CARIBBEAN LEAVEN IN THE AMERICAN LOAF: WILFRED A. DOMINGO, THE JAMAICA PROGRESSIVE LEAGUE, AND THE FOUNDING OF A DECOLONIZATION MOVEMENT FOR JAMAICA

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Just as the Caribbean has been a sort of leaven in the American loaf, so the American Negro is beginning to play a reciprocal role in the life of foreign Negro communities. … This world-wide reaction of the darker races to their common as well as their local grievances is one of the most significant facts of recent development. Exchange of views and sympathy, extension and co-operation of race organizations beyond American boundaries … are bound to develop on a considerable scale in the near future.¹

—Wilfred A. Domingo, 1925

In the first third of the twentieth century, important but often ignored connections between the African-American and the Caribbean freedom movements developed. These entanglements are often overlooked because conventional historiographic approaches tend to focus either on nation-states or on local microhistories but rarely look at transnational relationships. In the past decade, however, the relatively new field of transnational history has brought such connections between non-state entities to the center of historical investigation, highlighting the links between cultures and people in various countries. This paradigm shift, often called the “transnational turn,” has quickly proven to be a useful approach to historical studies that yields new insights into processes of intercultural transfer and migration.²

Employing a transnational research perspective, this essay examines the reciprocal influences of the African-American civil rights movement and the Jamaican movement for independence, thus bolstering the fact that the history of modern societies cannot be understood within the boundaries of their isolated national histories.³ At the center of my research is a transnational organization, the “Jamaica Progressive League” (JPL), founded in 1936 in New York by the Jamaican migrants Wilfred A. Domingo, Ethelred Brown, and Walter Adolphe Roberts. Dedicated to establishing an anti-colonial national movement in Jamaica, the JPL strengthened the connections between Jamaicans at home and abroad and played an important role in the creation of a national movement for self-government in Jamaica.
However, all of the JPL’s founding members were highly engaged in a variety of civic and cultural affairs. Their interest was not limited to Jamaica or the Caribbean, and they participated in the African-American civil rights movement and international black nationalist organizations. Moreover, they all contributed to the African-American and Pan-American culture and literature during this period. Walter Adolphe Roberts, for example, was a popular writer and journalist with a special interest in the Pan-American region; Reverend Ethelred Brown was the first black Unitarian minister in the United States. During the Harlem Renaissance, Brown founded the Harlem Unitarian Church (also known as Hubert Harrison Memorial Church), which served, in his own words, as “a Temple and a Forum.” It provided a platform for African-American and Afro-Caribbean activists and writers like Richard B. Moore, Hubert and Hermina Huiswoud, and the JPL co-founder Wilfred A. Domingo, who was not only a leading figure in the Jamaican decolonization movement but also a well-known writer, journalist, and theoretician of the Harlem Renaissance.

My analysis will focus on the early history of the JPL in the late 1930s and early 1940s and will include an overview of the Caribbean immigrant community in New York City and its involvement in the Harlem Renaissance. I will place special emphasis on Domingo, whose life and ideas impressively show how crucial connections between the African-American and Afro-Caribbean movements were to their success. In addition, his biography illustrates how different concepts of liberation are connected and how transnational ties of migrants can influence the history of single nations. I will conclude with a description of the early JPL, including its main activities and achievements. By highlighting its roots in the U.S., which are usually overlooked, I will demonstrate the transnational character of the history of nationalization in Jamaica and, at the same time, add to the studies that examine the Caribbean influence on the African-American civil rights movement of those years.

The Caribbean Community in New York City during the 1930s and 1940s

At the end of the nineteenth century, the population in the Caribbean grew rapidly, increasing the poverty for large groups within it. After the abolition of slavery in 1834, living conditions for these groups had not remarkably improved, and so by century’s end, they lived in abhorrent poverty. In this period, the labor movement and the first small nationalist circles emerged, but they met with little success. Economic problems forced many Caribbeans to leave their country in hopes of finding work elsewhere, and so the industrial growth of the northern cities in the U.S. attracted many of them. Between 1900 and 1930, the first of three big waves of Caribbean
migrants reached U.S. shores. About 40,000 of them settled in New York, with Harlem the most popular destination. For Caribbean intellectuals, Harlem provided a lively and intellectually inspiring environment. Philip Kasinitz emphasized that for authors, orators, journalists, and poets like Claude McKay, Eric Walrond, Cyril Briggs, Frank Crosswaith, Hubert Harrison, and Richard B. Moore, and for black nationalist leaders like Marcus Garvey, “nothing could have been further from their intentions than self-seclusion in West Indian enclaves; it was precisely Harlem’s diversity and excitement that had attracted them.”

