, led subsequent demands to extend the franchise to all Jamaicans in recognition of the island's participation in the war effort.⁵³ In 1923 Mends recalled how 'Jamaicans fought heroically ... Many gave up their lives, others [were] permanently disabled, to uphold the glory of the British Empire, to keep floating proudly in the breeze the Royal Standard, the Union Jack, and asked 'Where is the reward?'⁵⁴

Mends was strongly influenced by the struggles of African Americans to obtain the vote and cited Frederick Douglass's plea to President Johnson after the Civil War (1861-5): 'Your noble and humane predecessor placed in our hands the sword to assist in saving the nation, and we hope that you, his able successor, will favourably regard the placing in our hands the ballot with which to save ourselves.'⁵⁵ Demanding the fulfilment of pledges made in the empire's hour of need and underlining the implicit links between military service in the First World War and the expectation of citizenship, Mends portrayed Jamaica as '[a]n Island shouting ... across the broad blue waters of the Atlantic ... for Full Extended Representation, commensurate with the much vaunted boast 'Civis Britannicus sum' (I am a British

citizen).⁵⁶ He was echoing the sentiments of the Jamaican volunteers who had been encouraged to believe that war service would lead to greater political and economic participation. Significantly, Mends also led a campaign against the death sentence imposed on Rupert Smalling, a veteran of the WIR who had murdered a fellow soldier. Smalling, who had been mentioned in dispatches for bravery in East Africa and remained in uniform after the war, was said to have suffered temporary insanity caused by shell shock.⁵⁷

The strategic use of war service to press the case for self-determination could transcend this limited aspiration, however, and was embraced by the broader vision of Pan-Africanism which evolved during the 1920s and 1930s. This was evident in the transition of Marcus Garvey from an advocate of imperial citizenship to the leading Pan-Africanist figure before the Second World War. Having left Jamaica in 1916, Garvey re-established the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1917 in Harlem, New York, home to a burgeoning community of African Americans and Caribbean and African migrants.⁵⁸ Recognising that the Allies' post-war vision of self-determination and freedom did not extend to African Americans or imperial subjects of African descent, Garvey called for blood to be shed to secure an African homeland. At a mass meeting in Brooklyn, New York, in January 1919, Garvey declared:

Our sacrifices, as made in the cause of other people, are many ... it is time that we should prepare to sacrifice now for ourselves ... Africa will be a bloody battlefield in the years to come ... we are determined ... to fight ... to a finish. That finish must mean victory for the Negro standard ... I feel sure that my blood shall have paid that remission for which future generations of the Negro race shall be declared free.⁵⁹

In March 1921, Garvey arrived in Jamaica from Cuba where he had addressed thousands of Jamaican migrant labourers, many of whom were war veterans. Declaring that the Jamaican was a 'citizen of Africa' and not a 'British born subject', Garvey argued that true independence could only be achieved through the establishment of a 'dominion of Negroes' in Africa. Until then, Jamaican veterans should press their claim for enfranchisement as the first step toward African liberation.⁶⁰

In the following decade, Pan-Africanist ideas took a firmer hold among the Jamaican war veterans. The coronation of Ras Tafari as Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, in November 1930 underlined the place of Africa as a spiritual homeland. The failure of the League of Nations to prevent Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 provided a potential opportunity

for Jamaicans to heed Garvey's sacrificial message.⁶¹ Petitions and resolutions were organised as Jamaican citizens demanded the right to fight for the Ethiopian cause, denied to them by the Foreign Enlistment Act (1870) and the Ethiopian Order in Council (1934). In October 1935, some 1,360 Jamaicans signed a UNIA petition to George V, vowing as 'members of the Negro Race, and the descendants of African slaves' to ensure 'the preservation of any part of Africa which is free of foreign domination' and to defend 'our ancient and beloved Empire'.⁶² A further petition was organised by St William Wellington Wellwood Grant, a veteran of the First World War. Referring to Ethiopia as the 'only relic of the great African Empire' and to the contribution of the BWIR in the First World War, the petition demanded 'that in the same way as we helped to safeguard the integrity of other races, we are asking that our race be protected at this crucial moment'.⁶³

