

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History

Master's Thesis in History



The Power of the Personality

The influence of Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930) on
C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins* (1938)

Hanna Emilie Røtvold

Spring 2022

University of Oslo

The role of the personality arises before us here on a truly gigantic scale. It is necessary only to understand that role correctly, taking personality as a link in the historic chain.

Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930)

At a certain stage, the middle of 1794, the potentialities of the chaos began to be shaped and soldered by his powerful personality, and thenceforth it is impossible to say where the social forces end and the impress of personality begins.

C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938)

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor Steinar Andreas Sæther for all your support and encouragement in writing this thesis. Your knowledge and expertise in the area has been of immense value throughout this whole process. I also want to thank you for introducing me to *The Black Jacobins* several years ago and for helping me acquire the original 1938 edition without which this thesis would not have been possible.

I also want to thank my family for always being there and cheering me on. A very special thanks to my mother who has endured her fair share of late-night phone calls throughout these last two years. Thanks to my sister Turith for all your encouragement, thanks to my sister Ingeborg for forcing me to have fun once in a while, thanks to my brother Erlend for your sympathy, and thanks to my three nieces – Alia, Leyla and Vilde, who by your very existence reminds me that there are more important things in this world than a paper. And thanks to my father for never failing to be interested in whatever it is that I am studying. Finally, I want to thank my good friend Alina for helping me put the finishing touches on my introduction.

Abstract

In 1932 C.L.R. James sailed from his native Trinidad to London determined to make a life for himself in the metropole as a writer. With him on his journey he had an idea for a book. He was going to write a biography about the Haitian revolutionary leader, Toussaint Louverture. However, when James arrives, a radical transformation occurs. Quite by chance he reads Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930) and joins the Trotskyist movement a little over a year later. The consequence of this is that James's conception of the world system has changed, and this has a fundamental effect on how he decides to tell the story about Toussaint Louverture. This thesis argues that Trotsky's *History* had a fundamental influence on James's re-imagining of Toussaint Louverture, in what would become James's most famous work, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938). I argue that in *The Black Jacobins*, Toussaint Louverture has the same historical role as Lenin has in Trotsky's *History*. Toussaint, like Lenin, appear as the last and decisive element that had to come into place for the revolution to succeed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	7
<i>The Black Jacobins</i> and its legacy	11
Scholarly debate	13
Research topic and arguments	18
Primary sources and method	21
PART I: MARXISM AS REVOLUTIONARY PRACTICE	23
I. I. From idealism to materialism	23
I. II. Forces of production and relations of production	27
I. III. Class struggle.....	31
PART II: LEON TROTSKY’S <i>HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION</i>	33
II. I. Leon Trotsky: a portrait	33
II. II. The <i>History of the Russian Revolution</i>	38
II. III. The Stalinist Falsification of History	41
II. IV. The dynamics of the Russian Revolution.....	43
II. IV. I. Russia’s peculiar development.....	44
II. IV. II. “A study of revolutionary mass psychology”	47
II. IV. III. The Leninist Concept of the Vanguard Party	48
II. V. Trotsky’s portrayal of Lenin’s role in the Russian Revolution.....	49
II. V. I. Lenin’s arrival at the Finland Station	49
II. V. II. The April Inner-Party Crisis.....	51
II. V. III. A “great link” in the “historic chain”.....	54
II. V. IV. How was Lenin able to play this role?	55
PART III: C.L.R. JAMES’ <i>THE BLACK JACOBINS</i>	60
III. I. Writing <i>The Black Jacobins</i>.....	60
III. I. I. African revolution.....	61
III. I. II. The dynamics of revolution.....	62

III. I. III. The rise of Stalinism	65
III. II. What Trotsky’s <i>History</i> had to offer James	67
III. II. I. “Not Only Art, But Science”	68
III. II. II. The role of the individual in history.....	70
III. II. III. Uneven and combined development.....	71
III. III. James’s portrayal of Toussaint’s role in the Haitian Revolution	74
III. III. I. The economic base of the revolution	74
III. III. II. Toussaint appears before the Colonial Assembly.....	80
III. III. III. Toussaint’s rise to power.....	82
III. III. IV. Currents of counter-revolution.....	84
III. III. V. Toussaint’s tragic mistake	86
III. III. VI. Toussaint’s historical role	88
III. III. VII. How could Toussaint play this role?.....	93
CONCLUSION.....	98
BIBLIOGRAPHY	100
Primary sources.....	100
Secondary sources	101

INTRODUCTION

Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901-1989) was a Trinidadian Marxist and Pan-African intellectual and political activist. He is considered one of the most distinguished West Indian intellectuals to emerge out of the twentieth century and has made important contributions to Caribbean history and literature, Pan-African and anti-colonial thought, literary criticism, and political theory. He was a central figure within the international Trotskyist movement and throughout his life he was involved with anti-colonialist groups and movements in both Africa and the Caribbean.¹ He was an avowed revolutionary and dedicated his life to the Marxist movement, during which he produced several major books, hundreds of articles, and numerous pamphlets.² Alongside his political work, James retained a lifelong relationship to literature, sport, and the popular arts. As a young man he wrote one novel and several short stories, and he worked as a cricket commentator for the *Manchester Guardian*.³ Later in life he also produced several noticeable works of literary criticism. These interests, however, were not separated from his politics, but rather intimately intertwined with his political ideas and his activism.⁴

James was born in Trinidad in 1901, at that time a British Crown colony. He was born into a lower middle-class family, but at the age of nine he won a scholarship to the prestigious Queen's Royal College in the capital Port of Spain. This was an elite institution modeled on the English public school providing James with a classical education.⁵ Unlike many revolutionaries who by their early twenties were already involved in radical politics, James spent his twenties working as a history and English teacher at his former college. On his free time, he was devoted to the game of cricket and deepening his studies of the western literary classics that he had devoured since childhood.⁶ James was also involved in a literary circle of young black and white intellectuals in Port of Spain that called themselves the Beacon Group. Their work centered around spreading literary and cultural knowledge to the uneducated populace, with their magazine advertising itself as "A Guiding Light for All Who are in

¹ Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary* (The United States of America: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 118.

² Bogue, *Caliban's Freedom* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 1.

³ Glaberman, "C.L.R. James: A Recollection", 45.

⁴ Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary* (The United States of America: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 157.

⁵ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 19-20.

⁶ Bogue, *Caliban's Freedom* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 16.

Intellectual Darkness and Who Seek Great Things”.⁷ They wrote articles on a variety of topics, including Caribbean identity, Africa, India, capitalism and colonialism. James also published several short stories where he, despite his middle-class background and education, attempted to examine the lifestyle and values of the black lower classes living in the barracks-yards of Port of Spain.⁸ While James’s work in the Beacon Group and his preoccupation with the lives of ordinary people was a sign of things to come, it was not until he made the journey to England that he would become involved in revolutionary politics.

In the spring of 1932, James sailed from Trinidad to London determined to make a life for himself in the metropole as a writer. However, it would not be long before he traded literature for politics, as he was quickly radicalized by the revolutionary ferment of Europe in the 1930s. World War I had left Europe decimated, and the 1929 Wall Street Crash had plunged the world into economic depression. In addition to widespread poverty and mass unemployment, this also had profound political and ideological consequences, such as the rise of Hitler’s National Socialists in Germany in 1933. More and more people were beginning to discuss the possibility that the world as they knew it was on the verge of breaking down.⁹ James himself would later declare that “I had not been in Europe two years before I came to the conclusion that European civilization as it then existed, was doomed”.¹⁰ Furthermore, after having spent only 10 weeks in London, James settled down in a small industrial town called Nelson in Lancashire, also known as “Red Nelson” or “Little Moscow” due to its militant trade unionism.¹¹ Here James became acquainted with the British labor movement, and he was able to observe for himself what the working class could accomplish once they were united in a common cause.¹² James’s turn to Marxism was therefore an understandable reaction to the conditions that he found himself in after his relocation to Europe.¹³ However, James did not become a Stalinist as was common for a lot of black radicals at the time,

⁷ Worcester, *C.L.R. James* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 16, quoted in Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 28.

⁸ Bogue, *Caliban’s Freedom* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 19, 17.

⁹ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 35, 65.

¹⁰ James, *Marineers, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2001), 154, quoted in Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 65.

¹¹ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 44.

¹² James was so struck by the working-class solidarity in Nelson that he related a story about a recent cinema boycott in Nelson to the readers of the *Port of Spain Gazette*: “I confessed I was thrilled to the bone when I heard it. I could forgive England all the vulgarity, and all the depressing disappointment of London for the magnificent spirit of these north country working people. As long as that is the stuff of which they are made, then indeed, Britons never, never shall be slaves”. See Laughlin, *Letters From London: Seven Essays by C.L.R. James* (Oxford: Signal, 2003), 123-125, quoted in Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 47.

¹³ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 39, 44, 65.

instead, James became a Marxist through reading Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930). When he did decide to join the Marxist movement, it was not as a member of the Communist International, but rather as a member of a miniscule British Trotskyist organization, the Marxist Group.¹⁴

Around the same time as James was making his inquiries into Marxism, he also became involved in the newly revived Pan-African movement. Prior to this, James had been advocating West Indian self-government as a member of the British Labour Party, and it was their anti-imperialist program that had attuned him to politics in the first place. James's criticism of British colonialism soon evolved into a full-fledged imperialist critique, and through contact with various other black intellectuals, most notably the Pan-African communist George Padmore, he became increasingly aware of the situation in Africa and the African diaspora. In 1933 he became a member of the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP), a multi-racial organisation led by blacks, to further the black cause within the confines of the British Empire. This was not a revolutionary organization as their goal was not to break with British culture. James himself declared that the best hope for liberation from colonialism was to appeal to the better conscience of the British government. However, this would all change in 1935 when Mussolini announced his intentions of conquering the East African State of Ethiopia (at the time called Abyssinia) as part of his plan to create a new roman empire, concealed as a "civilizing mission".¹⁵

To protest the coming invasion, James formed the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IADA) together with Amy Ashwood Garvey, the first wife of the famous Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey.¹⁶ James was enraged by the lack of support for the Ethiopians by the British and French empire, and he lost any belief he once had that there existed such a thing as a "better conscience" as far as imperialism was concerned. After Ethiopia, James became convinced that the only way to liberate Africa was through armed revolution.¹⁷ By this time, James was already well on his way of becoming a serious Marxist theoretician himself, and he linked the struggle for Africa, as well as the black struggle in general, with the

¹⁴ Høgsbjerg, C.L.R. *James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 66.

¹⁵ Høgsbjerg, C.L.R. *James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 65-71.

¹⁶ Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) was a Jamaican writer and activist and founder of the largest Pan-African movement of the twentieth century. The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) was founded in Jamaica in 1914, and by 1919 it had attracted thousands of international followers. At its height the organization is estimated to have had over 2 million members scattered across the African diaspora. The movement surrounding Marcus Garvey as well as his political thought is referred to as Garveyism. See Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 28-30.

¹⁷ Høgsbjerg, C.L.R. *James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 89-90.

struggle for world socialist revolution.¹⁸ Within just a few years of arriving in the metropole, James had become a leading figure within the British Trotskyist movement and the Pan-African movement, and it was during this period of his life that he wrote his most celebrated work, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938).¹⁹

The Black Jacobins is a Marxist study of “the only successful slave revolt in history”, the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804.²⁰ It is a vivid account of how the slaves of the French colony of Saint-Domingue over the course of twelve years freed themselves from the bondage of slavery, defeated the most powerful European nations of their day and established the world’s first black republic, the independent state of Haiti. *The Black Jacobins* was a tremendous achievement. While not the first historical work on the Haitian Revolution, James was the first to demand that historians take it seriously as an event of world historical significance.²¹ He did this in part by connecting the Haitian Revolution to the French Revolution of 1789. James argued that it was the slave trade that had created the economic base for the French Revolution, and that once the revolution broke out in France, the slogans of the revolution – liberty, equality, fraternity – was transported to the colony, amplifying the class tensions that already existed there and creating the possibility for radical transformation. However, this was not a “one-way-street”: a pioneering element of James’s study is the fact that he emphasized the interconnections between events on both sides of the Atlantic.²² James did not just argue that the slaves had been inspired by the slogans of the French Revolution, he also insisted that by demanding that human rights be granted to slaves and colonial people, it was the slaves themselves that gave these ideas universal significance.²³

When the slaves rebelled, France had been forced to abolish slavery for fear of losing the colony. James therefore argued that it was the slaves themselves that had been the decisive factor in the abolition of slavery, and not the French revolutionary government. *The Black Jacobins* therefore effectively challenged the prominent view that abolition was something

¹⁸ Bogues, “C.L.R. James, Pan-Africanism and the black radical tradition”, 489.

¹⁹ In *The Black Jacobins*, James consistently refers to Saint-Domingue as San Domingo, the reasons for this as not entirely clear, although Brian Meeks has suggested that this was James’s way of creating an English variant out of the French “Saint-Domingue”. See Meeks, “RE-READING THE BLACK JACOBINS”, 76, footnote 7.

²⁰ This quote is from the 1938 advertisement for *The Black Jacobins* by the publisher Secker and Warburg, where it says: “The black revolution in San Domingo is the only successful slave revolt in history”. The original poster is reprinted in Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, *The Black Jacobins Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 14. This is also the way that James first introduces the Haitian Revolution to the reader in the 1938 preface to the *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), vii.

²¹ Dubois, “Reading *The Black Jacobins*, Seven Decades Later”, 2.

²² Dubois, “Reading *The Black Jacobins*, Seven Decades Later”, 2. This is evident from the very structure of *The Black Jacobins*, with each chapter transporting the reader back and forth between events in Saint-Domingue and Paris. The circulation of revolutionary ideas is therefore a central theme in *The Black Jacobins*.

²³ Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 13.

that had just been given to the African slaves, and that they themselves had no part in it. By ushering in the age of abolition, the slaves of Saint-Domingue had forever transformed the world, and as such no history of the French Revolution or the making of the modern world was complete unless it was also a history of the revolution in Saint-Domingue. Just like the French Revolution and the American War of Independence, the Haitian Revolution marked a pivotal event in the history of universal human rights.²⁴

The Black Jacobins and its legacy

While *The Black Jacobins* has long been considered the classical account of the Haitian Revolution, when it was first published in Britain in 1938 it received mixed reviews. While it was immediately praised by James's fellow activists in the Pan-African movement, British historians took little notice of it. Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg have argued that the reason for this was due to James's known Trotskyist politics and if he had been "a Communist with a capital C" the work was surely to have received far greater attention.²⁵ It did however find an audience among many socialists connected to the Independent Labour Party. The communist and historian Eric Hobsbawm recalled that "C.L.R. James's *Black Jacobins* was read, despite the author's known Trotskyism" by some of those who went on to form the Historians Group of the Communist Party of Great Britain, a group of Marxist historians that had been crucial in helping to develop the tradition of "history from below" after World War II.²⁶ While James himself disappeared from the public eye during the 1940s, as he was living and working in the United States under the pseudonym J.R. Johnson, *The Black Jacobins* took on a life of its own.²⁷ According to Forsdick and Høgsbjerg it became "something of an underground text, rapidly going out of print".²⁸ It was particularly popular

²⁴ Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 11-13.

²⁵ Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 16-17.