By 1930, Caribbeans made up about 25 percent of Harlem’s population. Their impact was so remarkable that Franklin D. Roosevelt called Harlem the “Capital of the Caribbean.” However, the Afro-Caribbean migrants quickly realized that coming to the United States did not present them with the opportunities they had expected, but rather meant coming to “Black America”—with all the barriers to social and economic integration that entailed. Many of them immediately faced open racist discrimination, which limited their social and financial opportunities, causing frustration and disappointment.

Compared with African Americans in the economic sector, Caribbean immigrants were more often self-employed and owned a higher percentage of small businesses in relation to the overall number of black enterprises. This was partly due to their better education and training and their experiences in skilled trades. Accordingly, many tried to open up businesses when they came to the U.S., for example, importing and retailing Caribbean goods necessary for their growing Caribbean community or offering their trained skills. Furthermore, they had also not internalized feelings of racial inferiority to the same degree as African Americans, because racial identities and stereotypes in their home countries were quite different.

Caribbean immigrants responded to the discrimination they encountered in the U.S. in a variety of ways. Some immigrants attempted to emphasize their West Indian heritage and separate themselves from African Americans while many of them maintained a strong ethnic, or, more precisely, national, island identity, and planned to eventually return to their home country. Despite the racist discrimination along the “one-drop rule” in the U.S., employers sometimes favored West Indian immigrants, whom they stereotyped as hard-working and ambitious. Accordingly, some Caribbeans exploited this perceived distinctiveness to their economic advantage, contributing to the sometimes hostile sentiments between Caribbeans and African Americans. Nevertheless, a good number of them identified with African Americans and joined their fight against racism and discrimination—especially in the big cities in the North. The most popular example for such solidarity was the Jamaican immigrant Marcus Garvey, who inspired the first and biggest international black mass movement, the
Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The organization encouraged black people everywhere in the world to be proud of their African heritage. Pride in “black” skin, self-confidence, a stronger emphasis on the importance of black self-help, and Black Nationalism instead of assimilationist attitudes had become popular in the African-American struggle for equal rights and prepared the ground for the radical Black Power movement in the late 1960s.\(^{15}\)

Indeed, Caribbean immigrants were overrepresented in the group of black radicals in Harlem’s emerging cultural and political scene.\(^{16}\) They were often key players in the most radical groups and were “especially active contributors to the black press and to a number of left-leaning white publications.”\(^{17}\) While Caribbean intellectuals publicly often reflected on race issues, many of the first-wave Caribbean immigrants still expressed their ethnic culture in private, often “mediating between racial and ethnic identities.”\(^{18}\) Some of them emphasized a more “anti-colonial/imperialist and international outlook” and “interracial class and colorism issues” than was generally articulated in the black press.\(^{19}\) Both topics were main themes in the writings of Domingo.

Many intellectual Caribbean immigrants had become involved in radical politics before they came to the United States. They had participated in the formation of trade unions and small nationalist circles in the early decades of the century, and the black majority living under colonial rule slowly grew in confidence. The “American brand of race prejudice,”\(^{20}\) as Domingo called it, ran counter to their experience of a racism based on differentiation of skin color in the Caribbean. This type of racism privileged “light-skinned” persons, who therefore often belonged to the middle class. This encounter spurred the Caribbean immigrants to action even more, leading to the radical mixture of race and class positions they took up. The different experiences with racism and marginalization in the U.S. and in the Caribbean provided a foundation for reciprocal influences in the American civil rights movement and the Caribbean anti-colonial movement. Thus, migration was one of the most important catalysts for the intertwined histories of black people in the Atlantic region, what Paul Gilroy calls the “Black Atlantic.”\(^{21}\)

The circumstance of being Caribbean and experiencing racial discrimination in the U.S. led many individuals to become involved in both the U.S. civil rights movement and Caribbean politics, and particularly the Jamaican decolonization movement. Domingo was one of them, but he, like many others, kept these roles distinct.\(^{22}\) Kasinitz describes Domingo’s roles in these two spheres as follows:

[Domingo] was a vocal advocate of black rights when working in the American political context and a leading advocate of Jamaican
independence in the Caribbean context. But he was never an advocate of the interests of Jamaicans in the United States, because here it was racial identity that was politically relevant. Caribbean New Yorkers of the 1920s and 1930s might have been immigrants in a city of immigrants, but it was race that structured their life chances. Being black determined where they lived and could not live, where they could and could not go to school, what type of job they could get and the way they were treated by Americans of all colors.23

Despite this formal separation, in Domingo’s mind the problems of African Americans and the situation of black people in his homeland were very much intertwined, which led to his participation in both spheres. Nevertheless, Kasinitz’s observation of the emphasis on race instead of ethnic or national identities in the public is correct and may help explain why many Caribbean radicals during the time of the “Harlem Renaissance” were often “invisible”24 as Caribbeans, and, therefore, neglected by scholars. Only in recent decades have scholars paid more attention to the disproportional influence of Caribbean immigrants in the radical scene of African Americans in the first third of the twentieth century.25

Wilfred A. Domingo

The philosophy of Wilfred A. Domingo, Harlem Renaissance activist and one of the founding members of the JPL, amalgamated “seemingly incompatible”26 internationalist positions on black liberation and socialism with Jamaican nationalism. A presentation of Domingo’s basic assumptions will make clear that these concepts were, in fact, compatible, which helps us to gain a fuller understanding of the ideas and influences that led to the formation of Jamaica’s movement for independence.

Domingo was one of the most influential personalities in the circles of African-American and African-Caribbean activists in Harlem in the first third of the twentieth century. He helped organize the first Jamaican immigrant society, the Jamaica Benevolent Association, in 1917, and he was also one of the most active members of the Jamaica Progressive League: he contributed numerous articles to the Jamaican press advocating self-government for the island and helped to shape the first political party in Jamaica that agitated for complete self-government, the People’s National Party (PNP). Additionally, he was centrally involved in efforts to influence American and British foreign policy: he co-founded the West Indies National Council, which issued the “Declaration of Rights of the Caribbean Peoples to Self-Determination and Self-Government” presented at a meeting of the nations of the Western hemisphere to determine a strategy
after the German victories in Europe, the Havana Conference in July 1940.²⁷

To better understand Domingo’s complex thinking, we need to look more closely at certain features of his life and political activities. Domingo was born in Jamaica. There, he first got involved in politics as the first secretary of the National Club, an organization founded by S. A. G. Cox in March 1909 that promoted greater self-government in Jamaica.²⁸ In this role, Domingo cooperated with Marcus Garvey, whom he had known since childhood. After Garvey arrived in the U.S., and specifically New York City in 1910, Domingo started to work as an editor for Garvey’s influential magazine, Negro World. In July 1919, he broke with Garvey because of disagreements over the socialist views Domingo promoted in his editorials. In fact, Domingo worked for an exceptionally wide range of leftist radical political organizations and wrote for several newspapers and magazines that were inaugurated during this period.²⁹

Socialist ideas were quite popular among many Caribbean intellectuals, in part, because they could explain different forms of economic and political oppression of black people all over the world. It is crucial to understand this relationship between anti-racism and anti-capitalism in order to fully recognize the ideas and philosophies of many black intellectuals in this period. A figure like Domingo helps us, therefore, to comprehend how seemingly contradictory concepts like black radicalism and socialism, or nationalism and internationalism, merged together into one powerful approach to analyzing and interpreting the world.

In Harlem, he had established close ties with other activists of the “New Negro” movement, many of them from the Caribbean, like Cyril Briggs, Hubert Huiswoud, and Richard B. Moore, who were also journalists and activists of the Socialist Party (SPA). In 1920, he joined forces with these three in particular to form a radical underground organization, the African Blood Brotherhood, which combined racial and socialist perspectives. Domingo’s analytical skills, his dedication to political theory, and his persuasive writing style placed him “at the center of radical thinking among Caribbean immigrants settling in Harlem”³⁰ and made him the “theoretician”³¹ of this group of socialist Caribbean thinkers. Additionally, Domingo was active in many diverse Harlem movements like the Independent Political Council led by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen (he was also a contributing editor to their socialist magazine, The Messenger, between 1919 and 1923), the Rand School of Social Science, an institution formed by the SPA in New York in 1906 that aimed to provide a broad education to workers and to promote class-consciousness and political awareness, the People’s Educational Forum, a platform where Harlem’s radicals organized lectures and discussions, and the Twenty-First Assembly District Socialist
Club, an association of radicals founded in 1917 to coordinate the mayoral campaign of the Harlemite Morris Hillquit.\textsuperscript{32} 