Grant epitomised the shift to a global consciousness among Jamaican war veterans, but also continued to adhere to some facets of imperial subjecthood, especially those related to military service. He returned to Jamaica in 1934 after over a decade of involvement with UNIA in the United States, and his role in the campaign to defend Ethiopian sovereignty placed him temporarily at the forefront of radical politics. In May 1938, he led the first march in protest at the shooting down of striking sugar workers at Frome, the event which signalled the beginning of the labour rebellion. Grant was rapidly eclipsed as the partisan struggle between Norman Manley's People's National Party and Bustamante's Jamaica Labour Party took hold.⁶⁴ However, his adherence to Garveyism and concern for the plight of the masses meant that he continued to be held in high regard. Until his death in 1977, he wore the uniform of the paramilitary UNIA Tiger Division upon which were pinned the British War Medal and Victory Medal earned during his service with the BWIR.⁶⁵

Since the late 1960s, the history of the West Indian contribution in the First World War has largely been regarded as lost, suppressed or forgotten. However, the sacrifices of Jamaican volunteers *were* commemorated and celebrated, although within the limits of post-war imperial relations. Memorials were erected in each of Jamaica's three counties. The first, a Calvary cross of imported Portland stone at Montego Bay, St James parish, Cornwall, was unveiled in September 1921.⁶⁶ Smaller memorial tablets were erected in many Jamaican parishes by public subscription.⁶⁷ The principal Jamaican memorial was unveiled in Church Street, Kingston, on Armistice Day 1922. Dedicating the memorial, Acting Governor Bryan declared that fallen Jamaicans formed part of an imperial brotherhood whose graves

'girdled' the world. But he also implicitly acknowledged the more distinct Jamaican identity to which the war had contributed, symbolised by 'our memorial... designed, fashioned and wrought by island hands, from island stone'.⁶⁸ The *Daily Gleaner* also recognised this transition, echoing Rupert Brooke in suggesting that the war dead had left a 'little part of Jamaica in a foreign soil'.⁶⁹

The shifting geography of the Kingston memorial reflected the movement of war memory from empire to the nation-state. In 1953, it was relocated in George VI Memorial Park, renamed National Heroes Park after independence.⁷⁰ But controversy around the burial of St William Grant underlined how, even after independence, many Jamaicans claimed identities beyond those of nationhood. Grant, like noted veterans before him — Hubert Reid and the journalist and impresario Vere Johns — was buried with full military honours.⁷¹ However, the Pan African Secretariat of Jamaica, who the previous year had presented Grant with an award for his contribution to Pan-Africanism, believed interment at Up Park Camp military cemetery was not sufficient to commemorate his achievements.⁷² The Secretariat argued a tomb in National Heroes Park, alongside Marcus Garvey, whose remains had been returned from England in 1964, would have been a more fitting tribute.⁷³ Subsequently, Victoria Park in Kingston was rededicated in Grant's honour.

The First World War raised the hopes of Jamaican volunteers in terms of citizenship rights, employment opportunities and autonomous land proprietorship. These expectations were expressed through the discourse of military sacrifice, despite the exclusion of many from the front-line settings to which heroic narrative alludes. The failure of imperial government to meet these expectations increased veteran militancy, although the dispersal of ex-servicemen through the Americas initially diluted the political impact in Jamaica. The increasing exposure, particularly of émigré Jamaicans, to an emerging global Pan-African consciousness transcended the boundaries of colonial subjecthood, leading to the reinterpretation of military service with more radical consequences. However, as the development of Hubert Reid's Ex-Service Men Labour Union shows, the demands of veterans could also be of a limited and parochial nature.

Over the past twenty-five years, Jamaica's war memory has moved even further from a narrow association with a single nation-state. Alongside other diasporic communities in Great Britain, Jamaicans have affirmed their citizenship in the former imperial power through the recovered memory of ancestral sacrifice in the world wars.⁷⁴ The contribution of imperial subjects was commemorated by the unveiling of the Memorial Gates on

Constitution Hill, London, in 2002. More recently, the Imperial War Museum, London, presented 'From War to Windrush' (13 June 2008 to 1 November 2009), its first exhibition acknowledging the contribution of West Indians in the world wars. These claims for recognition depend partly on a reworked post-imperial nostalgia which continues to privilege military service, and especially front-line duty, within discourses of national belonging. Jamaican war memory therefore needs to be framed within empire and its unravelling in the post-imperial era following the Second World War. While Jamaicans ostensibly volunteered to defend the British empire, within the popular imagination, they also served the cause of Pan-Africanism, the future Jamaican nation and its diaspora.

