

You are a television reporter for an African country and have been sent to Harlem to cover what is going on during this intellectual period of the 1920s and 1930s. Prepare a TV news report for your people back home describing what you have seen and heard in Harlem and how it

has made you feel. Each person can take turns giving his or her report to the class as a whole. In preparation for your TV news report, use the Internet and other resource materials to find relevant information about the Harlem Renaissance.

Multiple Perspectives

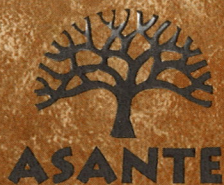
Select three of the contributors to the Harlem Renaissance covered in this chapter. Create a chart to show the different ways that each person used their gifts and talents to express their cultural awakening.

Review the information on decentering and dislocation in earlier units to explain why some African Americans disapproved of some of the creative works that this period produced.

CENTER YOUR WRITING

You are either a young musician, writer, poet, or dancer and you have just come to Harlem to be part of the Renaissance. Now you are writing a letter to your parents in the South. Describe your feelings about the atmosphere in Harlem at this time and how you feel about meeting some of the great names in the arts. What was it like to defy the southern

stereotypes of the South? Will you follow in Zora Neale Hurston's footsteps and return to the South? How has Langston Hughes' statement that the works of art created by African American artists should express African American culture without fear or shame empowered you to be true to your craft? Incorporate the answers to these questions in your essay.



AS YOU READ

- Why did communism appeal to some African Americans?
- How did the Communist Party actively recruit African Americans?
- Why did some African Americans believe that socialism, rather than communism, was the solution to the race issue that plagued America?

Chapter Outline

- African American Communists
- Resolutions and Plans Never Put into Action
- The Rise of Socialism

Vocabulary

- Communist Party • African American Communists • class position
- minority group • conservative • black belt theory • socialism • capitalism

African American Communists

When the **Communist Party** was founded in America in 1919, there was at least one African American member, Otto Huiswoud. Within a few months, others had joined him. Most, like Huiswoud, were from the Caribbean and were also members of a small group of revolutionaries known as the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB). The ABB, founded by Cyril Briggs, a native of Nevis in the West Indies, promoted a program of race pride and self-determination. They were attracted to the Communist Party because of its opposition to European colonialism. Many of them claimed to be communist long before the Russian Revolution and the rise of the Soviet Union which occurred in 1917.

These early **African American Communists** embraced the Party's claims with the same faith African Americans had once given the American creed of democracy. The *Communist Manifesto*, written by German revolutionaries Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, stated that all means of producing wealth should be owned by the government. It put forward the idea that **class position**,

1919

The Communist Party is founded in America.

1925

The communist organization, *American Negro Labor Congress*, forms.

1919

1920

1935

1920

The Socialist Party issued a demand that the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments outlawing enslavement be fully enforced.

1935

Many African Americans left the Communist Party when Russia signed a pact with France and put its fight against colonialism on hold.



Marcus Garvey clashed with Cyril Briggs in 1921, when Garvey denied Briggs and his allies entry into the Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World.

or social and economic place in society, is more important than race or the struggle for civil rights. For a **minority group**, outnumbered by whites and always at the bottom of the social ladder, these African Americans believed this was the answer to their problems. It was a new and exciting political outlook that for Briggs and others was worth at least a try.

Briggs was a captivating speaker and a productive writer. *The Crusader*, which he founded and edited, was a militant, nationalist newspaper with ideas very similar to those published by Marcus Garvey. By 1920, however, the paper was sliding more and more toward communism. It played down race issues and

insisted that problems in the African American community be viewed from a class perspective. There soon developed a rivalry between Briggs's followers and Garvey's supporters.

In 1921, when Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association hosted the Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World, Briggs and his allies were not allowed entry. Briggs responded with a series of editorials denouncing Garvey. Garvey retorted that the fair-skinned Briggs was

"a white man passing as a Negro."

Unable to penetrate Garvey's movement, Briggs and other members of the ABB devoted most of their time to recruiting for the Communist Party. Whether one belonged to a communist organization or a civil rights group, the early 1920s was not a good time for protesting against social and political inequality. A **conservative** tone was increasingly evident, from the federal government to local law enforcement agencies, who wanted things to stay as they were. The newly formed FBI, under Mitchell Palmer, was a growing threat to political organizations sympathetic to communism. Even the NAACP suffered under the intense scrutiny by the government. In the decade from 1919 to 1929, the organization's membership declined from 90,000 to 20,000 members.