For Domingo, capitalism, racism, and colonialism were connected modes of ruling the world. He referred to the parallel situation of workers throughout the world insisting that “[employers’] interests are opposed to those of their employees. And color or race make no difference.”\textsuperscript{33} He concluded that African Americans fail to understand the transnational character of oppression and urged them to join the fight of the working class against capitalist exploitation. But he soon realized that the SPA did not care too much about the situation of African Americans, and he regretted that the party made no serious attempt “to make the Negroes class conscious.” Domingo considered this to be “the greatest potential menace to the establishment of socialism in America.”\textsuperscript{34} Finally, he withdrew from the party, yet Domingo “remained convinced that Black liberation was a question of class struggle, class consciousness, and economical radicalism.”\textsuperscript{35}

In March 1920, he established his own weekly magazine, the \textit{Emancipator}, to advocate the idea of uniting race and class consciousness. He advertised it as a platform with a clear international outlook that aimed to provide “a scientific chart and compass” for blacks “in relation to national and international social, and political movements.”\textsuperscript{36} Many activists he had worked with like Moore, Briggs, Randolph, and Owen were appointed to be contributing editors, but the magazine only existed for a couple of months. In the 1930s, he continued to be involved in African-American political struggles, but he renewed his interest in Jamaican nationalism and became one of the most important figures in the movement for Jamaican self-government because he was convinced that Jamaica must be independent in order to abolish racial discrimination and thus better the living conditions of the majority of the people. Domingo asserted that “self-government would reduce the strength of the forces opposed to measures that can appreciably benefit the masses, by leaving the workers confronted only by their local capitalists and not by the entire British Empire ….”\textsuperscript{37} The organization in which Domingo acted upon his anti-colonial and nationalistic convictions was the Jamaica Progressive League.

The Jamaica Progressive League and Its Role in the Decolonization of Jamaica

The JPL was founded in New York by the Jamaican immigrants Walter Adolphe Roberts (president), Wilfred A. Domingo (first vice-president), and Ethelred Brown (secretary) on September 1, 1936. Its declaration, which was published in early 1937, outlined its main purpose:
Firmly believing that any people that has seen its generations come and go on the same soil for centuries is, in fact, a nation, the Jamaica Progressive League pledges itself to work for the attainment of self-government for Jamaica, so that the country may take its rightful place as a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations.38

The founders had been inspired by countries such as Ireland that had gained independence after a long struggle. At one meeting in Harlem on November 7, the JPL invited Eileen Curran, an Irish actress active in the political milieu of the Irish Progressive League, to talk about the Irish movement for independence.39

The JPL would soon play a leading role in the process of decolonization in Jamaica, with the Caribbean influence in the African-American community of New York fueling this process. Historian Jason Parker has convincingly demonstrated how the radical movement that evolved in the African-American and Caribbean community influenced American foreign policy in World War II, particularly policies regarding Great Britain and the Caribbean region. This influence, which he calls the “Harlem Nexus,” set the stage for the first steps of the decolonization of the British colonies in the Caribbean. The JPL was an important part of this “crossroads of African-diasporan and transnational-diplomatic history.”40

The pamphlet *Onward Jamaica!* published after the JPL’s founding in New York, outlined the organization’s essential principles and basic aims. The first goal was “Universal suffrage in Jamaica and the removal of property qualifications for candidates for public office,” and the second, the “right of labour unions to function legally.”41 Thus, the JPL sought to improve the living conditions of the masses in Jamaica, to give them a voice, and to prepare the population for the challenge of fighting for their right to self-governance. They encouraged the Jamaican people to “study the economic and social problems of the island and press for necessary reforms,” to engage in the “study of the history, geography and literature of Jamaica, and to give aid to all forms of artistic expression by the people.”42

In the economic sector, the JPL supported the need to “foster inter-Caribbean trade and commerce, and all other relations which tend to bring about a closer union of the British West Indian countries.”43