NOTES

- 1 John Edgar Caulwell Hearne, author of *Voices Under the Window* (1955), served in the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War. His father Maurice Vincent Hearne served as a sergeant in the Royal Fusiliers in the First World War before joining the civil service in Jamaica, having migrated there from Canada in the late 1920s. J. Hearne, 'The Democracy of Death', *Sunday Gleaner*, 5 July 1985, 12.
- 2 R. Hart, *Rise and Organise: The Birth of the Workers and National Movements in Jamaica (1936-1939)*, (London: Karia, 1989).
- 3 Hearne, 'Democracy', 12.
- 4 F. Cundall, *Jamaica's Part in the War, 1914-1918* (London: West India Committee for the Institute of Jamaica, 1925).
- 5 'Coloured' was the contemporary term for Jamaicans of mixed African and European heritage. For a discussion of the race and class dynamics of Jamaican society see B. L. Moore and M. A. Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), especially pp. 1-50.
- 6 Personal correspondence with Nola Stair, June 2008. Around 400 white Jamaicans gained commissions in other British and imperial units and perhaps a few hundred Jamaicans of all skin shades served as NCOs and privates in other British regiments. R. Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity and the Development of National Consciousness* (Manchester University Press, 2004), 80-1.
- 7 T. G. Ashplant, G. Dawson and M. Roper, 'The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration: Contexts, Structures and Dynamics', in Ashplant *et al.* (eds.), *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7-16. J. Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-2.
- 8 J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites Of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 93.
- 9 J. Henderson, *Jamaica* (London: A & C Black, 1906), 105.

- 10 For background, see P. E. Bryan, *The Jamaican People 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991); T. C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*.
- 11 *Jamaica Times* (henceforth *JT*), 8 August 1914, 9.
- 12 Marcus Garvey, 'A Talk with Afro-West Indians: The Negro Race and Its Problems', in R. A. Hill (ed.), *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 62.
- 13 'Circular Appeal' enclosed with Marcus Garvey to Booker T. Washington, 8 September 1914, in Hill (ed.), *Marcus Garvey ... Papers*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 69.
- 14 Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, 273-4.
- 15 *Daily Gleaner* (henceforth *DG*), 12 October 1915, 13.
- 16 *JT*, 12 September 1914, 4.
- 17 Marcus Garvey, UNI and Conservation Ass. & African Communities League to Rt. Hon. Lewis Harcourt MP, 16 September 1914 - Resolution passed at Collegiate Hall, Kingston 15 September 1914, The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA) CO157/705.
- 18 *DG*, 29 November 1915, 14.
- 19 *DG*, 12 May 1916, 10.
- 20 Memorandum from Military Members of the Army Council 6 February 1917 to Commander in Chief, British Armies in France, TNA WO32/5094.
- 21 *Manual of Military Law* (London: HMSO, 1914), p. 473; Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers*, 64-5.
- 22 *DG*, 24 February 1916, 8.
- 23 *DG*, 6 May 1916, 13.
- 24 Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers*, 125-6.
- 25 *Manual of Military Law*, p. 471. At least one Jamaican, described as 'coloured,' breached this restriction. Hubert Austin Cooper, Deputy Clerk of the Courts for the parish of Westmoreland, was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant of the BWIR in 1917 (*DG*, 1 August 1912; *The Voice* (St Lucia), 28 June 1919, 4).
- 26 War Diary BWIR, June 1917-April 1919, entry for 13 October 1918, TNA WO95/4732.
- 27 Not to be confused with the BWIR, the WIR emerged from the West India Regiments formed during the wars with France from 1793. Although, uniquely among colonial units, the WIR was a line regiment of the British army, it too was usually regarded as a 'native' unit. See B. Dyde, *The Empty Sleeve: The Story of the West India Regiments of the British Army* (St Johns, Antigua: Hansib, 1997).
- 28 *DG*, 29 March 1919, 18. The original report, 'British West Indies Regiment', appears in TNA WO95/4732 War Diary BWIR, June 1917-April 1919.
- 29 Memoranda from British West Indies Regiment Association, Sergeant W. Johnson to Royal Cm. (n.d.), TNA CO950/93.