²⁶ Hobsbawm, "The Historians Group of the Communist Party", in *Rebels and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton*, edited by Maurice Cornforth (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), 23, quoted in Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 17.

²⁷ James moved to the United States in 1938, at the invitation of the leading American Trotskyist James P. Cannon. There he took up work in the Socialist Workers Party (SW), led by Cannon and Max Shachtman. He soon formed his own group within the movement together with the Marxist theoretician Raya Dunayevskaya, called the Johnson-Forest Tendency. The group took its name from the pen name of its two founders: J.R. Johnson (James) and Freddie Forest (Dunayevskaya). See Hall, "C.L.R. James: A Portrait", 7, 9; Le Blanc, "Introduction", 4; Van Gelderen, "C.L.R. James: A Recollection", 48.

²⁸ Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 19.

among African and West Indian intellectuals who were struck by James's ability to place the revolution into the hands of the slaves themselves.²⁹

While largely ignored outside of the Pan-African and Trotskyists movements when it was first published, it became incredibly popular after a revised edition appeared in 1963 amid the rise of the New Left and the Black Power movements.³⁰ As has been noted by David Geggus, its prestige was enhanced by the wave of decolonization that the 1938 edition had predicted, and with the development of the new social history, associated most of all with E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, James's work found new resonance among historians as well.³¹ The rise of the civil rights and Black Power movements even enabled James to return to the United States to lecture. He had been deported from the U.S. in 1953, and as his third wife Selma James later recalled "CLR was not able to pass through the States, or even Puerto Rico on his way to London from the West Indies until Black students demanded that he come and lecture ..."³² The work also struck a chord among many black radicals in Britain, and the Jamaican dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson recalled how he came into contact with the work of C.L.R. James when he was a member of the Black Panthers Youth League and the Black Panther Movement in England in the late 1960s and early 1970s: "We studied the book *The Black Jacobins*, chapter by chapter. It was the beginning of my political education and my having a sense of what black history meant".³³ In 1968 it was also translated into Italian, and Ferruccio Gambino, an Italian political activist, recalled how "the publication of *The Black Jacobins* led to some radical rethinking not only of world history and world accumulation but also of the very notion of imperialism, class, and social formation" among the Italian left.³⁴

As for the status it has in the scholarship today, *The Black Jacobins* is still highly acclaimed and respected. While no longer considered an "up-to-date" account of the revolution, it still holds a special status among many scholars for the way that it transformed the field of Haitian revolutionary studies. Jeremy D. Popkin, a scholar of the Haitian Revolution and French history, has argued that *The Black Jacobins* marked a "turning point in the historiography of

²⁹ Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 11-13.

³⁰ Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 16, 30.

³¹ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 33, quoted in Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 30.

³² Quoted in Høgsbjerg and Forsdick, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 31. They cite "personal correspondence with Selma James, May 28, 2014" as the source.

³³ Austen, *The Black Jacobins* (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2006), quoted in Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 32-33.

³⁴ Ferruccio Gambino, "Only Connect", in *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work*, edited by Paul Buhle (London: Allison and Busby, 1986), quoted in Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 31-32.

the Haitian Revolution”.³⁵ Many scholars have also credited James’s work for inspiring them to conduct their own research into the Haitian Revolution.³⁶ Laurent Dubois, who published a study of the Haitian Revolution in 2004, has described how reading *The Black Jacobins* changed his perceptions of world history: “Afterward, something had shifted. The geography and chronology of history looked different to me. After *The Black Jacobins*, it is not possible to look at what we think we know about the past, about the history of democracy and revolution, the history of Europe and the Americas, in quite the same way”.³⁷

The Black Jacobins also sparked its own field. Scholars from a variety of disciplines, such as history, post-colonial studies, literary studies and anthropology have taken an interest in James’s work, a testament to the reach that it has had across disciplines. While this has contributed to a rich and diverse body of literature on *The Black Jacobins*, it has also meant that the political aspects of James’s study has sometimes been obscured. As Forsdick and Høgsbjerg has noted, “It is clear that studies of *The Black Jacobins* in a number of fields, not least postcolonial studies, have heavily underplayed the book’s political underpinnings and implications”.³⁸ As for the scholarly debate on *The Black Jacobins* more generally, there is particularly one topic that has fascinated scholars across disciplines, and that is James’s interest in revolutionary leadership, particularly his portrayal of the Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture. Part of what is so astonishing about *The Black Jacobins* is the emphasis James places on Toussaint Louverture “making” the Haitian Revolution. In the opening page to *The Black Jacobins*, James stated that “By a phenomenon often observed, the individual leadership responsible for this unique achievement was almost entirely the work of a single man – Toussaint Louverture”.³⁹ It is to this topic that I now turn.

Scholarly debate

James’s choice to frame the Haitian Revolution as being “almost entirely the work of a single man”, has gained a lot of attention in the scholarly literature surrounding his work. I believe there are primarily two reasons for this. The first reason scholars have taken an interest in James’s portrayal of Toussaint, has to do with developments in historical writing itself since

³⁵ Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 166, quoted in Sepinwall, “Beyond ‘The Black Jacobins’”, 10.

³⁶ Sepinwall, “Beyond ‘The Black Jacobins’”, 9.

³⁷ Dubois, “Reading *The Black Jacobins*, Seven Decades Later”, 1.

³⁸ Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, «Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*», 38.

³⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), vii.

the original 1938 edition was published, and the fact that *The Black Jacobins* only rose to fame after its second publication in 1963. This second edition coincided with the developments of the new social history, and James's focus on slave agency fit right into this new "history from below" perspective. Therefore, for many people, *The Black Jacobins* is a text of the sixties.⁴⁰ However, the book was originally written in an entirely different context, and although James made some slight modifications to the new edition, overall, the original narrative remained the same. This included James's focus on the individual leadership of Toussaint Louverture, which he wrote when he was a part of the Trotskyist movement. However, James's emphasis on a "leader of genius" was not so easily incorporated into the new social history. This was particularly true of James's frequent contrasts between the "enlightened" Toussaint and the "ignorant" masses (what James calls the rebel slaves). As a consequence, much of the scholarship on *The Black Jacobins* has centered around the dichotomy between leaders and masses.

Interest in this topic was also spurred on by James himself, as he took part in these discussions during the 60s and the 70s. In a series of lectures at the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta in 1971, James expressed regrets that he did not sufficiently consider the independent ideas and actions of the revolutionary masses. He also claimed that if he were to write the book again, he would have placed less emphasis on the individual leadership of Toussaint Louverture, and instead focused on the thousands of small leaders that made up the bands of maroons.⁴¹ James was also involved in Carolyn E. Fick's *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution From Below*. While Fick's narrative challenges James's focus on revolutionary leadership, she also credits James for pushing her in that direction in the early 1970s.⁴² James then, was very much involved in the new wave of Haitian scholarship that occurred from the 1960s onward. It does appear, however, that James's own change of heart somewhat lessened the academic interest in the original 1938 edition. Many scholars have

⁴⁰ Stuart Hall, a Jamaican-British cultural theorist, recalled how *The Black Jacobins*, to his knowledge, only became prominent in public discourse after the 1963 edition: "although of course I knew of its existence, I'm pretty sure that I did not read it until the paperback publication of 1963, and so far as I remember it wasn't prominent in public discussion. So for me, and for many others, it is in fact a text of the sixties". See Hall and Schwarz, "Breaking Bread with History; C.L.R. James and The Black Jacobins: Stuart Hall Interviewed by Bill Schwarz". *History Workshop Journal* 46 (1998), 22, quoted in Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, "Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*", 32.

⁴¹ James, "Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*", *Small Axe* 8 (September 2000): 98-99, in Sepinwall, "Beyond *The Black Jacobins*", 12.

⁴² Fick, "C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* and The Making of Haiti", in *The Black Jacobins Reader*, edited by Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg, 60-69 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), in Sepinwall, "Beyond The Black Jacobins", 13.

been more preoccupied with the changes that James made from the 1938 edition to the 1963 edition, then with how James originally came to write it.

The second reason scholars have taken an interest in James's portrayal of Toussaint Louverture, is the fact that James was a Marxist. A central debate within Marxist historiography more generally has been in what ways Marxism can account for human agency in the historical process, and the scholarly debate on James has reflected that. *The Black Jacobins*, while a sophisticated analysis of the economic forces at play in the Haitian Revolution, is also in large part a story about the political personality of Toussaint Louverture. It is this combination of biography and history, material forces and political personality, that is so striking about *The Black Jacobins*. Scholars have therefore been interested in how (and if) James's portrayal of Toussaint's role in the revolution fits into a Marxist framework. Two radically different interpretations have emerged here. At the one end of the spectrum there is Brian Meeks, who has argued that James is on the verge of Marxian heresy in his depiction of Toussaint Louverture. According to Meeks, James's Marxist method cannot fully explain the role of individuals in James's narrative:

James, in his study, adheres formally to a marxian position, but his honest reading of the San Domingo revolution, his own sensitivity to the colonial and critically, racial questions, carry him to the verge of severance with the marxist canon. In the end James remains a marxist, but in order to do so, he elevates the individual and agency to levels unprecedented in classical Marxism.⁴³

Meeks argues that Toussaint's role in *The Black Jacobins* is not based on a materialist interpretation, but a psychological one: James is not able to explain Toussaint's rise to power based on a strict materialistic explanation alone, and this is where James abandons his Marxian position. Meeks argues that by doing so, James creates his own method, a peculiar "Jamesian" theory aimed at explaining the role of intellectuals in revolution.

In the end, it is a most un-materialist psychological theory on the formation of the individual which has to be called on to explain Toussaint's character and, out of this, his profound impact on subsequent events. ... This psychological approach is carried

⁴³ Meeks, "RE-READING THE BLACK JACOBINS", 81.

over into a specifically Jamesian and equally non-materialist theory to explain the role of intellectuals in revolutionary situations.⁴⁴

Meeks' reading of *The Black Jacobins* suggests that there are two "methods" operating in James's narrative: the first being the one that James "formally adheres" to, his materialist method, the second one, which appears to contradict the first, born out of James's personal sensitivity to the events that he describes.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is Nick Nesbitt, who has attempted to overcome this perceived dichotomy between James's "veritably Shakespearean, idealist hagiography" of Toussaint on the one hand, and his "radically materialist, Marxist analysis" of revolution on the other.⁴⁵ While not completely "ignoring the former", as he put it, Nesbitt argues that it is possible to read the text "from start to finish and to the letter as the purely materialist, deterministic construction of a historical conjuncture, that of the Haitian Revolution understood as a composition of heterogenous apparatuses and bodies, each with their own powers and effects, rather than as the heroic struggle and conscious intentionality of subjects of freedom".⁴⁶ Nesbitt argues that James's individuals, including Toussaint, should not be understood as real and complex human beings making individual choices, but rather as a product of the historical laws that made the revolution possible in the first place. As such, he argues, James's explanation for how the revolution unfolded has nothing to do with the interiority of the individuals he describes, they are merely reduced to "cause and effect". "The human, for this materialist James", Nesbitt argues, "is not located in the romantic interiority of a consciousness ... but in the transient configuration of powers and effects in a singular body".⁴⁷

In this thesis, I want to object to both these interpretations, although for different reasons. Against Nesbitt I argue that while James understood individuals to be a product of historical development, he nevertheless assigned individual personality an important causal factor in the chain of events that was the Haitian Revolution (in that sense I agree with Meeks' interpretation). The problem with Nesbitt's interpretation, is that in his attempt to "solve" this perceived duality of *The Black Jacobins*, he loses an essential part of James's method, which was precisely James's attempt to understand the effects that individuals have on a historic

⁴⁴ Meeks, "RE-READING THE BLACK JACOBINS", 97-98.

⁴⁵ Nesbitt, "Fragments of a Universal History", 143.

⁴⁶ Nesbitt, "Fragments of a Universal History", 143.

⁴⁷ Nesbitt, "Fragments of a Universal History", 145.

process, as well as the relationship between personality and social forces.⁴⁸ Against Meeks on the other hand, I argue that while he is right that James applied a psychological approach to Toussaint, he is wrong in thinking that there exist two different “methods” in *The Black Jacobins*. My point here is not to argue against Meek’s claim that James’s sensitivity to the colonial question or his interest in the human personality had an impact on his analysis of the Haitian Revolution. On the contrary, I would argue that these two characteristics define all of James’s writing. My point is rather that James understood his focus on objective historical forces and individual personality to be one and the same method. There is a tendency in the literature to treat James’s portrayal of Toussaint as a “residue” of James’s literary studies, something that he was not quite able to “shake off” even as he became a Marxist. However, to James, there was no contradiction between human agency and Marxism. In fact, James argued that “Marxists believe in the predominant role of the objective forces of history, and for that very reason are best able to appreciate the progressive or retarding influence of human personality”.⁴⁹

Furthermore, I argue that James’s method and his portrayal of Toussaint Louverture was fundamentally shaped by how James came to Marxism. As has already been mentioned, James became a Marxist through reading Leon Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* and this happened in the same period that he wrote *The Black Jacobins*. The *History* is significant here, because as has been noted by Christian Høgsbjerg, Trotsky explicitly stressed the crucial role played by Lenin in “making” the October Revolution.⁵⁰ While Trotsky emphasized the larger economic forces at work in the Russian Revolution, he also argued that Lenin played an indispensable role in the revolution’s success. James’s interpretation of Marxism was therefore from the very beginning shaped by Trotsky’s ability to combine objective historical forces with individual initiatives. Therefore, instead of locating James’s portrayal of Toussaint Louverture outside of James’s Marxism, I argue that it should be understood as the result of a particular interpretation of Marxism that James inherited from Trotsky.

It is also interesting to note that the scholarly debate on James’s *Black Jacobins* and Trotsky’s *History* sort of mirrors each other. They have both been criticized for overplaying the “genius” of their leaders and for having contradictions in their method. For instance, Robert D. Warth, in a similar manner as Brian Meeks, has argued that: “Though espousing the

⁴⁸ Bogue, *Caliban’s Freedom* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 24.

⁴⁹ James, *World Revolution* (1937; reis., Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 126.

⁵⁰ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 172.

superiority of dialectical materialism as the key to history's secrets, he (Trotsky) nevertheless has contradictions in his *History*, at times psychological and at times moralistic, which an orthodox Marxist must find hard to accept".⁵¹ But they have also been interpreted the opposite way. Just like Nesbitt argued that James's method should be understood as a "purely materialist deterministic" model, Steve Rigby has argued that Trotsky's method is just another example of "productive force determinism".⁵² The similarities in the scholarly debate on Trotsky's *History* and James's *Black Jacobins* is yet another reason why I think much can be gained from looking at these two works in conjunction with each other, specifically, how one of these books impacted the other.

Research topic and arguments

Trotsky's *History* was a book that in many ways served as a model for James's *Black Jacobins*. There are many similarities between *The Black Jacobins* and Trotsky's *History*, both in terms of style and structure. Certain passages are similar, and the chapters follow a similar structure. Throughout *The Black Jacobins*, James also creatively builds on Trotsky's *History* by making explicit comparisons with the Russian Revolution at a number of crucial moments. He draws many parallels between the leadership of the Haitian Revolution and the Russian Revolution, particularly between Toussaint and Lenin. In these comparisons Lenin often figure as the epitome of a revolutionary leader, highlighting what Toussaint should and should not have done.⁵³ However, these parallels between Toussaint and Lenin are more than just superficial similarities. What I want to argue here is that Trotsky's *History* had a fundamental impact on James's conception of history and historical development and that this in turn shaped his portrayal of Toussaint.