Another basic principle was fostering cooperation between Jamaicans and expatriate Jamaicans. Thus, the JPL aimed at stimulating “among Jamaicans in the United States and other foreign countries a keen interest in home affairs.”44 The JPL planned to form branches in other U.S. cities and everywhere that large numbers of Jamaicans lived, including London. But the most important step was to form offices in Jamaica in order to plant the seed for self-government in the country itself, circulate pamphlets, and exchange news quickly.45
This would happen very soon: Jamaican Walter G. McFarlane founded the first office in Jamaica in the capital city of Kingston, prompted by reading about the first anniversary meeting of the JPL in New York in a Jamaican newspaper in 1937. In his pamphlet, *The Birth of Self-Government for Jamaica*, he described his thoughts in reaction to this article. Having lived in the U.S. for thirteen years, where he had studied architecture and political science, he was immediately drawn to the idea of founding a branch in Jamaica. He felt that Jamaica should be an independent nation and have the final say over its own politics and economics to improve the living conditions of the majority of Jamaicans. Moreover, McFarlane had not been satisfied by the work of some small political groups acting in Jamaica because he felt that there had been no independent Jamaican political culture. None of the existing groups articulated the aim of self-government and independence, and some “were trying to be more English than the English-born.”

McFarlane decided to write a letter to the president of the JPL and ask for permission to found a branch of the JPL in Kingston. As this goal accorded perfectly with the New York JPL’s plan to open a branch in Jamaica itself, the board of directors agreed, and they worked out the particulars. In Jamaica, McFarlane tried to organize a founding meeting for the JPL branch in Kingston. Several obstacles hampered McFarlane’s efforts, representing Jamaicans’ deeply rooted skepticism towards the idea of self-government. After problems with finding a meeting hall, a small number of people eventually met on November 27, 1937, but they were unable to pass a resolution to implement the JPL officially because opponents disturbed the meeting. After this incident, McFarlane and six others met in private and launched the JPL, “giving birth to the National Self Government Movement in Jamaica and indeed in the British Caribbean and other British colonies in Africa.” Although McFarlane’s words here might be exaggerated, they point to Jamaica’s leading role in the decolonization of the Caribbean part of the British Empire. They also emphasize the crucial role Caribbean migrants in New York and especially the JPL played in it.

Not only had the Jamaican migrants who formed the JPL been the first group to organize around the demand for full self-government, they were also crucial to a broader introduction and approval of that idea in Jamaica. JPL president Roberts played a prominent role in this process. After arriving in Kingston in December 1937, he greatly helped popularize the idea of self-government by addressing a variety of organizations. As the main speaker at the first public meeting of the JPL, he facilitated “a brilliant push-off” for the League in Kingston. As a local newspaper reported, “The large and enthusiastic audience at the Metropolitan Hall showed much appreciation for the inauguration of the Association, and the address given by Mr. Roberts, and other speakers.”
In Jamaica, the founding of the JPL signaled the start of a noteworthy nationalist and anti-colonial movement. The JPL in New York published four pamphlets that were widely distributed in Jamaica to outline and promote its aims and purpose. One of these pamphlets—"Injustices in the Civil Service of Jamaica" by Ethelred Brown, a reprint of an address he had delivered at the first mass meeting of the JPL in New York on October 11, 1936—had immediate effects in Jamaican politics. Primarily, he called for the Civil Service in Jamaica to employ Jamaicans and not Englishmen and immediately return to competitive examination as the means of entrance into the Civil Service. C. A. Reid, a member of the JPL, then presented these demands to the Legislative Council. Brown later recapitulated the outcome: "Sir Leslie Probyn, then governor of the island, warmly approved the resolution from his seat as chairman of the Council, with the result that it was unanimously passed. This is an achievement of which the League is justifiably proud."

The founding of the JPL in Kingston coincided with a growing discontent in large parts of Jamaica’s working class. Unemployment rates were high, wages low, and the majority of Jamaicans suffered tremendously under these conditions. In May 1938, riots broke out on a sugar plantation in Frome, which quickly spread to other estates and finally reached the capital, where a large number of workers initiated strikes. British troops were called in and violently put down the unrest. The JPL took an active part by providing food to striking workers. Afterward, the JPL employed a lawyer, E. R. D. Evans, barrister and JPL-member, to represent the workers who had been charged for their actions, financed by the JPL’s New York branch. The JPL’s actions and relative success in the trial popularized the movement, swelling its membership rosters.