- 30 James Campbell, 'Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism', *New Literary History*, 30 (1999), 203-15.
- 31 The majority of BWIR casualties occurred away from the front line. 1,071 died of disease, 178 men were killed or died of wounds, and 697 were wounded (*West India Committee Circular*, 539, 29 May 1919, 128).
- 32 *War Diary Camp Commandant Taranto Base entries for 6-12 December 1918*, TNA W095/4255; 'The First World War Memoirs of Lieutenant D. C. Burn', f. 136. Imperial War Museum (IWM) P2/MCA/173. There was only one reported fatality during the mutiny period - when Acting Sergeant Robert Richards negligently discharged his rifle, killing Private Samuel Pinnock (*War Diary of 7BWIR*, entry for 9 January 1919, TNA W095/4262).
- 33 *War Diary Commandant Taranto Base entries for 6-8 December 1918*, TNA W095/4255; TNA W095/4262 *War Diary 7BWIR*, January 1918 - January 1919 entry for 9 January 1919; E. Dupuch, *A Salute to Friend and Foe* (Nassau: Tribune, 1982).
- 34 Register of Field General Courts Martial and Military Courts to 27 February 1919, TNA WO213/27. Second Lieutenant Hubert Austin Cooper (see note 25) is reported to have served as a military prosecutor during these hearings (*DG*, 1 August 1942, 1). He had previously defended Private Albert Denny who was executed for murdering a fellow soldier (TNA W071/675 Army Form B. 122).
- 35 Notes of meeting held at Cimino Camp, Italy, 17 December 1918, TNA C0318/350/2590.
- 36 Major Maxwell Smith to Major-General Thuillier, GOC, Taranto, 27 December 1918, TNA C0318/350/2590.
- 37 Major Maxwell Smith (8BWIR) to GOC, Taranto, 3 January 1919, TNA C0318/350/2590.
- 38 Notes of meeting held at Cimino Camp, Italy, 17 December 1918; Major Maxwell Smith (8BWIR) to GOC, Taranto, 3 January 1919, TNA C0318/350/2590. Sergeant Cecil Collman returned to civil life in Jamaica as the deputy clerk of court in Portland, having helped oversee the final stages of demobilisation. Sergeant Harold Leopold Brown devoted the remainder of his life to benevolent societies and became a leading advocate of Jamaican agricultural initiatives (*DG*, 7 May 1919, 10; *DG*, 11 March 1946, 9).
- 39 'The Song of Our Returning Soldiers', *JT*, 28 June 1919, 8.
- 40 'The Kaiser after His Kind', *JT*, Christmas number, December 1914, 9. Returning to Jamaica from Taranto in the summer of 1919, Monteith immersed himself in progressive social activism for the remainder of his life. Central to his vision was a desire to revitalise Jamaica through comprehensive education and agricultural investment. He served as a president of the Jamaica Union of Teachers, officer of the Jamaica Agricultural Society and parish councillor for his native St Ann (*DG*, 23 June 1970, 1, 5).
- 41 'BWIR Ass. Witnesses', TNA C0950/93, J33 26th Session; 'Memorandum on Unemployment and Rates of Wages', TNA C0950/944. Written Evidence, Serial No. 169.
- 42 Extract from Sir Leslie Probyn's welcome speech to returning soldiers, 2 May 1919, TNA C0950/93.

- 43 A. S. Jelf to William Bennett, C. H. Eastwood and others, 15 February 1933, TNA C0137/799/10; *Ex-Service Man*, n.d., 5 enclosed with British West Indies Regiment Association Memorandum to Moyne Commission, TNA C0950/93. The Jamaica Old Comrades Association (formerly known as the Jamaica Ex-Service Men's Association) was dominated by white and light-skinned Jamaicans, many of whom had served in regiments other than the BWIR. The future prime minister, N. W. Manley, who served as a Royal Artillery gunner, was a member of the executive committee (*DG*, 21 December 1923, 6).
- 44 A. S. Jelf to William Bennett, C. H. Eastwood and others, 15 February 1933, TNA C0137/799/10; British West Indies Regiment Association Memorandum TNA C0950/93.
- 45 *DG*, 18 May 1933, 15. The Ex-BWIR Association was founded in 1919 and remained active until the early 1940s. After the Second World War, the Jamaica Legion became the main veterans' organisation. It remains affiliated to the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League and maintains the Curphey Home for veterans.
- 46 *DG*, 15 July 1933, 7; William Bennett and others to Gov. R. E. Stubbs, 19 October 1932, C. H. Eastwood and others to Gov. Sir Ransford Slater, 7 December 1932, TNA C0137/799/10; Gov. Denham to Ormsby Gore, SSC 4 January 1938, C0137/818/3; *Jamaica War Contribution* (Cd. 8695), London, 1917.
- 47 Minute by Surveyor-General, 10 January 1938, TNA C0137/828/5.
- 48 Denham to Sir Cosmo Parkinson, Colonial Office 30 July 1937, TNA C0137/818/3.
- 49 Minute by Surveyor-General, 10 January 1938, TNA C0137/828/5.
- 50 Reid's citation appears in the *London Gazette*, 30 October 1918, 12, 835.
- 51 Memorandum of Jamaica Ex-Service Men Labour Union, TNA C0950/240.
- 52 R. Hart, *Towards Decolonisation: Political, Labour and Economic Developments in Jamaica 1938-1945* (Mona, Jamaica: University Press of the West Indies, 1997), 3.
- 53 Notice, King's House, 22 May 1919, TNA C0318/348/38685.
- 54 A. A. Mends, *Can There Still Be Hope for the Reformation in Jamaica?* (Kingston: Temple of Fashion Printery, 1923), 11-12.
- 55 Quoted in *ibid.*
- 56 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 57 *DG*, 10 January, 1924, 6.
- 58 On the West Indian presence in Harlem see L. J. Parascandola (ed.), *Look for Me All Around You: Anglophone Caribbean Immigrants in the Harlem Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); J. M. Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).
- 59 *West Indian* (Grenada), 28 February 1919. Also see M. A. Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
- 60 See *DG*, 25 March 1921, 11; 26 March 1921, 6; 29 March 1921, 10.