The leadership of the ABB joined the Communist Party. They focused most of their organizing activities in Harlem. If the Communist Party could demonstrate that it was genuinely interested in the condition of African Americans, they might be induced to become Party members. Another tactic approved by Russia, communism's greatest advocate, was to make arrangements for some African Americans to visit Russia. Not until the late '20s would there be large groups traveling to the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, given the fair treatment

Russia had extended to its minority groups, a few African Americans were hopeful the communists could help them in their struggle in the United States.

African Americans who believed that the American government would never encourage interracial harmony found the Communist Party a political haven. Challenged by the continuing racial animosity in the country and the growing sentiment among African Americans for autonomy, self-determination, and Pan-Africanism, the African American communists found comfort in the slogan, "Black and white together." African American tenants unable to pay their rents were often forcibly removed from their homes, while the communists were the only ones willing to help prevent evictions. This further endeared some African Americans to the communists. By 1925 the Communist Party had formed the American Negro Labor Congress. It lasted for five years without any significant advancement among African Americans. Harry Haywood, a prominent Party member and among the first African Americans to visit Russia, stated the reason the organization could not really unify African American farmers and workers. He recalled, "Few local chapters were formed."

Resolutions and Plans Never Put into Action

The Communist Party was successful in attracting a number of prominent African American thinkers to its ranks. Attorney William Patterson, lecturer Richard B. Moore, postal employee James Ford, journalist and author George Padmore, and organizer Claudia Jones, along with Haywood, a World War I veteran, were among the more significant African American Communists of the period. Haywood would make a name for himself, as one of several thinkers who drafted the Party's resolution. The resolution argued that African Americans comprised a separate nation in the United States. It took a while for this novel idea to be accepted by Haywood and others in the Party, who saw African Americans as a racial minority, not an oppressed nation. This formulation, sometimes called the "**black belt theory**," was based on the notion that the majority of African Americans lived in the southern states, and thereby constituted a separate nation. The Party would hold on to this theory for years as a means to entice African Americans to join it. This strategy did not work and was finally dropped in 1958.

ANGELA DAVIS

The presence of the Communist Party among African Americans had a quirky history. A large, forceful organization of communists never formed among African Americans in the U.S. Even in its earliest years, when the worldwide Party's image was not yet tarnished by the misadventures and crimes of leaders such as Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and Chinese leader Mao Zedong, the U.S. Party did not attract many African American members; in fact, it had fewer than 200 such members in 1928. Moreover, unusual stories tended to make the link between African Americans and the U.S. Communist Party more of an isolated novelty than anything else. By the late 1960s, the communists in the U.S. received notoriety with Angela Davis, a philosophy instructor at the University of California in Los Angeles, who was placed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list, the

first African American woman so listed, for her involvement in a prisoners' rights case. Davis had worked on behalf of three prisoners who had been accused of murdering a white guard in California. The brother of one of the prisoners staged a raid in August 1970 in order to take hostages to try to trade for the prisoners. In the raid, several people were killed, including the brother who conducted the raid and a judge. Not only was Davis accused of supplying the weapons used in the raid, but she was charged with murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy. She was acquitted by an all-white jury in August 1971. However, her association with the crime, as well as her communist affiliation—she was a presidential running mate a number of times for the Communist Party—did not give her a favorable image in the popular white mind.

In 1932, 20 young African Americans boarded a ship bound for the Soviet Union. A Russian film company had invited them to participate in the making of a movie about the exploitation of the “Negro American from slavery to the present.” Louise Thompson was the group’s coordinator. Because of her enthusiasm for Russian causes, she was called “Madame Moscow.” Writers Langston Hughes and Dorothy West were among the 20. The film was never made because the Russians knew nothing about African American life. They refused help from the African Americans who had come to Russia to make the film. When the Russians announced the cancellation of the project, the African Americans thought it was because of incompetence. Later they learned the reason was international politics. The United States was about to grant diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union and the film might interfere with it.