Authorities in Great Britain observed the incidents in Jamaica and other colonies in the Caribbean with anxiety. They were concerned about stability in a country where the majority of the population were descendants of slaves and still lived under white dominion in a society divided along racial lines. They reacted to the disturbances by appointing the West Indies Royal Commission, a 12-man committee chaired by Lord Moyne, to travel to Jamaica and other islands and investigate conditions.

The JPL responded to this new development by organizing a committee consisting of various groups representing the interests of Jamaica’s majority, the Jamaica Deputation Committee, for the purpose of presenting material and advice to the Royal Commission. When the governor passed a resolution requiring all memoranda to the Commission to first be sent to him, the JPL successfully blocked its implementation. This decision would have limited the candidness of the delivered papers. In addition to the memorandum prepared by the Deputation Committee, the JPL in New York produced its own memorandum and sent Brown to Jamaica to pres-
ent it to the Royal Commission personally. Lord Moyne refused to meet Brown but accepted the memorandum. The memorandum of the JPL in New York demanded better wages for agricultural workers, land settlement programs for the poor, better and affordable medical treatment for the population, lower taxes on small incomes, the founding of public schools, and prison reform.54

The actions of the JPL contributed to the heightened political awareness during this period in Jamaica that ultimately led to the founding of the PNP. McFarlane underscored the JPL’s impact in the process of founding this party, of which Norman W. Manley became president. The JPL and other groups gathered and decided that Jamaica needed a political party in order to change the political and social conditions in the country. They formed a number of planning committees as well as a steering committee. McFarlane himself had been member of the steering committee and was also elected to three of the other planning committees, which worked out a constitution and program to launch the party.55

The JPL’s main effort was to include its political positions, especially to campaign for immediate self-government, in this program. Many of the other party members strongly opposed this position, advocating instead representative government and a constitution like the one Jamaica had had before it became a crown colony in 1866. McFarlane described feeling like “the lone voice in a wilderness on this issue,”56 and calling for help from New York. Roberts and Domingo immediately came to Jamaica to attend the inaugural meeting of the new party. Together with McFarlane, they started talking directly to individual members of the Planning Committees, trying to convince them that self-government would be the only solution for Jamaica. They were successful: after a lively discussion and vote at the first party conference on April 12, 1939, the new party adopted the proposal for complete self-government and universal adult suffrage, defeating the proposal of the group supporting Manley for representative government.57

In order to guarantee that the newly formed PNP would carry the issue of self-government further, even against the wishes of some influential groups within the party, the Kingston JPL decided to affiliate with the PNP. Nevertheless, it remained independent and kept on influencing the public with pamphlets and various articles, especially in the newly founded Public Opinion, which Domingo used extensively as a platform to popularize the demand for the political independence of Jamaica. The League achieved the concession that at least two members of the JPL had to attend every party meeting and that a written report must be sent to the JPL on every public issue discussed. In addition, many JPL members became direct members of the PNP. McFarlane became a member as well and was an elected member of the General Council from 1939 to 1947,
when he decided to forgo any further leading executive role in the party.

The relationship between the PNP and the JPL in New York was very close. The JPL was very active in raising money, and, especially in the early years, it provided the main financial means for the party. Its members advised the party and nearly acted as an overseas branch of the PNP. Through their actions in New York and in Jamaica, they became leading forces in the decolonization process. Thus, the “African American-West Indian ‘Harlem Nexus’” became very important for U.S. foreign policy and the decolonization of the British Empire.58

The background for this influence was the labor rebellions in many Caribbean islands in the middle of the 1930s and the subsequent activities of New York’s Carribbean community. The British and U.S. governments felt threatened by these events: Great Britain feared the challenge to its imperial rule in the region, and the U.S. feared race riots because of the coalescence of West Indian and African-American radicalism in Harlem. In 1940, another incident put the Caribbean on display. After the fall of the Netherlands and parts of France to Nazi Germany, both Great Britain and the United States worried that the Caribbean islands of the Netherlands and France might be used as bases by German troops.59 Because Great Britain had to cope with great war losses, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt agreed to the “Bases-for-Destroyers Deal,” which allowed American warships to be traded for British bases in the Western hemisphere, including Caribbean bases. This deal has often been interpreted as a signal for the contraction of the British Empire and the expansion of the new American superpower.60 Quite overlooked, however, is the fact that this power configuration made the Caribbean freedom movements possible as the Caribbean nations strove to achieve independence from both British and American rule.61