James first conceived of the idea of writing about Toussaint Louverture while he was still living in Trinidad. Exactly when and how it first entered his mind is unclear, and James himself has been rather mysterious regarding his initial motivations for writing about the revolution, other than that he wanted to show people that "blacks could do things".⁵⁴ What is clear however is that he first only envisioned it as a biography about Toussaint Louverture. In

⁵¹ Warth, "Leon Trotsky: Writer and Historian", 36.

⁵² Rigby, *Marxism and History* (Manchester University Press, 1998), quoted in Blackledge, "Leon Trotsky's Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History", 3.

⁵³ Douglas, *Making The Black Jacobins*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press), 93.

⁵⁴ James, "Autobiography, Section 4, 1932-38", University of the West Indies (UWI), Box 14, file 309, quoted in Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, "Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*", 4.

his 1971 Atlanta lectures, James recalled that “I had decided – God only knows why, I don’t, and I rather doubt if even He would too – that I would write a history of Toussaint L’Ouverture. Why? I don’t know. ... I had made up my mind, for no other reason than a literary reason, that when I reached England I would settle down to write a history of Toussaint L’Ouverture”.⁵⁵ However, when James reached England in the spring of 1932, a radical transformation occurred.⁵⁶ Within a year, he had joined the Trotskyist movement and as he himself put it, “Fiction-writing drained out of me and was replaced by politics. I became a Marxist, a Trotskyist”.⁵⁷

After James’s turn to Trotskyism, the concept for his book had changed.⁵⁸ The revolution in Saint-Domingue was no longer just an inspiring slave-rebellion, it had become one of the most radical revolutions in the age of bourgeois revolutions.⁵⁹ James now argued that the slaves of Saint-Domingue had played a crucial part in the destruction of European feudalism. Although *The Black Jacobins* retained some of its biographical focus on Toussaint (hence the subtitle “Toussaint Louverture *and* the Haitian Revolution”), he was now situated within a larger historical movement. So, while James had intended for years to write a biography about Toussaint Louverture, his turn to Trotskyism and revolutionary politics would alter his analytical framework, in turn assigning new meaning to Toussaint’s leadership. I therefore argue that Trotsky’s *History* had a fundamental impact on James’s re-imagining of Toussaint’s historical role. As James himself has explained:

So when I reached Nelson I began to import books from France on the history of the black Jacobins. I sent for the French catalogues that I had been reading in the Caribbean and I sent for all the books that dealt with it, and I got them and began to read them and collect my material. But I also read very carefully Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*, volume one.⁶⁰

More specifically, I argue that Trotsky’s portrayal of Lenin’s role in the Russian Revolution had a crucial influence on how James conceptualized Toussaint’s role in the Haitian Revolution. In his *History*, Trotsky argued that it was doubtful whether the Russian

⁵⁵ James, “Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*”, 67-68.

⁵⁶ Schwarz, “Haiti and Historical Time”, 97.

⁵⁷ James, *Beyond a Boundary* (1963; reis., London: Penguin Random House, 2019)

⁵⁸ Schwarz, “Haiti and Historical Time”, 97.

⁵⁹ Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, “Introduction: Re-thinking *The Black Jacobins*”, 13.

⁶⁰ James, “Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*”, 67-68.

Revolution would have succeeded without Lenin's leadership. While the Russian workers were already a strong revolutionary force in their own right, they lacked leadership. What Lenin had to do, and so successfully did, was to convince the moderate forces within the Bolshevik Party that now was the time for action. The problem was that the Bolshevik Party was not revolutionary enough and if Lenin had not persuaded them to take action, the revolutionary opportunity could have been easily missed.⁶¹ While Trotsky maintained that Lenin could only play the role that he did because the objective situation was ripe for a proletarian insurrection, he also argued that Lenin had acted as a "great link" in the causal chain leading up to the October Revolution. Lenin's role during the Russian Revolution was therefore to step into "a chain of objective historic forces" and actually speed up the historical process.⁶² This led Trotsky to conclude that at certain moments, individuals could play a significant role in shaping the course of history.

While the situation surrounding the Haitian Revolution and the Russian Revolution was obviously not identical (for example, there was no specially trained vanguard or international socialist movement in Saint-Domingue), Toussaint has a strikingly similar role in James's narrative as Lenin has in Trotsky's *History*. It was only through Toussaint's leadership that the scattered gangs of rebel slaves were united into a strong and self-aware revolutionary force. If not for the actions of Toussaint Louverture, the revolutionary opportunity in Saint-Domingue created by the French Revolution, could have been easily missed. However, Toussaint could only take the revolutionary opportunity when it presented itself. James is very clear on the "vast impersonal forces" at work in Saint-Domingue and that individuals can only act within this parameter. I therefore argue that in *The Black Jacobins*, Toussaint Louverture has the same historical role as Lenin has in Trotsky's *History*. Toussaint, like Lenin, appear as a "great link" in the causal chain leading up to Haitian independence.

It is important to note that neither Trotsky nor James were scholarly historians, but revolutionary Marxists. Therefore, they are less concerned with the details of events than with understanding the dynamics of revolution.⁶³ As Marxists, both Trotsky and James believed that history is governed by certain laws and that the historian's task is to identify these laws. This also has political significance, as it is imperative for their political projects to understand what happened in these revolutions. More specifically, their historical analysis is directed towards identifying what processes were significant to how the events unfolded, and this in

⁶¹ Blackledge, "Leon Trotsky's Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History", 24.

⁶² Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 238.

⁶³ Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 68.

turn creates the foundation for their political program. It is within this context that we must understand Trotsky and James's analysis of Lenin and Toussaint. When James and Trotsky conclude that Toussaint and Lenin were vital for how the revolution unfolded, then individual leadership in a revolutionary process becomes singularly important, because now the success of a revolutionary process is in large part decided by the specific individuals involved. Trotsky and James are therefore not only interested in analyzing what happened, but also what should have happened and why it did not happen that way. The parallels that James draws between the Haitian Revolution and the Russian Revolution serves to highlight this and is intended to educate those reading the book on how revolutions are won and lost.

Primary sources and method

This is a historiographical thesis and therefore my primary sources are Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, originally published in 1930 (although an English translation did not appear until 1932) and the original 1938 edition of James's *Black Jacobins*. Since this thesis is concerned with how James originally conceptualized Toussaint's role in the Haitian Revolution, I will not be doing any comparison between the 1938 and 1963 edition. Another important primary source is a series of lectures that James held at the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta in 1971, which has already been referenced several times in this text. From June 15 through June 19, James held in total six lectures at the Institute and three of these were transcribed and published by the Caribbean studies journal *Small Axe* in 2000.⁶⁴ The three lectures that were published all center around *The Black Jacobins*, with James covering topics such as how he wrote *The Black Jacobins*, how he would re-write it as well as a comparison between *The Black Jacobins* and W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* (1935). While these lectures took place more than three decades after James first published his study, they provide valuable insights into James' own thoughts and ideas about the book as well as his motivations for writing it. And since James was a political thinker with very clear objectives in mind, it has been an important part of this thesis methodology to take his words into account.⁶⁵

Other important primary sources are a book that James wrote about the Communist International in 1937, titled *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the*

⁶⁴ Nielsen, "On the Wings of Atalanta", 301.

⁶⁵ Douglas, *Making The Black Jacobins* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 13.

Communist International as well as an article that James published in 1940 discussing Trotsky's legacy, titled "Trotsky's Place in History". This article has been of particular value to this thesis because in it, James provides a detailed account of his thoughts on Trotsky's *History*. As for secondary sources, an important part of this thesis methodology has been to consult a wide variety of Marxist literature. In order to understand Trotsky and James's "internal logic", it has been necessary to not only consult literature on Marxist historiography but also literature written by Marxist theoreticians or historians. What I discovered early on in the process was that strictly reading literature written from a non-Marxist point of view made it difficult to grasp the complexities of Trotsky and James's analysis. I have therefore to the best of my abilities tried to combine both an outsider and an insider perspective in my analysis of both Trotsky and James's work.

Finally, there are two more things that need to be said about this thesis. First, this thesis will say nothing about what "really" happened in these revolutions. James and Trotsky's narrative will be taken as given, as the point is not to challenge their interpretations, but to explain it. Secondly, this thesis will in no way attempt to make an argument on what Marxism "is". If anything, I hope this thesis shows that Marxism is not a monolith: it has been applied in a variety of ways by different Marxist historians. My only concern is to demonstrate in what ways Trotsky's portrayal of Lenin influenced the way that James conceptualized Toussaint's role in the Haitian Revolution, not to pass judgement on whether Trotsky and James's method breaks with Marxist methodology or not. That being said, there are some key concepts that are shared by all Marxists (although they can be understood in different ways), which I will discuss in part I of this thesis.

PART I: MARXISM AS REVOLUTIONARY PRACTICE

The most important thing to understand about Trotsky and James, is that as Marxists, they already had a particular interpretation of how history developed. Within the Marxist theory of history, history is seen as an ongoing dialectical process in which the inherent conflict between forces and relations of production, a conflict which takes the form of a class struggle, leads to a classless (or communist) society.⁶⁶ Since it is this theory that forms the basis for James and Trotsky's historical analysis and their political program, this chapter will outline some of the most fundamental features of Marx's historical materialism. I will particularly emphasize how this theory is related to revolutionary politics. While Marx claimed that he had uncovered the "inner workings" of human history, and as such he viewed his theory as a scientific discovery, this was done with the intent that it would inform revolutionary practice.⁶⁷ As Georg Iggers has explained, "while Marxism views itself as a scientific form of socialism, it sees science not in terms of neutral objectivity, but as political, specifically, revolutionary, practice".⁶⁸ As for the structure of this chapter, I will focus on three important concepts: the origin and meaning of Marx's dialectical approach to history, Marx's conception of historical change and his concept of class struggle.

I. I. From idealism to materialism

Marx's dialectical materialism grew out of his critical engagement with the German idealist philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). In 1844, Marx referred to Hegel's philosophical epic *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as "the true birthplace and secret of his (Marx's) philosophy".⁶⁹ Hegel's concept of a world Spirit (translated from the German word *Weltgeist* and sometimes translated to Mind instead of Spirit) refer to a kind of universal consciousness which every other being on earth is merely a limited manifestation of.⁷⁰ In its

⁶⁶ Iggers, "The Marxist Tradition of Historiography in the West", 20-21.

⁶⁷ Perry, *Marxism and History*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 32.

⁶⁸ Iggers, "The Marxist Tradition of Historiography in the West", 21.

⁶⁹ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 98, quoted in Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 16.

⁷⁰ According to Peter Singer it is uncertain whether Hegel thought that this universal consciousness was God or if he identified God with the world as a whole. Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 16-17.

limited form as the consciousness of individual people, world Spirit is not aware of its universal nature. History for Hegel was therefore the progressive development of universal consciousness from unconscious to self-conscious, and he argued that this process was dialectical.⁷¹ Dialectics is a philosophical concept in which the antagonism between a thesis and its antithesis generates conflict and when this conflict is solved, it transcends its original form and reaches a higher state, beginning the dialectic process anew until it reaches perfect unity (synthesis).

Hegel's most famous example of this process is his master and slave analogy: say you have two individual people who are not aware of their common nature as part of the same universal consciousness. Instead of recognizing their shared nature, they see each other as rivals. The situation is therefore unstable, leading to a struggle where one of the individuals conquers and enslaves the other. However, this situation is also unstable, because as the slave works the land, he asserts his own consciousness over the natural world and as a result, he develops his own self-consciousness. He begins to understand that there is no fundamental difference between him and his master. The master on the other hand has only become dependent on his slave. While it initially seemed like the master was everything and the slave was nothing, the slave has now developed greater levels of self-consciousness than his master. There is a contradiction. The solution to this contradiction occurs when the slave is liberated and the initial conflict between the two individuals are solved.⁷² Hegel believed that all history developed according to this principle.

As the minds of particular people, world Spirit does not see itself as part of the same universal consciousness. It is therefore alienated from itself. In practice this means that while all people are manifestations of the same universal mind, they do not recognize themselves as such. Instead, they see other human beings as something foreign and hostile, even though they are all part of the same great whole. As long as Spirit is unaware of its true nature it cannot be free, for in its alienated state it continues to encounter obstacles to its own complete development. In *The Phenomenology* Hegel traces this development, as it progresses through higher and higher stages of consciousness until it finally transcends its limited form as it comes to realize its own universal nature. This is necessary because when Spirit does not know itself for what it really is, it cannot use its powers to organize the world in accordance

⁷¹ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 16-17.

⁷² Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 17-18.

with its own plan.⁷³ The goal of history for Hegel is therefore the liberation of universal consciousness from its alienated state.

Marx studied Hegel as part of a philosophical group called The Young Hegelians. This group stripped down Hegel's philosophy of history to what they perceived to be its core, which was the liberation of universal consciousness from alienation. However, they rejected Hegel's idea of a universal consciousness and instead began to treat Spirit as a collective term for all human minds. In their reinterpretation of Hegel, the goal of history was not the liberation of universal consciousness from alienation, but rather the liberation of real human beings from whatever illusions prevented them from seeing themselves for what they really were. Under the influence of the German philosopher and theologian Bruno Bauer, Marx at first argued that the chief illusion standing in the way of human liberation was religion. He argued that it was not God that was the world's highest divinity, but man himself. However, as long as man imagined that God had an independent existence it was impossible for humans to recognize this within themselves. The practical task for philosophers like Bauer and Marx was therefore to criticize religion and show people that God was their own creation. Only then could man end his subordination to God and his alienation from his own true nature. However, over time, Marx began to see economic life, and not religious ideas, as the chief form of human alienation.⁷⁴ He therefore rejected the idealism of the Young Hegelians for a materialist conception of history in which the main cause of human alienation and suffering was not to be found in human thoughts or ideas, but in man's relationship to the material world.

More specifically, Marx argued that it was economic life, in the form of private property, that alienated human beings from their true nature. In contrast to classical economists, Marx believed that private property, competition, and greed was not something essential to human nature, but a product of human development itself.⁷⁵ As such, it was a historical phenomenon that could be overcome. The reason why private property was a problem for Marx, was because he saw free labor as the essence of humanity. It was through laboring to satisfy their material needs that humans began to distinguish themselves from animals. He also argued that this was a social act: it was through working together to change their environment that humans transformed themselves from a natural to a social being. Therefore, it was through the process of producing socially that our ancestors became human. It is important to note here

⁷³ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 18-20.

⁷⁴ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 21-27.