- 61 On the Italian invasion's wider impact in the Anglophone Caribbean, see R. G. Weisbord, 'British West Indian reaction to the Italian-Ethiopian War: an episode in Pan-Africanism', *Caribbean Studies*, 10:1 (1970), 34-45; K. A. Yelvington, 'The War in Ethiopia and Trinidad 1935-1936', in B. Breton and K. A. Yelvington, *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Post-Emanicipation Social and Cultural History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).
- 62 Petition of Kingston UNIA October 1935; TNA CO318/48/4/71062.
- 63 Copy Petition to Secretary of State for the Colonies 5 October 1935; TNA CO318/48/4/71062.
- 64 On the legacy of the long-standing rivalry between the PNP and the JLP, see A. Sives, 'Violence and Politics in Jamaica', PhD thesis, University of Bradford, 1998, and Carlene J. Edie, *Clientelism in Jamaica* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1991).
- 65 Hill (ed.), *Marcus Garvey ... Papers*, vol. VII (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 309-10; N. White, 'St William Wellington Grant: A Fighter for Black Dignity', *Jamaica Journal*, 43 (1979), 56-63; K. Post, *Strike the Iron: A Colony at War: Jamaica 1939-1945*, vol. 1 (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981) 63-4.
- 66 DG, 23 September 1921, 9.
- 67 See for example DG, 24 October 1921, 9; 26 October 1921, 6; 21 November 1921, 4; 2 December 1921, 4.
- 68 DG, 13 November 1922, 6.
- 69 DG, 13 November 1922, 8.
- 70 DG, 15 July 1933, 3.
- 71 DG, 5 November 1969, 21; 16 September 1966, 4.
- 72 Up Park Camp also contains the graves and memorials to Jamaican volunteers of both world wars in the care of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.
- 73 DG, 7 June 1976, 15; 2 September 1977, 15.
- 74 Jane Bown's photograph of a black British veteran at the Cenotaph, chosen for the cover of Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 1987), strikingly recorded this shift.

CHAPTER 15

Not only war: the First World War and African American literature

Mark Whalan

In a column for the *Chicago Defender* published just following the Second World War, the African American poet Langston Hughes has his Harlemite barfly Jesse B. Semple (or 'Simple') say the following:

'You know Buddy Jones' brother, what was wounded in the 92nd in Italy, don't you? Well, he was telling me about how bad them rednecks treated him when he was in the army in Mississippi. He said he don't never want to see no parts of the South again. He were born and raised in Yonkers and not used to such stuff. Now his nerves is shattered. He can't even stand a Southern accent no more.'

'Jim Crow shock,' I said, 'I guess it can be as bad as shell shock.'

'It can be worse,' said Simple. 'Jim Crow happens to men every day down South, whereas a man's not in a battle every day.'

Although ostensibly written about a different conflict, Hughes's association of battlefield trauma with the traumas of racial segregation in the USA was one forged in the experiences of the First World War. Shell shock troubled distinctions between organicist and psychological notions of trauma; it was exacerbated by feelings of helplessness in conflict situations.² Such a blend of psychological and physical stress and coercion was familiar to African Americans living under Jim Crow, and Hughes's bleak humour suggests that its everyday status only prolonged that trauma rather than dulled it.

More broadly, Simple's (typically deceptive) simple statement suggests two things about the African American reaction to the First World War. First, it voices a sense common in African American cultural reactions to the two world wars: that, in the words of Jessie Redmon Fauset, African American soldiers had 'fought a double battle in France, one with Germany and one with white America'.³ Second, if for the European combatants the war resulted in a 'Victorian world of respectability, predictability, and heroes' being replaced by 'a culture of experience, surprise, and victims', for African Americans it bequeathed instead a range of new