As Western nations planned the Havana Conference for July 1940, the JPL and other organizations formed a West Indies National Emergency Council (WINEC) led by Domingo, Charles Petioni, and Richard B. Moore in order to lobby for West Indian self-government and prepared a declaration to present this aim to the conference. Domingo later claimed that this “Declaration of Rights of the Caribbean Peoples to Self-Determination and Self-Government,”62 which WINEC-delegate Hope Stevens had presented to the hemispheric meeting in Havana, had strongly influenced the Havana Declaration. This declaration, he claimed, constituted “a substantial political gain for the colored race in the Western world. This fact and its logical consequences, the possibility of creating new black nations in the Caribbean, should be of the highest significance of American Negroes.”63 After the Havana conference, the WINEC changed its name to West Indies National Council (WINC), and Domingo tried to broaden its
membership and shape it into a unifying force of all the progressive leagues that had been formed in New York on the model of the JPL for many Caribbean islands.

PNP leader Manley, who had been impressed by Domingo’s personality and his compelling persuasive power since meeting him during the inaugural phase of the party, invited him to take an active role in the PNP in 1940. Domingo accepted and agreed to return to Jamaica to work full-time for the PNP in 1941, but he was unable to begin this work: he was arrested on the ship before arriving and immediately sent to prison for twenty months. The governor charged him with promoting and fostering “anti-British,” “anti-American,” and “defeatist sentiments,” even though Domingo encouraged his readers and listeners to support Britain in its fight against fascism in Europe. Domingo’s detention instigated massive protests in Jamaica as well as New York. Manley unsuccessfully tried to convince the colonial government of Domingo’s sincerity by launching a pamphlet entitled The Case of Domingo to defend his actions and outline the unfair accusations against him. Later, recalling the event, Manley highlighted its importance for the policies of the PNP: “This single act [Domingo’s imprisonment] more than anything else set the party on a line of final opposition to Government and its ways.” After Domingo’s release, the United States refused to allow him to return. He worked in the PNP for several years before he was finally allowed to go back to the U.S. in 1947.

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Migration is a salient factor in the globalized world. Studying its historical impact is a crucial task, indispensable to understanding modern societies. Seeing how migrants have connected and identified with their new country while at the same time maintaining strong ties with their country of origin, thus developing new forms of allegiance, allows us also to perceive the ways they have shaped the future of both their new and old country.

This study of the emergence of the transnational JPL in the context of the Harlem Renaissance in New York and the start of the decolonization movement in Jamaica illustrates that the African-American and African-Caribbean movements were not only linked but highly interrelated. A group of Jamaicans who left the colony of their birth developed a concept of nationalism, built the JPL, a transnational organization with bases in the U.S. and Jamaica, worked to decolonize their homeland, and helped to establish self-government. The JPL had a significant influence on the establishment of the movement for self-government and was actively involved in shaping the emerging political system in Jamaica. Although it may seem remarkable that these ideas evolved “in exile,” it is not unusual
for anti-colonial, nationalist movements to emerge in this way. More noteworthy is the direct influence of African-American civil rights struggles and the international socialist movement, which promoted the right of all people to self-determination.

During World War II, with the power shift from Great Britain to the new world superpower, the United States, and increasing U.S. interest in the Caribbean, these connections became especially important. In this special power constellation—with racism in the U.S. as a backdrop—the Caribbean migrant community in Harlem was able to influence the foreign policy of both the United States and Great Britain. The activities of the JPL marked important steps towards the self-government of the British colonies in the Caribbean.

By tracing the history of the JPL and the political influence of Domingo, we can clearly see the importance of individual actions in transnational historical developments. Domingo’s dual role connected his own anti-racist position (in Jamaica and in the U.S.) with staunch socialist and anti-capitalist ones, which reinforced the former, helping him to see the different shades of race discrimination in the U.S. and in the Caribbean as two sides of the same coin. The juxtaposition of these theoretical viewpoints led him to adopt anti-colonial and nationalist positions and engage in Jamaica’s struggle for independence. His role in the evolution of Jamaican nationalism and his activities within the transnational JPL were not contradictions of his internationalist and socialist convictions but were rather consistent with them.