⁷⁵ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 34.

that Marx did not see human nature as transhistorical: while man was a natural being with certain instincts and capabilities, these were not “fixed” once and for all, but constantly evolving as man labored to transform the natural world. Marx therefore saw production, and not thoughts, as the basis of human development, because language and ideas had grown out of the production process.⁷⁶ He therefore contrasted his materialist philosophy of history against the Hegelian idealistic philosophy where history was the development of World Spirit from unconscious to self-conscious: “in contrast to German philosophers which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven”, Marx argued.⁷⁷

However, as history progressed, man had become increasingly alienated from his true nature. With the development of private property and different social classes, man no longer produced freely. Alienation through production occurred because human beings no longer had control over the things that they produced. When this was taken away from them, they produced not for themselves but for others, and they had therefore become alienated from their true essence. The development of different social classes also meant that human beings were in constant competition with one another. Thus, a consequence of humans becoming alienated from their true nature was that they were also alienated from each other. When humans no longer recognized their shared nature, they only saw each other as instruments to be used to further their own selfish interests. In this state of alienation, it was impossible for human beings to be free, because they were unable to organize the world to satisfy their needs and realize their own potential. So, while private property was a human creation, human beings had now become enslaved by it. The goal of history for Marx was therefore to destroy that which had turned man against himself, which was private property, so that humanity could liberate itself. Communism was therefore the solution to the “antagonism between man and nature and man and man”.⁷⁸

For Marx, however, criticism and philosophy alone were not enough to liberate humanity, a material force was required. Marx argued that this force was the proletariat. The reason for this was that while the property-owning middle class could win freedom for themselves based on their rights of property, this would exclude all other classes from freedom. The property-less working class on the other hand, possessed nothing but their “title as human beings”.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 22-23.

⁷⁷ Marx, *The German Ideology*, 48-49, quoted in Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 22.

⁷⁸ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 36-38.

⁷⁹ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 29-30.

Therefore, the only way that they could liberate themselves was if they liberated all of humanity as well. Since human alienation was a universal problem, and not just the problem of a single class, whatever solved it must also have a universal character. The proletariat, because of its complete degradation, had that universal character. By alleviating its own suffering, it would end the suffering of all mankind. Marx conceived of private property and the proletariat as two sides of a Hegelian contradiction: one could not exist without the other. The existence of private property was dependent on the existence of a property-less working class that could work in the factories. The proletariat on the other hand, who suffered under these conditions, was compelled to destroy it. The result of this contradiction was that both private property and the proletariat (antithesis) would “disappear” and be “replaced” by communism (synthesis).⁸⁰

At its core, the Marxist theory of history is a theory of liberation. Marx believed that in their present state, human beings were not free. With the development of private property, human beings had become enslaved by their own productive powers and as a result they suffered under various forms of exploitation and oppression. The materialist conception of history is also a practical philosophy: the contradiction inherent in the human condition, which is a contradiction between man’s nature and his productive life, can only be solved by the actions of human beings themselves. These two insights: alienation through production and the role of the proletariat in the liberation of humanity forms the basis of Marx’s philosophy of history.⁸¹ However, to Marx, it was not enough to simply describe what was wrong with society: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways”, he argued, “the point is to change it”.⁸² With this in mind, he developed a model of world history that could explain how history developed. Central to this project was his periodization of history into a series of modes of production. Two concepts were essential for Marx here: forces of production and relations of production.

I. II. Forces of production and relations of production

Mode of production is a term that describes the material forces of production and the corresponding relations of production within a particular historical epoch. The material forces

⁸⁰ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 30, 40.

⁸¹ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 30-44.

⁸² Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, thesis eleven, quoted in Iggers, “The Marxist Tradition of Historiography in the West”, 21.

of production (or simply just “productive forces”) include the means of production, such as instruments of production and raw materials, and the labor-power needed to utilize these instruments and raw materials.⁸³ Relations of production refers to the social relations that human beings must enter into in order to produce what they need to survive. Out of these two concepts, it is the forces of production that is the most fundamental, because it is the productive forces that determine what kind of relations of production that develop. For example, feudal relations of production developed because they fostered the growth of the productive forces of feudal times.⁸⁴ This concept was applicable to all historical epochs: “The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist”.⁸⁵ Marx argued that it is these social relations, and not the productive forces themselves, that make up the economic structure of society. It is from this economic structure, or “base” as Marx often referred to it, that state, religion, morality – essentially all aspects of society – emerges from.⁸⁶

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.⁸⁷

Forces of production and relations of production was therefore essential to Marx because it was these two concepts that allowed him to periodize history. Since Marx defined human beings as socially producing animals, he also believed that it was possible to distinguish between different historical epochs based on the kind of social production that dominated

⁸³ Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 27.

⁸⁴ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 49.

⁸⁵ McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 202, quoted in Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 49.

⁸⁶ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 48.

⁸⁷ Marx, preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 173, quoted in Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 39.

within each. Each mode of production was therefore characterized by its distinct form of forces and relations of production, and this is what constitutes the essence of human nature within a particular historical epoch.⁸⁸ According to Marx, there are five major historical modes of production: primitive communism, the ancient mode of production, the Asiatic mode of production, feudalism and capitalism.⁸⁹ These epochs are stages of economic development and history progresses through them as one stage provides the material precondition for the next. The capitalist (or bourgeois) mode of production is the last epoch because this is the stage that provides the material conditions necessary for a solution to the antagonism between man's nature and his productive life. With the transition to communism, the prehistory of mankind has ended, and humanity enters a new historical age.⁹⁰

In other words, it was Marx's concept of forces and relations of production that allowed him to grasp historical change. To Marx, history developed according to the changing relationship between forces and relations of production, and this is what explained the rise and fall of civilizations and the transition from one historical epoch to another. While each historical epoch is determined by its mode of production, over time, the material forces of production develop to the point where they come into conflict with the existing relations of production. When this happens, the social system enters into a crisis which will either lead to a revolutionary reorganization of society or societal stagnation or regression.⁹¹ Marx describes this phenomenon in the following way:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production ... From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.⁹²

While the inherent conflict between forces of production and relations of production inevitably produces a society in crisis, it also produces the possibility for transformation in the

⁸⁸ Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 27.

⁸⁹ Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 38-39.

⁹⁰ Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 27.

⁹¹ Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 37-38.

⁹² Marx, "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works, vol. 29* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975-2004), quoted in Blackledge "Historical Materialism", 3.

form of revolutionary movements. Revolutionary movements therefore develop as a response to the structural crises created by the contradiction between forces and relations of production.⁹³ Sooner or later, this possibility for transformation will necessitate a transformation from one historical epoch to another. From this, Marx generalized that great historical transformations occur when the existing relations of production no longer promote the growth of the productive forces.⁹⁴

Marx's emphasis on the necessity of revolutionary transformation has often led to historical materialism being depicted as a deterministic and teleological model. It is essentially a question about the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure. If changes in the forces of production provide the impetus for the whole historical movement, in what ways do elements that belong to the superstructure, such as thoughts, ideas and personality, impact historical development? And if the development of revolutionary movements is inevitable, in what ways do the actions of humans themselves impact the outcome of the revolutionary process? The truth is that Marx himself was very ambiguous on this topic. In some texts he spoke of "iron necessities" leading to "inevitable results", while in other texts, like *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), he is much more flexible, emphasizing how ideas and personalities affect the historical process.⁹⁵ *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is the closest Marx ever came to writing history, which might suggest that he was more deterministic in theory than he was in practice.⁹⁶ What this means is that it is possible to find justification for both these views in Marx's writing. The consequence of this is that Marxist historians and theoreticians have disagreed strongly among themselves on the role of human consciousness in the process of historical change.⁹⁷

⁹³ Blackledge, «Historical Materialism», 4.

⁹⁴ Blackledge, «Historical Materialism», 8; Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 238, 241.

⁹⁵ Iggers, "The Marxist Tradition of Historiography in the West", 24; Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 50.

⁹⁶ *The Eighteenth Brumaire* concerns itself with a short period in French history, the period between the February revolution of 1848 and Louis Bonaparte's coup d'état of 2 December 1851. Unlike his other works, where historical examples were used to illustrate his theory of history, here Marx applied his historical materialism in order to explain the actual course of events. Among other things, he stressed the personality cult of Napoleon as an important causal factor for why the working class had not been victorious. See Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 48; Iggers, "The Marxist Tradition of Historiography in the West", 24; Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 50.

⁹⁷ Maza, *Thinking About History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 167.

I. III. Class struggle

It is important to note that for Marx, relations of production were inherently exploitative because they grow out of a division of labor. The division of labor created different social classes, divided between those who control the means of production and those who provide the labor (or those who exploit and those who are being exploited). At first, these divisions merely reflected natural predispositions: in hunter-gatherer societies labor was divided between the sexes. However, over time, it developed into a division between mental and manual labor, which is what allowed one group of people to live off the work of others. From this division there emerged a new class that slowly gained control over the production process.⁹⁸ Class is therefore not a subjective category to Marx: it is a historical phenomenon that was created through the division of labor. Class is not determined by people feeling like they belong to the same class, it is an objective “expression of the fact of exploitation”, as Geoffrey de Ste. Croix put it.⁹⁹ To Marx, to control someone else’s productive powers is by itself exploitation. Different classes exist because in every society there is someone who controls the means of production and someone who provides the labor - and these groups have contradictory material interests. The possessing classes who thrive on the exploitation of others, wishes to preserve the status quo, while the laboring classes, who suffer under different forms of exploitation, wishes to uproot it. Marx argued that the tensions born out of these contradictory material interests inevitable led to class struggle.¹⁰⁰

While history develops according to changes in the relationship between forces and relations of production, the antagonism between these two forces is expressed as antagonism between the classes. This is the sentiment behind Marx’s famous phrase in the *Communist Manifesto*: “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another”.¹⁰¹ Class struggle therefore constituted a fundamental truth about human existence in its alienated state. It also took on many different forms, such as strikes, riots, mutinies, slave rebellions and revolutions.

⁹⁸ Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 8, 28.

⁹⁹ St. Croix, “Class in Marx’s Conception of History”, 43-44, quoted in Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 44.

¹⁰¹ Marx and Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975-2005), 482, quoted in Blackledge, “Historical Materialism”, 4.

In order to explain the resistance to exploitation, Marx made a distinction between a class-in-itself, in the objective sense, and a class-for-itself, which was a class that had become aware of its own material interests. In times of revolution “this awareness is raised to new heights” and the class struggle is drawn out into the open for all to see.¹⁰² While class struggle is always present, it only becomes an open fight during a revolution. In times of social stability, the class struggle is “hidden”, only to re-emerge with explosive power once the social structure enters a crisis. As Marx put it in the *Communist Manifesto*, the class struggle is “carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes”.¹⁰³

What Marx did when he periodized history, was to provide the framework that the class struggle operates within.¹⁰⁴ In order to change society, it was necessary to understand what stage the present situation was in its dialectical progress to liberation. Only then would it be possible to encourage revolutionary movements that could foster that development.¹⁰⁵ Revolutionary politics thus lies at the heart of Marx’s theory of history because the purpose of explaining the historical process is so that it can inform revolutionary practice.¹⁰⁶ In short: the purpose of determining what is historically possible, is to determine what is politically possible.

¹⁰² Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 45.

¹⁰³ Marx and Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975-2005), 482, quoted in Blackledge, “Historical Materialism”, 5, quoted in Blackledge, “Historical Materialism”, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 28-29.

¹⁰⁵ Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 37-38.

¹⁰⁶ Blackledge, «Historical Materialism», 2.

PART II: LEON TROTSKY'S HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* grew out of Trotsky's own experiences in 1917 as well as his conflict with Stalin during the 1920s as leader of the Left Opposition, which led to him being expelled from the Soviet Union in 1929. The first half of this chapter will therefore provide an overview of Trotsky's political life as well as the different objectives he had in mind when he wrote his history of the revolution. In the second half of this chapter, I will delve into Trotsky's actual analysis of the Russian Revolution. I have placed special emphasis on three key concepts: uneven and combined development, the role of the party and the role of the masses. The reason for that is that these concepts are central to understanding how Trotsky conceptualized Lenin's role in the Russian Revolution. The chapter ends with my discussion on Trotsky's portrayal of Lenin.

II. I. Leon Trotsky: a portrait

Lev Davydovich Bronstein, later known under the pseudonym Trotsky, was born on 26 October 1879, in the province of Kherson in southern Ukraine. After attending primary school in Odessa, his father sent him to study in Nikolaev to prepare for university entrance. However, in Nikolaev Trotsky discovered politics and he quickly began to neglect his studies in favor of revolutionary activities. In 1879 he joined his friends in organizing a worker's cell called the South Russia Worker's Union and immediately began to publish revolutionary pamphlets. However, their work came to a halt in 1898 following over 200 arrests, and Trotsky spent the next two years in prison until he was put on trial and sentenced to two years of exile in Siberia.¹⁰⁷ It was during these years of prison and exile that Trotsky would take his final step towards Marxism. While in a transit prison in Moscow he read Lenin's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899) and reoriented himself as a Social Democrat. In Siberia he began writing proclamations and pamphlets for a Social Democratic organization called the Siberian Union, and when he heard that Lenin, Julii Martov and other leading émigré Social Democrats had launched a new newspaper called *Iskra*, he decided to escape from exile. He arrived in London in October 1902 and began working for *Iskra* immediately.

¹⁰⁷ Swain, *Trotsky: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 5-12.

In 1903 the Social Democrats split into a Bolshevik and a Menshevik faction due to a disagreement among the party leadership on rules for party membership. Trotsky sided with the Mensheviks as he was critical of what he deemed Lenin's overly dictatorial policies.¹⁰⁸ However, in 1904 he declared himself formally independent and instead began working towards a reconciliation between the Bolshevik and the Menshevik faction.¹⁰⁹

In the Russian Revolution of 1905, Trotsky was as a central participant. When he heard of the Bloody Sunday massacre in January in 1905, in which unarmed workers taking a petition to tsar Nicholas II had been shot down by the palace guards, he returned to Russia immediately. He arrived in February, and in the months that followed, he worked primarily as a revolutionary journalist for different socialist newspapers and journals. As a member of the Soviet of Worker's Deputies, a non-party workers organization that had been created to organize the massive strikes that occurred in October, he was also intimately involved with the strike movement. When the Soviet's chairman Khrustalev-Nosar was arrested in November, Trotsky succeeded him as chairman of the Soviet, but was arrested himself shortly thereafter. He was once again sentenced to exile in Siberia, this time for life, but he managed to escape before reaching his destination.

The 1905 revolution had a profound impact on Trotsky as it was his experiences during this event that led him to develop his distinctive program of permanent revolution. Throughout the 1905 revolution he had observed how the St. Petersburg workers had spontaneously and independently united to protest the tsarist regime. From his observations of the Soviet as an organ of revolutionary government, Trotsky began to consider that the proletariat might play a dominant role in the coming Russian bourgeois-revolution. By doing so, Trotsky challenged the "Orthodox" Marxist dogma that a bourgeois-revolution, that is a revolution which aims to destroy a feudal system, would naturally lead to a bourgeois-democratic government.¹¹⁰ This view was built on Marx's assertion that a bourgeois revolution was a necessary step toward socialism. The reason for this was that countries that had preserved their feudal structure, like Russia, would have to establish capitalism via a bourgeois revolution before being able to wage a proletarian revolution. Trotsky however was now challenging this accepted dogma, by arguing that the liberal phase could be skipped and instead of the revolution being episodic,

¹⁰⁸ Swain, *Trotsky: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 14-16.; Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 28-29.

¹⁰⁹ Warth, «Leon Trotsky: Writer and Historian», 29.