Three years later, in 1935, when Russia signed a pact with France and put its fight against colonialism on hold, many African Americans left the Party. Richard Wright had joined the Party in 1932. It would take him a little longer to make up his mind to leave. When he did, he wrote bitterly in 1956:

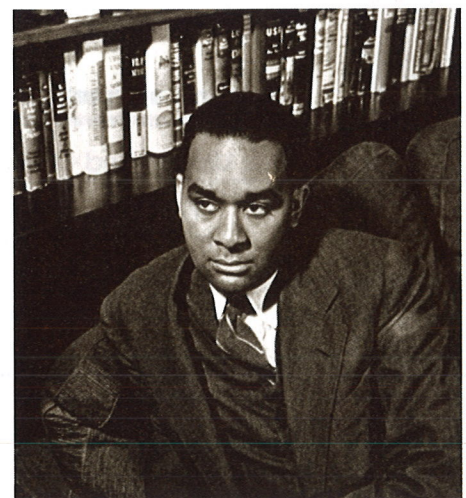
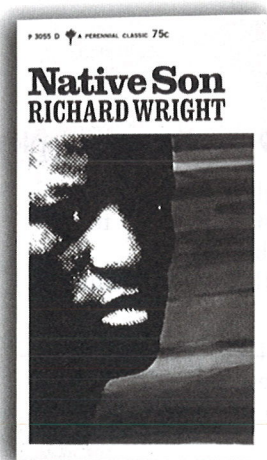
“That the Africans, West Indians and American Negroes have flirted with Communism is undeniably true, but just as true is the sad fact that in almost every instance the black victim discovered that he was not serving his own interests Today nobody is more immune to the call of Communism than black men who found, to their bitter sorrow, that they were being used for ends that were not theirs.”

The Rise of Socialism

While Wright came to his view of the party after many years of membership, the majority of African Americans did not see the Communist Party as the

solution for ending racism and discrimination. A small number became interested in **socialism**, a theory holding that the means of producing wealth should be owned by the community as a group. **Capitalism**, on the other hand, allowed individuals to own the means of producing wealth. African Americans believed that socialism would allow them to participate in the wealth of the society on an equal basis and put an end to racial strife. African Americans did not trust local governments, especially in the South, to implement social reforms for their benefit. They believed that under socialism, equal participation by the entire community would wipe out many of the social injustices against African Americans.

Like communism, socialism had its flaws. In 1920, the Socialist Party issued a demand that the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, outlawing enslavement, guaranteeing equal protection under the law, and giving African Americans the right to vote, be fully enforced. The foundation of socialism and communism was the belief that class, not race, was the major factor in the oppression of African Americans. The majority of African Americans believed that both systems were flawed. They knew that in the United States, race still held sway, and it rarely mattered that an African American had money or class if whites sought to discriminate or persecute them based on the color of their skin.



Richard Wright in his book *Native Son*, portrayed the destructive effect of racism on both whites and African Americans.



Chapter 39 After You Read

Read each section carefully, then write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Comprehension Review

1. What was Otto Huiswoud noted for?
2. What was the main goal of the African Blood Brotherhood?
3. What political philosophy was put forth by the Communist Manifesto?
4. Why did many African Americans embrace communism?
5. What caused a decline in membership of the NAACP from 1919 to 1929?
6. What was the “black belt theory”?
7. Why did Russian filmmakers cancel plans to make a movie about the exploitation of the Negro American?
8. How do socialism and capitalism differ?
9. Which amendments to the Constitution did socialists demand be enforced?

Center Your Thinking

10. Create a two-column chart comparing the beliefs of communism and capitalism. Analyze your chart to determine which ideology best protects the rights of African Americans. Write an essay identifying your selection and supporting your choice with examples.

Vocabulary and Concept Development

1. How does the meaning of the term *class* as used on page 363 of your text compare with the meaning of the term as used in a school setting?
2. With the help of a dictionary, define and explain the differences between **socialism** and capitalism.
3. What does the author mean by the statement “The African American community knew that in the United States, race still held sway”?

Reading a Timeline

Use Unit 11 and Chapter 39 timeline to complete the following:

1. What do you think might have been the attraction of communist philosophy to African Americans in the years immediately after the Russian Revolution in 1917?
2. Note when the Socialist Party’s demand regarding the 13th through the 15th Amendments was made in regard to slavery. Do you think communist and socialist groups in the U.S. competed for the attention of African Americans?
3. If a socialist group should demand full enforcement of the 13th through the 15th Amendments, do you think that African Americans felt that American whites did not seriously enough embrace these

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