Notes


3 See Tom Bender, ed., Rethinking American History in a Global Age (Berkeley, 2002).


8 Kasinitz, Caribbean New York, 42–43.


12 See Irma Watkins-Owens, Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900–1930 (Bloomington, 1996). This was also true for Domingo, who had worked for his uncle’s Caribbean import business since he had arrived in the United States and later established his own import business.

13 Ibid., 127.

14 See Kasinitz, Caribbean New York, 35. Kasinitz differentiates between “sojourners” and “settlers,” but it seems that these categories are quite interchangeable.


16 See James, Holding Aloft the Banner, 6.

17 Watkins-Owens, Blood Relations, 149.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.


22 Kasinitz, Caribbean New York, 8.

23 Ibid.


25 See James, Holding Aloft the Banner; Turner, Caribbean Crusaders; Mars, Caribbean Influences, 565–83.

26 James, Holding Aloft the Banner, 126.

27 The West Indies National Emergency Council (WINC, later renamed WINC) was a joint effort of Domingo, Richard B. Moore and Charles Petioni in order to “lobby for West Indian interests, including self-government” during the crisis of World War II and in regard to the new US interest in the Caribbean region. For more details, see Parker, “Capital of the Caribbean,” 103; see also W. Adolphe Roberts, “The Act of Havana,” Jamaican Historical Review 3, no. 2 (1959): 66–69.


30 Ibid.


32 For biographical information on Domingo, see Hill, Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers, vol. 1, 527–31; see also Turner, Caribbean Crusaders, 34f.
35 Davis, Five Afro-Caribbean Voices, 88.
36 Wilfred A. Domingo, Emancipator, March 13, 1920, 2; cited in Davis, Five Afro-Caribbean Voices, 86.
39 This interesting connection supports the presumption that the JPL was very much inspired by the Irish Progressive League and chose their name in reference to this organization, which had been founded in 1917. The link between the two movements became clear during the Young Scholars Forum 2007. See Ely Janis’s article in this volume and the leaflet for the meeting with Eileen Curran in Jamaica Progressive League, MS 234, National Library of Jamaica.
41 JPL NY, Onward Jamaica!, 3.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 See JPL NY, Onward Jamaica!, 4.
47 Ibid., 10.
48 Ibid., 11.
49 Ibid., 12.
51 JPL NY, Onward Jamaica!, Ethelred Brown, Injustices in the Civil Service of Jamaica (New York, 1937); Jaime O’Meally, Why We Demand Self-Government (New York, 1938); W. Adolphe Roberts, Self-Government for Jamaica, n.d. These pamphlets can be found in the Manuscript Collection of the National Library of Jamaica, Kingston (MS 234).
53 The committee consisted of the JPL, PNP, Federation of Citizens Associations, Jamaica Teachers’ Association, and the Women’s Liberal Club.
54 “Supplementary Memorandum of the Jamaica Deputation Committee under the Auspices of the Jamaica Progressive League presented to the West Indies Royal Commission 1938,” Box 4, Folder Jamaica Progressive League, EEBP.
55 McFarlane, Birth of Self-Government, 23.
56 Ibid., 24.
57 Ibid.
58 Parker stressed this point in “Capital of the Caribbean,” 98f.
59 See Uwe Lübken, Bedrohliche Nähe: Die USA und die nationalsozialistische Herausforderung in Lateinamerika (Stuttgart, 2004), 163–66.
Jason Parker has convincingly presented and argued this point in “Capital of the Caribbean,” 98.

West Indians also feared that the United States might taken possession of the region and worried about implementing their racism. For example, Domingo insisted that Dominion status would best serve West Indian and American interests and make possible the maximum self-determination for the Caribbean. See Wilfred A. Domingo, “Anglo-American Interests: How They Affect the Caribbean Islands,” The African (October 1944): 5, 16.

Declaration of Rights of the Caribbean Peoples to Self-Determination and Self-Government, MS 353, Box 9, Walter Adolphe Roberts Papers, National Library of Jamaica, Kingston.

Domingo to Walter White (NAACP), 6 November 1940, qtd. in Parker, “Capital of the Caribbean,” 103.

See Parker, “Capital of the Caribbean,” 104.

See PNP-Pamphlet, The Case of Domingo (Kingston, n.d.).

Ibid., 1.

PNP-Pamphlet, The Case of Domingo.