¹¹⁰ "Orthodox" Marxism is a term that refers to the official Marxist doctrine of the Second International, an international organization of socialist parties that was formed in 1889. See Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 53.

that is going through different stages, it would be permanent, moving directly from a bourgeois revolution to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹¹¹

The idea that it was possible to move directly from a bourgeois-revolution to a working-class government without having to go through the stage of a bourgeois-democratic government, makes up the first part of Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution, to this he also added an international element. Once a working-class government had been established, the state would take control over the national economy as a step towards introducing socialism. But this would inevitably come into conflict with the interests of the international bourgeoisie, who, among other things, were anxious to protect the interest payable on loans made to the tsarist regime.¹¹² The new workers government would not only be threatened by the bourgeoisie, but it would also be threatened by counter-revolutionary forces within the Russian peasantry. While Trotsky prophesized that the abolition of feudalism would be met with support from the entire peasantry, he also argued that any changes in legislation to the agricultural economy would be met with opposition by a minority of the peasantry. This meant that the proletariat would eventually have to go into the villages to break up that community of interest "which is undoubtedly to be found among all peasants", but that in turn meant that the peasantry would grow hostile to the proletariat.¹¹³ To these problems, the pressure from the bourgeoisie and the peasantry, there was only one solution: revolution in Europe. To Trotsky, the only way a worker's regime in Russia could survive, was if the revolution spread to Western Europe, creating sympathetic regimes that would support the new Russian government. According to Ian Thatcher, a Russian revolution was therefore "permanent" in two senses for Trotsky:

First, there would be no lengthy period or historical stage separating tsarist Russia from socialism. Second, a socialist revolution in Russia would not seek to confine itself to its national borders, but would try to extend itself internationally. Only when socialism was established across the globe would the "permanent" revolution come to an end.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 36; Swain, *Trotsky: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 26-29.

¹¹² Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 37.

¹¹³ Trotsky, *Results and Prospects* (London: New Park, 1962), 208-209, quoted in Swain, *Trotsky: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 29.

¹¹⁴ Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 37.

In 1917 Trotsky emerged as one of the revolutions most famous leaders, second only to Lenin himself. While Trotsky did not arrive in Russia until May, he went on to play a vital role in the planning and execution of the October Revolution. While Trotsky had a long history of criticizing the centralism of the Bolshevik Party, once formally committed to their policy, he quickly rose through the party ranks.¹¹⁵ In July Lenin had gone into hiding, and Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, two other leading Bolsheviks, had been taken into custody. In their absence it was Trotsky who took on leadership of the Bolshevik group in the Soviet and with Lenin still in hiding, Trotsky became the unofficial spokesman of Bolshevism, no doubt aided by his great oratorical skills. In September he was elected chairman of the Soviet Executive and with Trotsky at its front, the Executive Committee began preparing for insurrection. Once the Bolsheviks had seized power in late October and established a new government, Lenin became chairman of the Council while Trotsky was appointed Commissar of Foreign Affairs.¹¹⁶

While Trotsky played a major role in organizing the October Revolution, it is largely his role as Commissar of War during the Russian Civil War that define his image as hero of the revolution. According to Ian Thatcher, it is not unusual for the Red Victory to be put down to Trotsky's talents. However, while Trotsky did achieve fame for his role in the Civil War, it also had a negative impact on his political influence in the Communist Party. Resentment grew in the party against Trotsky's reliance on tsarist officers and the fact that military personnel had priority over party officials. Some even worried that Trotsky might use his position within the army to stage a Bonapartist coup. It was also during the Civil War that Trotsky's relationship with Stalin began to deteriorate. While their disagreements at the time was largely due to different military principles, there was already an element of personal rivalry between them. After the Civil War ended in 1920, Trotsky's position within the party continued to deteriorate. While still a prominent Bolshevik in the years immediately following the Civil War, he failed to secure support from other leading party officials on several of his policies. Furthermore, his debates with other leading Bolsheviks would often grow quite hostile, further isolating him from the leading circles of the party.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Trotsky first entered the Soviet as a representative of a group called the United Social-Democratic Internationalists (or Inter-Districters), but in July this group joined forces with the Bolsheviks, and that is how Trotsky first became a member of the Bolshevik Party. When Lenin arrived from Switzerland presenting his *April Thesis*, in which he argued that all power should go to the soviets, the political differences that had once separated Trotsky from Bolshevism lost all significance and he joined the Bolsheviks in voting against the formation of a Coalition Government on May 5. Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 83, 86-87.

¹¹⁶ Swain, *Trotsky: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 54-55, 65, 73-78.; Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 82-89.

¹¹⁷ Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 100-109.

After Stalin was appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1922, a position which made him virtually head of state due to the enormous influence he could exert on the party, the relationship between Trotsky and Stalin became even more hostile.¹¹⁸ By 1923 there was a complete breakdown in relations between Trotsky and most of the Politburo and the Central Committee and by 1925 he had been removed from all of his important positions within the Party, including his position as Commissar of War.¹¹⁹ Trotsky however continued in his critique of the policies introduced by the Central Committee, now as a leader of the so-called Left Opposition. The term “Left Opposition” is a reference to how Trotsky understood the political climate within the Communist Party at the time. He visualized Stalin and his closest associates, Zinoviev and Kamenev (also known as the “triumvirate”) to the right of party politics, and himself and his supporters to the left.¹²⁰ In 1924 the conflict also took on an ideological dimension as Stalin launched his doctrine of socialism in one country in opposition to Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution. While Trotsky had argued that the revolution would have to spread to Western Europe for socialism to develop in Russia, Stalin now argued that Russia’s backwardness and isolation was no obstruction to the development of socialism.¹²¹ This was a much more popular line among party officials because it meant that the Soviet Union could focus on building up the country in the wake of the Civil War and not worry about inciting revolution in other countries.¹²²

In 1927 Trotsky was expelled from the Communist Party and he was exiled to Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan in 1928. Following his expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1929 he relocated to the island of Prinkipo, off the coast of Turkey, where he continued his oppositional campaign against Stalin. In 1938 he was ready to take this oppositional campaign a step further and together with his supporters he launched the Fourth International as an alternative to the Communist International under the leadership of the Soviet Union.¹²³ The Fourth International became the center of the international Trotskyist movement in the years that followed, although it never developed beyond a minor oppositional movement. Trotsky’s role as leader of the opposition against Stalin ended abruptly in Mexico in 1940 when he was killed by a soviet agent.

¹¹⁸ Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 120.

¹¹⁹ Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 104-130.

¹²⁰ Twiss, “Trotsky’s Analysis of Stalinism”.

¹²¹ Daniels, *Trotsky, Stalin, and Socialism* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1991), 27.

¹²² Daniels, *Trotsky, Stalin, and Socialism* ((Boulder, Westview Press, 1991).

¹²³ Swain, *Trotsky: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 202-205.

II. II. The *History of the Russian Revolution*

Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* is a work of massive scope, spanning over 900 pages despite covering a timespan of only a few months (it begins with the February Revolution that ended tsarism and ends with the Bolshevik seizure of power in October).¹²⁴ It was originally published in two volumes in Germany in 1930, but an English translation by Max Eastman appeared in 1932 divided into three volumes. It was written shortly after Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1929, on the Turkish island of Prinkipo, and it took him less than a year to finish it.¹²⁵ While the historical value of Trotsky's work has often been called into question due to his professed Marxism, he is generally praised for his abilities as a writer. Robert D. Warth once noted: "If the defects which have been pointed out impair Trotsky's significance as a historian – and they undoubtedly do – they are obscured in his *History* by a sustained power of vivid narration and cogent historical interpretation which has seldom been equaled and almost never surpassed".¹²⁶ Similarly, Peter Beilharz argues that "His (Trotsky) narrative is excellent, his images of the dog-tired proletarian enthusiasm of 1917 are evocative in the extreme. Trotsky fascinates the reader with devices such as the change of tense from past to present correlative with the shift from context to the actual unfolding of events. His is a masterly technique".¹²⁷

While it is Trotsky's unique style as a writer, particularly his colorful descriptions and character-portraits, that has received the bulk of positive attention in the past, the *History* appears to be experiencing somewhat of a renaissance; new articles have appeared over the last few years which attempt to re-evaluate the historical value of Trotsky's analysis of the revolution. In an article published in the journal "Economic & Political Weekly" in March 2017, Kunal Chattopadhyay and Soma Marik describe Trotsky as the "Thucydides of the Russian Revolution", and they argue that "Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* ... makes most of modern research appear not so modern, after all".¹²⁸ Commenting on the fact that the *History* has often been ignored by scholarly historians due to Trotsky's politics, Neil Davidson wrote the following in an article published in the socialist magazine "Jacobin"

¹²⁴ In my edition published by Penguin Random House in 2017 it totals 969 pages, but the number of pages can vary from 1000-1400 depending on which edition you are reading.

¹²⁵ Muldoon, "Leon Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution". *International Socialist Review*. <https://isreview.org/issue/58/leon-troskys-history-russian-revolution-part-1/index.html>

¹²⁶ Warth, "Leon Trotsky: Writer and Historian", 41.

¹²⁷ Beilharz, "Trotsky as Historian", 40.

¹²⁸ Chattopadhyay and Marik, "The Thucydides of the Russian Revolution", 43.

in 2018: “Despite the fact that the *History* is a politically engaged work, recent research support most, if not all, of Trotsky’s assessments and interpretations”.¹²⁹

Trotsky on the other hand made no attempt to hide his political affiliations and like Marx, he saw no contradiction between political practice and scientific objectivity. Trotsky vehemently rejected the notion that historians need to be impartial to the events that they describe, standing upon the wall of a threatened city, “and behold at the same time the besiegers and the besieged”.¹³⁰ Objectivity to Trotsky had nothing to do with the personal character or intentions of the historian, “for which only he himself can vouch”, but was rather located in the method that the historian employed. Historical materialism allowed the historian to enter his analysis with a “scientific conscientiousness, which for its sympathies and antipathies – open and undisguised – seeks support in an honest study of the facts, a determination of their real connections, an exposure of the causal laws of their environment”.¹³¹ Against critics who argued that history could not be scientific because the historian had to collect and interpret his facts, Trotsky argued that the “materialist method disciplines the historian”, because he begins his analysis “from the weighty fact of the social structure”.¹³²

Trotsky therefore contrasted his Marxist method against what he called “the purely psychological school”, or what Matt Perry has referred to as intentionalism, which is the idea that history can be understood as the actions of free individuals pursuing their own interests (or intentions).¹³³ Trotsky argued that this method “which looks upon the tissue of events as an interweaving of the free activities of separate individuals or their groupings” offered a “colossal scope to caprice”.¹³⁴ The problem with this method was that it reduced people’s behavior and actions, and thus also history itself, to the strictly personal and accidental. History written from this point of view could never be “scientific” because the historian had nothing to ground his analysis in the larger structures of historical development. Historical materialism on the other hand, Trotsky argued, began “from the objective to the subjective, from the social to the individual, from the fundamental to the incidental” and this set a strict

¹²⁹ Davidson, “History From Below”. *Jacobin*. 2022-05-18. <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/01/leon-trotsky-russian-revolution-stalin-lenin>

¹³⁰ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), xviii.

¹³¹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), xviii; Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 67.

¹³² Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 67; Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 351-252.

¹³³ Perry, *Marxism and History* ((Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 67.

¹³⁴ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 351.

limit to the “personal whims” of the historian.¹³⁵ To Trotsky, events could “neither be regarded as a series of adventures, nor strung on the thread of a preconceived moral” but “must obey their own laws”. Trotsky argued that “the discovery of these laws is the author’s task” and he continued to insist that Marx’s dialectical approach to history was superior to all other historical methods.¹³⁶

While a historian was not obliged to be impartial to the events that he described, Trotsky nevertheless distinguished between a work of history and a memoir. The reader had a right to expect that the historian did not try to insert himself into the historical account. The *History* was therefore in no way going to be based on his personal experiences or observations, “either in trivial details or in important matters”.¹³⁷ In order to avoid bias, he also subdued his own role in the revolution to the point where it became, as Robert D. Warth has put it, “almost a bias in the opposite direction”.¹³⁸ Baruch Knei-Paz concurs, arguing that “Trotsky bent over backwards in order to keep himself as much out of the narrative as possible – so much so that one could fairly say that a really objective rendering of the events by a different hand would have been less reticent in making Trotsky a central figure”.¹³⁹ This was not because Trotsky was a particularly modest or self-effacing person. On the contrary, Trotsky often treasured his own role in history.¹⁴⁰ But in this instance, it was not Trotsky that was the subject of his work, but the revolution itself. And in the spirit of that great revolution Trotsky was determined to not let his own role in the events obscure the otherwise scientific value of his work. It was of course impossible to remove himself completely from the narrative, so to distinguish his personal role in the revolution from his role as historian, Trotsky adopted a method of referring to himself in the third person:

The circumstance that the author was participant in the events does not free him from the obligation to base his exposition upon historically verified documents. The author speaks of himself, insofar as that is demanded by the course of events, in the third person. And that is not a mere literary form: the subjective tone, inevitable in autobiographies or memoirs, is not permissible in a work of history.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 351-352.

¹³⁶ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), xv.

¹³⁷ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), xvii.

¹³⁸ Warth, “Leon Trotsky: Writer and Historian”, 35.

¹³⁹ Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 499.

¹⁴⁰ Warth, “Leon Trotsky: Writer and Historian”, 1.

¹⁴¹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), xvii.

This does not mean that Trotsky did not have any personal interests in writing about the revolution. First of all, the revolution was his lifework and he wanted to leave for the historical record what he believed to be the single most important event of the twentieth century.¹⁴² An event that set the stage for what would necessarily have to happen in the rest of the world if socialism in Russia (or any other place for that matter) was ever going to be achieved. Secondly, it was written more than 10 years after the revolution and much had transpired between Trotsky and the Soviet leadership since then. While the *History* concerns itself with the events of 1917, it is nevertheless shaped by events in the decade that followed. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

II. III. The Stalinist Falsification of History

The *History of the Russian Revolution* was Trotsky's response to what he viewed as the most pressing political questions of the day, which was to counter what he called "the Stalinist falsification of history", or what would be the title of a book he published in 1937, "The Stalin School of Falsification".¹⁴³ What Trotsky meant by this term was Stalin's attempt at falsifying recent Russian history to fit his own political agenda. More specifically, Trotsky argued that soviet historians under the leadership of Stalin had presented a false narrative of the Russian Revolution. This included the nature of the October Revolution, Trotsky's own role in the events and his relationship to Lenin.¹⁴⁴ Lenin was particularly significant here because as the conflict between Stalin and Trotsky developed "who was the authentic claimant to Lenin's legacy" became a central issue.¹⁴⁵ This began as early as 1924, when Lenin died of a brain haemorrhage. At that point Stalin was still trying to consolidate his power and one way for him to do that was to strengthen his connection to Lenin. When Trotsky began to criticize Stalin and his regime, accusing Trotsky of anti-Leninism was a way to discredit Trotsky and thus strengthen his own claim to power. For Trotsky on the other hand, the legitimacy of his opposition to Stalin rested on the idea that Stalin's regime represented a distortion of Leninism.

As the 1920s progressed, Trotsky was increasingly depicted by Stalin as an agent of counter-revolution and an enemy of the state. Because Trotsky's actual historical role in the

¹⁴² Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 496.

¹⁴³ Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 66.

¹⁴⁴ Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 76-78.; Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 22-23.

¹⁴⁵ Bagues, *Caliban's Freedom* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 30.

Russian Revolution was hard to ignore, instead of trying to suppress it, Stalin attempted to distort the relationship between Trotsky and Lenin. He did this by claiming that Trotsky and Lenin had always been politically opposed to each other.¹⁴⁶ Trotsky was particularly vulnerable to these charges because he had a long history of criticizing certain aspects of Lenin's policies both prior to joining the Bolsheviks in 1917 and during some of the political disputes in the Central Committee after the Bolsheviks had come to power. However, while their relationship could be complicated at times, Lenin never endorsed removing Trotsky from leadership, and by 1923 it became evident that they shared some of the same concerns regarding Stalin and the nature of the Soviet state.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, in the factional struggle between Trotsky's Left Opposition and the "triumvirate" consisting of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev, accusing Trotsky of anti-Leninism was a way to discredit Trotsky by claiming that his was the voice of counter-revolution.

The attempts at destroying Trotsky's reputation varied from personal attacks, such as criticizing him for not attending Lenin's funeral (even though he was suffering from illness at the time), to actually omitting and falsifying some of Lenin's policies. This was done to make it seem like there was a sharp contrast between Trotsky and Lenin's political program. In 1924, the Central Committee asked the Bolshevik and Soviet historian Mikhael Pokrovski and the Institute of Red Professors to write a history of the Russian Revolution that was published in 1927. In this publication, Pokrovski attempted to reconcile Lenin's policies with both Anti-Trotskyism and Stalin's doctrine of socialism in one country.¹⁴⁸ However, in order to create the impression of continuity between Lenin and Stalin, Pokrovski omitted all of Lenin's passages on the necessity of revolution in the West for the survival of socialism in Russia.¹⁴⁹

The debate over the October Revolution was also characterized by a discussion of the relationship between the masses and the party. According to Matt Perry, "in accordance with Stalin's preferences, the masses vanished from 1917 as makers of their own history, now visible only when being herded like the sheep in George Orwell's fable *Animal Farm* by Lenin and the Party".¹⁵⁰ In Trotsky's account, however, the revolution was made through the *interaction* between the masses and the party. Ever since Zinoviev's *History of the Bolshevik Party*, published in 1923, the debate over the October Revolution had increasingly become a story about a correct party line versus the mindless masses. Trotsky's response to this was the

¹⁴⁶ Cox, «Trotsky and His Interpreters», 95.

¹⁴⁷ Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 130-131.

¹⁴⁸ Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 23.

¹⁴⁹ Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 23.

¹⁵⁰ Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 23.

1924 *Lessons of October*, where he argued that even the most revolutionary parties tended to create routine and inertia, and it was only through crises and interactions between masses and leaders that the revolutionary process could go forward.¹⁵¹ In the *History*, Trotsky reiterated this argument, arguing that “Every organization, the revolutionary included, has a tendency to fall behind its social basis”.¹⁵² The Russian Revolution for Trotsky was not a story about an infallible party leading the masses to insurrection. On the contrary, in Trotsky’s account of events, it was the crisis within the leadership that almost cost the revolution its victory.

This is essentially what Trotsky is responding to in the *History*. “Vilified as an agent of counter-revolution” within the international Marxist movement, Trotsky is determined to set the record straight about the October Revolution and his relationship to Lenin.¹⁵³ As such, the *History* should be seen as an act of political intervention.¹⁵⁴ However, while Trotsky clearly wants to counter the Stalinist vilification of him, the *History* is not so much about Trotsky as it is about Lenin. While Trotsky is often depicted as a difficult person, his devotion to Lenin is rarely questioned, even by his enemies.¹⁵⁵ According to Isaac Deutscher, Trotsky’s great biographer, Trotsky’s love and admiration for Lenin was present in all his post-revolutionary utterances on Lenin.¹⁵⁶ This is also evident in Trotsky’s portrayal of Lenin in the *History*, where Lenin appears as the epitome of a revolutionary leader, far beyond all of his contemporaries. While Trotsky wanted to correct the Stalinist distortion of his relationship to Lenin, Lenin is not some “tool” for Trotsky to highlight his own significant role in the revolution. In the *History*, as elsewhere, he places himself in Lenin’s shadow.¹⁵⁷

II. IV. The dynamics of the Russian Revolution

What Trotsky set out to achieve in the *History* was to reconstruct the inner dynamics of the revolutionary process that led to the Bolshevik seizure of power in October. Trotsky emphasized particularly three things here: the peculiar development of Russia, changes in mass psychology and the Bolshevik Party.

¹⁵¹ Chattopadhyay and Marik, “The Thucydides of the Russian Revolution”, 45.

¹⁵² Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 106.

¹⁵³ Muldoon, “Leon Trotsky’s History of the Russian Revolution”. *International Socialist Review*. <https://isreview.org/issue/58/leon-troskys-history-russian-revolution-part-1/index.html>

¹⁵⁴ Chattopadhyay and Marik, “The Thucydides of the Russian Revolution”, 45.

¹⁵⁵ For some examples of this, see Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 247-248.

¹⁵⁶ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 248-250.

¹⁵⁷ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 250.

II. IV. I. Russia's peculiar development

In the *History*, Trotsky set out to explain how the world's first workers' revolution could occur in a "semi-feudal" and "primitive" country like Russia. To understand why this was significant to Trotsky, it is necessary to say a few words about the Russian Revolution itself, and how this event, by simply happening, re-oriented the intellectual landscape of Marxism.¹⁵⁸ Prior to the revolution taking place, the accepted view among orthodox Marxists was that the coming bourgeois revolution would naturally lead to a bourgeois-democratic government. It was believed that the period of liberal democracy was necessary for the working class to grow strong enough to eventually be able to challenge the liberal government and then overthrow it. But it was not deemed possible to go directly from a bourgeois revolution to a proletarian revolution.¹⁵⁹ When this happened anyway, it became necessary for Marxists to develop a new theoretical framework that could explain why the revolution had suddenly developed in an unexpected direction. In the attempts to understand and explain the enigma of the Russian Revolution, new Marxist theories and political programs developed, and one of these were Trotsky's.

While Trotsky had begun developing his political strategy of permanent revolution already in 1905, it was only when he wrote his concrete account of the 1917 revolution that he provided the theoretical basis for this program. As Neil Davidson has explained, in the *History*, Trotsky transformed permanent revolution from a strategy "lacking a complete theoretical basis" into a fully developed theoretical model, that was applicable not only to Russia, but to all countries of a similar development.¹⁶⁰ This theoretical model was built on two historical "laws" as Trotsky calls them, the most fundamental being the law of uneven development. From this law Trotsky developed his own original contribution to the Marxist theory of history, which he called the law of combined development. In the *History*, Trotsky argued that without this law it was impossible to understand the history of Russia or indeed the history of any "backwards" country:

The laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism.

Unevenness, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply

¹⁵⁸ Schwarz, «Haiti and Historical Time», 99.

¹⁵⁹ Swain, *Trotsky: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 26-29.

¹⁶⁰ Davidson, "From Uneven to Combined Development", in *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*, edited by Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice, 21 (London: Pluto, 2006), quoted in Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 77.

and complexly in the destiny of backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law, which for the lack of a better name, we may call the law of combined development – by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combination of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms.¹⁶¹

The underlying principle of Trotsky's law of combined development is that due to the unevenness of historical development, so-called "backward" countries are compelled to adopt the material and intellectual conquests of more advanced countries. This is what Trotsky calls the "privilege of historic backwardness": because "primitive" countries are able to make use of what is already available to them from more developed countries, they are in fact able to skip a whole series of intermediate stages in their historical development. However, this does not mean that the "backwards" countries reproduce the exact same stages as the advanced countries before them. "Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without traveling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past".¹⁶² What this means is that the development of historically "backwards" nations will necessarily lead to a "peculiar combination of different stages in the historic process". As such, "Their development as a whole acquires a planless, complex, combined character".¹⁶³

Trotsky therefore argued that the key to unraveling the "mystery" of 1917 lay in Russia's long and peculiar development in the centuries preceding the revolution, with the most fundamental feature being Russia's backwardness. Because of this, no significant middle class had emerged during the Middle Ages, and therefore there had been no Reformation and no bourgeois revolution.¹⁶⁴ At the same time, Russia had been subjected to constant military and economic pressure from the West, which had forced it to adopt features from the more advanced western countries. This combined development meant that Russia exhibited a peculiar combination of both modern and archaic traits: On the one hand, its competition with the West had led to a rapid development in modern industry. On the other hand, that very same development had paradoxically led to a strengthening of tsarism, which in turn had

¹⁶¹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 5.

¹⁶² Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 4.

¹⁶³ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 4.

¹⁶⁴ Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 63.

delayed the developments of the country.¹⁶⁵ In its attempt to compete with the West, the Russian state had been forced to grow its economy. It had done this partly through excessive exploitations of the country's population and resources, and partly by taking up foreign loans to develop the national industry. This had enormous consequences for Russia's social structure. Firstly, it had left the Russian peasantry so impoverished that it was unable to support a revolutionary movement on its own. Secondly, it had weakened the foundation of the possessing classes, leaving the Russian bourgeoisie too weak and isolated to stand up to the monarchy. Finally, it had created a small, but nevertheless strong working class.¹⁶⁶

What this meant was that while the Russian Revolution was a bourgeois revolution, the Russian bourgeoisie was unable to lead the revolution because of its relationship to the proletariat and the peasantry. It could not ally itself with the peasantry against the monarchy because of its entanglement with the landlords. But due to Russia's combined development, the bourgeoisie also found itself face to face with a militant group of first-generation proletarians. Therefore, it dared not ally itself with the proletariat for fear of losing control. Instead of challenging the monarchy, the Russian bourgeoisie became its ally, for fear of the proletariat. And since the Russian peasantry was too weak to lead a revolutionary movement on its own, the leading role in the Russian bourgeois revolution fell to the proletariat. The proletariat however, because of its advanced nature, was not content with the establishment of a bourgeois democracy. According to Trotsky, "Russia was so late in accomplishing her bourgeois revolution that she found herself compelled to turn it into a proletarian revolution".¹⁶⁷ Because of Russia's combined development, the Russian working class had developed greater levels of class consciousness than its European counterparts and this is what explained the enigma of the Russian Revolution.¹⁶⁸ In Russia, the proletariat had not arisen gradually throughout the ages, and therefore it did not carry with itself the burden of the past. "It is just this fact", Trotsky argued, "combined with the concentrated oppression of tsarism – that made the Russian workers hospitable to the boldest conclusions of revolutionary thought".¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 67-69. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 3-12.

¹⁶⁶ Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 36-37.

¹⁶⁷ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 350.

¹⁶⁸ Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 69.

¹⁶⁹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 9.

II. IV. II. “A study of revolutionary mass psychology”

However, while Russia’s combined development had created tensions within Russia’s social structure, this did not by itself account for the sudden developments of 1917. Trotsky argued that there had not occurred any fundamental changes in the social structure in the decades leading up to the revolution, which meant that Russia’s economy as well as the relations between the classes were essentially the same in 1917 as it had been in 1905. But if the situation in 1917 and 1905 was more or less the same, what could then explain the mass uprising in February and the developments leading up to the October Revolution? Trotsky’s answer to this question was changes in the psychology of the classes.¹⁷⁰ To Trotsky, changes in the social structure did not automatically “make” a revolution:

In a society that is seized by revolution, classes are in conflict. It is perfectly clear, however, that the changes introduced between the beginning and the end of a revolution in the economic bases of the society and its social substratum of classes, are not sufficient to explain the course of the revolution itself, which can overthrow in a short interval age-old institutions, create new ones, and again overthrow them. The dynamic of revolutionary events is directly determined by swift, intense, and passionate changes in the psychology of the classes which have already formed themselves before the revolution.¹⁷¹

Trotsky argued that society generally takes its social structure as “given once and for all”, it was only in times of profound crisis that people became aware of the fact that their ideas about society lagged behind the objective conditions. It was the shock of this realization that brought the masses to insurrection, and not the changes in the social structure itself. Trotsky therefore argued that the changes in the moods and aspirations of the masses in a revolutionary upheaval, derived, paradoxically, “not from the flexibility and mobility of man’s mind, but just the opposite, from its deep conservatism”.¹⁷² Isaac Deutscher has therefore argued that “The *History* is to large extent a study of revolutionary mass psychology”.¹⁷³ In response to criticism that his conception of revolutionary processes was

¹⁷⁰ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 231-232.

¹⁷¹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), xv-xvi.

¹⁷² Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), xvi.

¹⁷³ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 231.

“idealistic” and particularly Pokrovski’s claim that he had underestimated the objective factors of the revolution, Trotsky replied: “Thanks to a praiseworthy incisiveness of formulation, Pokrovski exposes to perfection the worthlessness of that vulgarly economic interpretation of history that is frequently given out for Marxism”.¹⁷⁴ A revolution for Trotsky was therefore more than anything else “a history of the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny”.¹⁷⁵

II. IV. III. The Leninist Concept of the Vanguard Party

However, while Trotsky emphasized the role of the masses in the revolution, he nevertheless maintained that for a revolution to be successful, it needed a revolutionary vanguard to lead it. Trotsky’s point was that while the masses were instinctively revolutionary, in the sense that they were unhappy with the old order, in order to overthrow it, they needed to be made conscious of the class struggle that they were participating in. Trotsky appears to emphasize that while the masses have an instinctive response to intolerable situations, they are unable to translate this into the appropriate political action because they lack class consciousness. According to Trotsky, “The masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction, but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old regime. Only the guiding layers of a class have a political program, and even this still requires the test of events, and the approval of the masses”.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, to be instinctively revolutionary is not the same as being class conscious. This is an important distinction because it is only through the latter that the transition to a socialist society can be achieved, as capitalism can only be overcome through a conscious worker’s revolution.¹⁷⁷

However, within the Leninist concept of the vanguard party the masses cannot spontaneously develop class consciousness, no matter how militant they are. The only way that the working class can develop class consciousness is through the political struggle between rival parties and leaders. The party’s mission is then to win the majority of the working class to their revolutionary program. The workers develop class consciousness through their revolutionary activity, because through it they gain the experience needed to become conscious communists. However, this can only happen if the party constantly

¹⁷⁴ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 352.

¹⁷⁵ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), xv.

¹⁷⁶ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), xvi.

¹⁷⁷ Marxists Internet Archive, “The Leninist Concept of the Revolutionary Vanguard Party”.

intervenes to explain the dynamics of the struggle and provide them with the revolutionary strategy and tactics necessary for victory. The role of the party is therefore to transform the revolutionary potential of the militant masses into revolutionary consciousness.¹⁷⁸ This is the reason why leadership is so important to Trotsky: if the working class cannot develop political consciousness on their own, then a crisis within the leadership is a crisis for the revolution.

II. V. Trotsky's portrayal of Lenin's role in the Russian Revolution

While the sudden outbreak of the February Revolution was predicated on a shift in mass psychology, this was not in itself enough to secure the success of the revolution. Trotsky argued that for a socialist revolution to succeed, the masses had to become class conscious, which they could only become through the guidance of a revolutionary party, in the case of the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks. However, what happened in 1917 was that the Bolshevik party was left incapable of providing that guidance. The reason for this was that the peculiarities of Russia's development meant that the revolution had developed beyond what the Bolsheviks thought was possible up to that point. The consequence of this was that the Bolshevik leadership experienced a "certain inertia", and they were therefore unable to perform their historical role. Since the masses could not become politically conscious enough to organize a proletarian revolution on their own, the revolution could not move forward until this crisis was resolved. What Trotsky argues in the *History* is that this crisis was only solved by Lenin's return to Russia in April 1917. So, while there were many factors that had to come into place for the revolution to succeed, such as the crisis within the social structure and the sudden shift in mass psychology, Lenin was the last and decisive element.¹⁷⁹

II. V. I. Lenin's arrival at the Finland Station

Trotsky describes the first months of the revolution as a period of "bewilderment and vacillation" on the part of the Bolshevik leadership.¹⁸⁰ Instead of working towards establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat, the Bolshevik Central Committee, under the leadership of Stalin and Kamenev, supported the establishment of a Coalition Government

¹⁷⁸ Marxists Internet Archive, "The Leninist Concept of the Revolutionary Vanguard Party".

¹⁷⁹ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 240-241.

¹⁸⁰ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 206.

between the liberal bourgeoisie and the soviet.¹⁸¹ The reason for this according to Trotsky was that the consensus among the Central Committee was that this was a bourgeois revolution, and what they were seeing and experiencing was the breakdown of the old feudal relations, which would then give rise to new “bourgeois relations”. The goal then was to establish a bourgeois-democratic republic, and this was seen as the first step toward a proletarian revolution which would finally lead to the establishment of socialism.¹⁸² According to Trotsky, it was in this position that Lenin found them when he returned from exile “with his inflexible determination to bring the party out on a new road”.¹⁸³

On April 3, Lenin arrives at the Finland station in Petrograd. On the following day, he appeared at the Bolshevik party conference and presented a short, written exposition of his views, titled the *Theses of April 4*, demanding that the Bolsheviks overthrow the Provisional Government and summon the workers to proletarian insurrection. Only this policy would guarantee the transition to a socialist regime.¹⁸⁴ However, according to Trotsky, when Lenin first presented his thesis, it sounded to most of the listeners like something between “mockery and delirium”.¹⁸⁵ Consensus among the Bolshevik members present at the conference was that Lenin’s thesis was absurd, that it represented nothing more than “pure adventurism” and that Lenin had become out of touch with Russia during his time in exile.¹⁸⁶ But it was not Lenin that was out of touch with reality, Trotsky argued. While Lenin’s plans were bold, they were born out of his superior understanding of the dynamic movement of the class consciousness of the masses.¹⁸⁷ The Central Committee on the other hand, were only relying on old dogmas, which was why they were incapable of leading the revolution. When the Bolsheviks present at the conference rejected Lenin’s theses, it was because they had failed to understand this dramatic shift in mass psychology, which meant that the Russian Revolution had developed

¹⁸¹ On 27 February, prior to the tsar’s abdication and with workers and soldiers still meeting in the streets, two institutions independent of each other was created in the Tauride Palace. One of these were the Provisional Government of the Duma, made up of former members of the State Duma which had been dissolved by the tsar the day before. The other was the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Worker’s Deputies, comprised of prominent members from the Russian socialist parties – the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries, and the Bolsheviks. Now, Trotsky argued that out of these two institutions the only one with any real power was the soviet. However, according to Trotsky, instead of uniting to form a socialist government, the soviet leadership appeared before the Provisional Committee and demanded that it take power into its own hands. The Provisional Committee then proceeded to form a Provisional Government. By the end of March, Trotsky argued, the soviet executive, including the Bolsheviks, was ready to form a Coalition Government with the liberal bourgeoisie. See Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 115-178.

¹⁸² Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 122-123.

¹⁸³ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 229-230.

¹⁸⁴ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 217.

¹⁸⁵ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 223.

¹⁸⁶ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 224-225.

¹⁸⁷ Blackledge, “Leon Trotsky’s Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History”, 23.

beyond a bourgeois revolution – and that the working class was ready to turn it into a proletarian revolution. That was why “for all its boldness of revolutionary grasp ... the speech of Lenin – every part balanced against the rest – was filled with deep realism and an infallible feeling for the masses”.¹⁸⁸ Trotsky therefore argued that out of all the Bolsheviks, Lenin was the only one who was able to adapt to the situation and properly diagnose the nature of the revolution.

The problem was that for the time being the masses was left confused by the policy of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries (or the “Compromisers” as Trotsky calls them) who dominated the soviet. Simultaneously, by the end of March, the Bolsheviks were on the verge of merging with the Mensheviks, who supported the establishment of a Coalition Government with the liberal bourgeoisie. Therefore, prior to Lenin’s return from Switzerland, there was not one person that challenged the policy of the “Compromisers”. This was why when Lenin arrived, he criticized the Bolshevik Party for not being “equal to its objective task” because it had not prevented “the Compromisers from expropriating the popular masses politically for the benefit of the bourgeoisie”.¹⁸⁹ Instead of uniting against the formation of a bourgeois-government, the Bolshevik leadership had conformed themselves to “temporary prejudices and illusions” among the masses.¹⁹⁰ What Lenin demanded that the Bolshevik Party had to do, Trotsky explains, was to “bring the consciousness of the masses into correspondence with that situation into which the historic process had driven them. The worker or the soldier, disappointed with the policy of the Compromisers, had to be brought over to the position of Lenin and not left lingering in the intermediate stage of Kamenev and Stalin”.¹⁹¹ This was the only way that the revolution could succeed.

II. V. II. The April Inner-Party Crisis

Trotsky argued that the Central Committee’s inability to accept what Lenin proposed led to a conflict between Lenin and the Central Committee, which Trotsky later termed the April inner-party crisis. To illustrate how isolated Lenin was at the beginning of April, Trotsky recounted how the editors of *Pravda* wrote a note on Lenin’s theses on April 8, where they argued that Lenin’s theses was unacceptable, because it started from the assumption that the

¹⁸⁸ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 224.

¹⁸⁹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 221.

¹⁹⁰ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 235-236.

¹⁹¹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 235-236.

bourgeois-democratic revolution was ended and counted upon an immediate transformation into a socialist revolution. According to Trotsky, that “note alone is sufficient to show the depth of the April crisis in the party due to the clash of two irreconcilable lines of thought and action”.¹⁹² The one leading to a dictatorship of the proletariat, the other counter-revolution. The point for Trotsky here is that until the Bolsheviks solved this crisis, “the revolution could not go forward”.¹⁹³

However, it is important to note that Trotsky does not argue that the crisis within the party was caused by Lenin. The confusion and inertia within the Bolshevik Party was due to the objective situation itself. The reason for this was that the official Bolshevik policy since 1905 had been that while the coming bourgeois revolution would be led by a union of workers and peasants, this would not lead to the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship. The participation of the proletariat in the revolution was strictly limited to an ally of the peasants because the revolution did not aim for the creation of a socialist society, only the destruction of the medieval feudal system. Thus, the character of the coming revolution was a democratic revolution of peasants and workers aimed at destroying feudalism. However, the February Revolution had disrupted this “accustomed schema of Bolshevism”.¹⁹⁴ Instead of power being concentrated in a revolutionary dictatorship of workers and peasants, there was established the “regime of dual power”.

What Trotsky is referring to here is the relationship between the soviet and the Provisional Government. Trotsky argued that after the February Revolution, power already belonged to the soviets. But the leaders of the soviet, terrified of taking power into its own hands, had given that power away to the liberal bourgeoisie, who then formed a bourgeois government. This is what Trotsky calls the paradox of the February Revolution: that the Russian democracy, “after having captured the power from the very moment of insurrection”, proceeded to give the state over to the bourgeoisie.¹⁹⁵ According to Trotsky, the “Compromisers”, instead of defending the workers, peasants, and soldiers, had become an ally and defender of the bourgeoisie. What this meant was that the “Compromisers” had destroyed the “democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants” in embryo in order to prevent it from becoming a bridge to the dictatorship of the proletariat. By doing so, the

¹⁹² Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 226.

¹⁹³ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 226.

¹⁹⁴ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 228.

¹⁹⁵ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 153-154.

Compromisers had opened a new road to the dictatorship of the proletariat – “only a different road, not through them, but against them”.¹⁹⁶

Trotsky therefore argued that the confusion within the party stemmed from the disruption caused by the very nature of the February Revolution. The inner-party crisis was unavoidable because no one, not even Lenin, had foreseen this regime. However, while Lenin swiftly changed his mind as he saw the actual development that was taking place, the Bolshevik Central Committee did not, which is what led to the April crisis. The February Revolution had left the Bolshevik leadership confused because the revolution had developed beyond what the Bolsheviks had expected. Therefore, when the “dual power regime” was created in February, the Bolshevik leadership had done nothing to stop it because they were still under the illusion that this was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. However, Trotsky argued that once the “dual power” system had been established, the revolution could no longer lead to a stable liberal democracy, because it was not possible to divide power into two equal halves.¹⁹⁷ The revolution would either develop into a proletarian dictatorship or it would degenerate into what Trotsky called a “military dictatorship of capital”, which was a reference to the attempted military coup of General Lavr Kornilov in August 1917:

But it is quite evident that a political turning of the workers and soldiers toward the Bolsheviks, having knocked over the whole two-power construction, could now no longer mean anything but the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat resting upon a union of the workers and the peasants. In case the popular mass had been defeated, only a military dictatorship of capital would have risen on the ruins of the Bolshevik Party. “The Democratic Dictatorship” was impossible in either case. In looking toward it, the Bolsheviks had actually turned their faces toward a phantom of the past.¹⁹⁸

Because the revolution according to Trotsky could no longer lead to liberal democracy, it “left no place for intermediate positions”.¹⁹⁹ The revolution would therefore inevitably have produced a crisis in the leadership. Thus, Lenin did not cause the crisis, his “arrival merely hastened the process” and “His personal influence shortened the crisis”.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 229.

¹⁹⁷ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 149-155.

¹⁹⁸ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 229-230.

¹⁹⁹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 238.

²⁰⁰ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 238.

II. V. III. A “great link” in the “historic chain”

How would the revolution have developed if Lenin had not reached Russia in April 1917?

While Trotsky argues that the inner struggle in the Bolshevik Party was "absolutely unavoidable", its solution was not.²⁰¹ It was by no means certain that the crisis in leadership could have been solved without Lenin. Trotsky argued that Lenin's personal interference was vital because without him, it was doubtful whether the party would have been able to solve the crisis in time:

Is it possible, however, to say confidently that the party without him would have found its road? We would by no means make bold to say that. The factor of time is decisive here, and it is difficult in retrospect to tell time historically. Historical materialism at any rate has nothing in common with fatalism. Without Lenin the crisis, which the opportunistic leadership was inevitably bound to produce, would have assumed an extraordinarily sharp and protracted character. The conditions of war and revolution, however, would not allow the party a long period for fulfilling its mission. Thus it is by no means excluded that a disoriented and split party might have let slip the revolutionary opportunity for years. The role of the personality arises before us here on a truly gigantic scale. It is necessary only to understand that role correctly, taking personality as a link in the historic chain.²⁰²

From his analysis of Lenin's role in the Russian Revolution, Trotsky concluded that the individual personality could have a profound effect on the course of history. Without Lenin, the revolutionary opportunity that had opened up in February, could have been easily missed. However, Trotsky was very adamant that Lenin was not a “demiurge of the revolutionary process”, he did not force the revolution into being.²⁰³ Lenin was only able to play the role that he did because the objective situation was ripe for a proletarian revolution. As has been noted by Paul Blackledge, while Trotsky emphasized the crucial role played by Lenin in the Russian Revolution, he did not “reject Marx's materialist insight that it was the level of the development of the forces of production that set the parameters of the historically

²⁰¹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 238.

²⁰² Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 238.

²⁰³ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 238.

possible”.²⁰⁴ What was historically possible for an individual to achieve was ultimately decided by the development of the forces of production. Thus, Lenin did not create the revolutionary opportunity, he “merely entered into a chain of objective forces”.²⁰⁵ Lenin was however, a “great link in that chain”, because without Lenin, the party was unable to perform its historical role: “The dictatorship of the proletariat was to be inferred from the whole situation, but it still had to be established. It could not be established without a party. The party could fulfill its mission only after understanding it. For that Lenin was needed”.²⁰⁶ In the *History*, Lenin therefore appear as the last and decisive element in the causal chain leading up to October.

II. V. IV. How was Lenin able to play this role?

What was it that allowed Lenin to step into the historic process and actually influence the outcome? Trotsky emphasizes that Lenin’s vital role in the revolution was based on his superior understanding of the historic process itself.²⁰⁷ This is what allowed him to diagnose the situation correctly, even as all the other Bolsheviks leaders refused to accept that the situation was ripe for a proletarian revolution. This was predicated on Lenin’s ability to “enter into the minds” of the masses and anticipate what they were feeling and thinking and allowing his policy to be guided by those predictions, which is what made him such an exceptional revolutionary leader to Trotsky. According to Trotsky “The chief strength of Lenin lay in his understanding of the inner logic of the movement, and guiding his policy by it. He did not impose his plan on the masses; he helped the masses to recognize and realize their own plan”.²⁰⁸ Part of what was so astonishing about Lenin was that even from abroad he had a better understanding of what was going on in the psyche of the masses than those Bolsheviks that was actually present: “Although separated from these workers by two war fronts, and almost without communication, Lenin had never lost touch with them” and “In his mind Lenin had been living through the events along with these worker-Bolsheviks, making with them the necessary inferences – only broader and more boldly than they”.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ Blackledge, “Leon Trotsky’s Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History”, 19.

²⁰⁵ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 238.

²⁰⁶ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 238.

²⁰⁷ Blackledge, “Historical Materialism”, 16-17.

²⁰⁸ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 235.

²⁰⁹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 235.

On a more practical note, Trotsky argued that Lenin was able to bring the party on to a new course because he was able to appeal to the more radical rank-and-file members of the party against the more conservative Central Committee.²¹⁰ When the “Old Bolsheviks” due to their conservatism became an obstacle to the revolution, Lenin was able to appeal to another, more radical layer of the party “already tempered, but more fresh and more closely united with the masses It was on this stratum of workers, decisively risen to their feet during the upward years of 1912-14, that Lenin was now banking”.²¹¹ It took Lenin less than a month to persuade the majority of the Bolshevik Party to follow his course, and according to Trotsky, this was because when the Leninist theses were published, they helped explain what the Bolsheviks themselves had been experiencing over the past months. While discussing Trotsky’s portrayal of Lenin’s role in the Russian Revolution, Peter Beilharz asked rhetorically: “how can Trotsky explain that Lenin was the only ‘revolutionary’ in the Bolshevik Party ...?”.²¹² But this is not what Trotsky is arguing. What he does argue is that while the Russian masses were more radical than the Bolshevik Party, the rank-and-file members of the party was more radical than the Central Committee.²¹³ Thus, the April inner-party crisis was essentially a problem of leadership.

However, while there existed more radical forces among the rank-and-file section of party who did not support the Provisional Government, Trotsky argued that they lacked the theoretical resources to challenge the policy of the Central Committee.²¹⁴ Lenin was therefore the only one in a position to bring the party out on a new road. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, the power of Trotsky’s analysis lies in his ability to differentiate between those individuals who are replaceable representatives of social classes and therefore have little room for alternative courses of action, and those, like Lenin, who cannot be so easily replaced because a crucial choice is at hand that other leaders were ill positioned to make.²¹⁵ Similarly, in his *1935 Diary*, Trotsky distinguishes between his own role in the revolution and that of Lenin, arguing that the revolution would still have succeeded even if he himself had not been present, so long as Lenin was:

²¹⁰ Blackledge, “Leon Trotsky’s Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History”, 23-24.

²¹¹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 235.

²¹² Beilharz, “Trotsky as Historian”, 43.

²¹³ Blackledge, “Leon Trotsky’s Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History”, 23.

²¹⁴ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 238.

²¹⁵ MacIntyre, “Trotsky in Exile”. In *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, edited by Alasdair MacIntyre. London: Duckworth, 1971, referenced in Blackledge, “Leon Trotsky’s Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History”, 23.

Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place – on the condition that Lenin was still present and in command. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik Party would have prevented it from occurring – of this I have not the slightest doubt! If Lenin had not been in Petersburg, I doubt whether I could have managed to overcome the resistance of the Bolshevik leaders.²¹⁶

The centrality of Lenin is built on Trotsky's argument that there was no one that could take Lenin's place, he was, essentially, irreplaceable. This was not just because he had a better understanding of the historic process than anyone else, but also because it was Lenin that had built up the party beforehand. "Without the party", Trotsky argued, "Lenin would have been as helpless as Newton and Darwin without collective scientific work".²¹⁷ It was not that Lenin could have acted alone or without the support of the party, but rather that it was doubtful whether the party could have done it without Lenin.²¹⁸

From the extraordinary significance which Lenin's arrival received, it should be inferred that leaders are not accidentally created, that they are gradually chosen out and trained up in the course of decades, that they cannot be capriciously replaced, that their mechanical exclusion from the struggle gives the party a living wound, and in many cases may paralyze it for a long time.²¹⁹

Lenin was not, however, an "accidental" element in the historic process. Trotsky argued that Lenin was a product of the of the whole past of Russian history, "embedded in it with deepest roots".²²⁰ He had lived through the same struggle as the vanguard of the workers, had been molded by the same forces which shaped them. In the *History*, Lenin therefore appear as an expression of historical development itself, as was his party and the masses. As Trotsky put it, "Lenin did not oppose the party from outside, but was himself its most complete expression".²²¹ Lenin's vital role in the revolution was owed to the fact that the revolutionary

²¹⁶ Trotsky, *Trotsky's Diary in Exile 1935*, 46, quoted in Beilharz, "Trotsky as Historian", 42.

²¹⁷ Trotsky, *Stalin* (1940; reis., London: Hollis and Carter, 1947), quoted in Blackledge, "Leon Trotsky's Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History", 24.

²¹⁸ Røtvold, "Aktør og lederskap i C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins*", 6.

²¹⁹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 239.

²²⁰ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 239.

²²¹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 239

possibilities of that “pregnant age” had come together in Lenin in the most concentrated way: “Lenin became the unqualified leader of the most revolutionary party in the world’s history, because his thought and will were really equal to the demands of the gigantic revolutionary possibilities of the country and the epoch”.²²² Lenin’s interference in the events was therefore not an accident, Trotsky argued, the accident was that he had been separated from the party.

However, the fact that Lenin was not an accidental element in the historic process does not mean, as Baruch Knei-Paz has suggested, that Lenin’s actions in the revolution was inevitable:

the surprising – for Marxist – admission by Trotsky that without Lenin the ‘revolutionary opportunity’ might not have materialized is immediately juxtaposed by the claim that Lenin was not ‘accidental’ but a ‘product of the whole past of Russian’. It emerges, therefore, that although Lenin was indispensable he was also inevitable.²²³

Knei-Paz therefore interprets Trotsky’s portrayal of Lenin as a variation of Georgi Plekhanov’s fatalistic account of the role of the individual in history.²²⁴ However, the difference between Plekhanov and Trotsky is that to Plekhanov, history affords itself the individuals it needs, and therefore no individuals are irreplaceable because someone else would have taken their place.²²⁵ But that is not what Trotsky is arguing. Even though he was careful in the *History* about making too explicit statements regarding Lenin’s role in the revolution, in other instances he left no doubt about what he thought would happen if Lenin had not been present. I have already mentioned one example of this from Trotsky’s *Diary*, but he made the same point elsewhere, such as in a letter that he wrote in 1928 to Yevgeni Preobrazhensky, a Bolshevik that was associated with Trotsky’s Left Opposition: “You know better than I do that had Lenin not managed to come to Petrograd in April 1917, the October Revolution would not have taken place”.²²⁶

So, while Trotsky argues that Lenin is a product of historical development, in the sense that he has been molded by the same forces that led the masses to insurrection in February, he was not inevitable. If Lenin had been prevented from returning to Russia in April, it was doubtful

²²² Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 234.

²²³ Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 510.

²²⁴ Blackledge, “Leon Trotsky’s Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History”, 5.

²²⁵ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 242-243.

²²⁶ *The Trotsky Archives*, quoted in Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 241.

whether the revolution would have materialized.²²⁷ To Trotsky, there was nothing “automatic” about the October Revolution. While Russia’s combined development had created the opportunity for revolutionary transformation, the outcome of that process was not predetermined. There was a real alternative in 1917 between a proletarian dictatorship and a “military dictatorship of capital”.²²⁸ Thus, when Trotsky speaks of “objective necessity” or the “inevitability of October”, he is not talking about the success of the revolution; it was the revolutionary opportunity that was inevitable, not its victory. If Lenin had not intervened in April, the Bolshevik party might have “let slip the revolutionary opportunity for years”.²²⁹ Now, this does not mean that Trotsky thought that any outcome was possible: based on the peculiar development of Russia, which had created the “dual power regime”, the revolution could no longer mean the establishment of liberal democracy. However, if a stable liberal democracy was not possible, a counter-revolutionary dictatorship was.²³⁰ Lenin’s arrival at the Finland Station in April 1917 thus marks a pivotal event in the history of the revolution because it was only at this moment that the revolution was able to move forward. It was one of those crucial moments that “punctuate the history of revolutions”.²³¹

²²⁷ Here I am thinking in terms of Trotsky’s argument in the *History* where he does not explicitly stress that the revolution would never have happened without Lenin, even though he has, as we have seen, made that argument elsewhere.

²²⁸ Blackledge, “Leon Trotsky’s Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History”, 21-22.

²²⁹ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 238.

²³⁰ Blackledge, “Leon Trotsky’s Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History”, 21-22.

²³¹ Schwarz, “Haiti and Historical Time”, 99.

PART III: C.L.R. JAMES' *THE BLACK JACOBINS*

James came across Trotsky's *History* quite on accident. A friend and fellow book enthusiast named Frederick Cartmell, whom James met while he was living in Nelson, loaned him a copy during the summer of 1932. To James, who had not read any Marxism prior to this, Trotsky's *History* was a "revelation".²³² It was not only a historical narrative, providing detailed descriptions of day-to-day events as they unfolded, Trotsky was also expounding on the revolutionary process itself, based on Marx's theory of history, historical materialism. James was particularly intrigued by Trotsky's conception of historical development. A revolution for Trotsky was not a simple event, but a "complex chain of causes and events" born out of a profound crisis in a country's social structure.²³³ Based on the situation that James found himself in after his move to Europe, the onset of the Great Depression, mass unemployment, working-class movements and the rise of Nazism and fascism, it is not hard to imagine why Trotsky's *History* had such a profound impact on him. Essentially, it helped James make sense of the things that he observed in the world around him. The *History* is also powerfully written and as a writer, James was struck by Trotsky's compelling style, his ability to merge the writing of history with great literary sensibility.²³⁴ As James later noted: "There is a profound lesson here not only in history but also in aesthetics".²³⁵

The structure for this chapter is as follows: it begins with the different objectives that James had in mind when he wrote *The Black Jacobins* followed by a chapter that further details what it was that Trotsky's *History* had to offer James. The chapter ends with my discussion on James's portrayal of Toussaint Louverture. Here I will argue that in *The Black Jacobins*, Toussaint has the same historical role as Lenin has in Trotsky's *History*.

III. I. Writing *The Black Jacobins*

The Black Jacobins grew out of several different contexts and thus have several different but intersecting objectives. While it drew its contemporariness from James's work in the Pan-African movement, its theoretical framework and methodology was informed by his Marxism, as he had learned it in the Trotskyist movement. *The Black Jacobins* was also partly

²³² Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 23.

²³³ Daniels, *Trotsky, Stalin, and Socialism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 12.

²³⁴ Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 25.

²³⁵ James, "Trotsky's Place in History", 123.

written in response to the rise of Stalinism. This is reflected in James's preoccupation with individual leadership and the dangers of revolutionary degeneration.

III. I. I. African revolution

The most immediate context here is the coming African revolution, as James imagined it in 1938. During one of his 1971 Atlanta lectures, James recalled that he had written *The Black Jacobins* as preparation for the revolution that he and the people he surrounded himself with in the Pan-African movement, thought was bound to happen in Africa: "I had in mind writing about the San Domingo Revolution as the preparation for the revolution that George Padmore and all of us were interested in, that is, the revolution in Africa".²³⁶ *The Black Jacobins* was to serve as both inspiration and education: by invoking the story of Toussaint and the rebel slaves of Saint-Domingue, James wanted to convey to black and colonial peoples everywhere that resistance to imperialism was not hopeless. He also wanted to expose what he saw as the "machinery of imperialism" to teach African revolutionaries what to look out for in the conflict that was to come.²³⁷ James saw an historical parallel between the Haitian Revolution and the black liberation struggles of his own time, in the sense that he believed that what had happened in Saint-Domingue would also happen in Africa. In response to the British Labour politician Sir Stafford Cripps claim that Africa would have to be governed by "trusteeship" until it was strong enough for self-government, James argued that the African people would organize themselves and win freedom on their own terms. Furthermore, he argued that this was essential if the transition to socialism was ever going to be achieved:

We have an historic parallel. The half-brutish and degraded slaves in San Domingo in 1791 joined the French Revolution. In six years illiterate slaves were Generals of division and able administrators. ... The African slaves will do the same and more at the prospect of a new existence. Without them and the other colonial masses, the British worker can win at most only temporary success.²³⁸

²³⁶ James, "Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*", 72.

²³⁷ Meeks, "RE-READING THE BLACK JACOBINS", 76.

²³⁸ James, "Sir Stafford Cripps and 'Trusteeship'", *International African Opinion* 1, no. 3 (September 1938): 3, quoted in Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 122-123.

In an article titled “Revolution and the Negro”, published in 1940, James argued that just as the slaves of Saint-Domingue had contributed to the destruction of European feudalism, so would the Africans of his own time contribute to the destruction of capitalism:

What we as Marxists have to see is the tremendous role played by Negroes in the transformation of Western civilization from feudalism to capitalism. It is only from this vantage-ground that we shall be able to appreciate (and prepare for) the still greater role they must of necessity play in the transition from capitalism to socialism.²³⁹

James therefore understood the Haitian Revolution, as well as black and colonial liberation struggles in general, as part of a larger historical development towards socialism, which to James represents the ultimate liberation of all human beings.

III. I. II. The dynamics of revolution

The other important context here is James’s turn to Marxism. First of all, James’s *Black Jacobins* is an exploration into the dynamics of revolution, particularly the dynamics of a colonial revolution.²⁴⁰ *The Black Jacobins*, like Trotsky’s *History*, is more than just a historical narrative, it is an inquiry into the concept of revolution itself. For James, this was not just a question of historical analysis, it also had political implications. As already mentioned, *The Black Jacobins* was to serve as inspiration and education for black and colonial liberation movements in James’s own time. James also saw a historical parallel between the Haitian Revolution and liberation movements in Africa, it was therefore essential to his political project to understand the dynamics of the Haitian Revolution, so that lessons could be drawn from it. Secondly, it is intended as a serious contribution to historical methodology. What James set out to do in *The Black Jacobins*, was to demonstrate why and how the revolution in Saint-Domingue had occurred, by applying a particular interpretation of historical materialism that James felt was able to explain revolutionary upheavals.²⁴¹ Since James’s conception of revolutionary processes and the method that he applied to explain these processes are interconnected, they will be discussed interchangeably throughout the text.

²³⁹ James, “Revolution and the Negro”, 77.

²⁴⁰ Meeks, “RE-READING THE BLACK JACOBINS”, 76.

²⁴¹ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 189

James's conception of revolution is generally in line with how Marx phrased it in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, which I have already discussed in part I of this thesis.²⁴² James describes how revolutionary movements develop as a response to structural crisis created by changes in the economic structure of society, or in his words, "when the ceaseless slow accumulation of centuries burst into volcanic eruption". When this happens, the class struggle, which has remained hidden below the surface for centuries, arises out into the open with "meteoric flares and flights above". A revolution for James is about that moment when radical transformation becomes possible, "when society is at a boiling point" and therefore susceptible for change.²⁴³ However, to James, revolutionary transformation does not automatically follow from changes in the social structure. It was the activities of the oppressed themselves, in the case of the Haitian Revolution, the slaves, that "made" revolutions. There was, however, a close relationship between these two forces because people are shaped by their environment.²⁴⁴ It was the "powerful reaction" that the oppressed had to changes in the social structure that James aimed to record:

The writer has sought not only to analyse, but to demonstrate in their movement, the economic forces of the age; their moulding of society and politics, of men in the mass and individual men; the powerful reaction of these on their environment at one of those rare moments when society is at a boiling point and therefore fluid. The analysis is the science and the demonstration the art which is history.²⁴⁵

James's method was therefore two-folds: the scientific analysis of the economic forces of the age and the artistic "demonstration" required to reconstruct the class struggle that arises from them.²⁴⁶

While it was people's actions that mattered, James understood individuals to be operating within specific material conditions: "Great men make history, but only such history as it is possible for them to make. Their freedom of achievement is limited by the necessities of their environment".²⁴⁷ James is clearly influenced by Marx at his most flexible here. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* contains Marx's most famous expression on the role

²⁴² Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 190.

²⁴³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), viii.; Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 190.

²⁴⁴ Bogue, *Caliban's Freedom* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 44.

²⁴⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), viii.

²⁴⁶ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 190.

²⁴⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), viii.

of the individual in history: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past”.²⁴⁸ As I have already discussed in part I of this thesis, Marx made less deterministic statements and placed a greater emphasis on human agency when he applied his method to actual historical events. It is therefore significant that James came to Marxism from reading history. As already mentioned, James’s first introduction to Marxism was reading Trotsky’s *History*, and he followed that up with Marx’s own writing. He later recalled that while he had “gobbled up” volume I of Marx’s *Capital*, at the time he “did not get very far” with volume II and III, and instead he “read and re-read *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*”.²⁴⁹ While Trotsky’s influence on James’s conception of historical materialism will be discussed further in later chapters, for the time being it is enough to state that history for James was not so much about inevitability as it was about possibility: “To portray the limits of those necessities and the realisation, complete or partial, of all possibilities, that is the true business of the historian”.²⁵⁰

James was not only interested in how revolutionary movements are formed, but also how they transform their participants. If *The Black Jacobins* can be said to have one overarching theme, it would be the transformation of consciousness that occurred among the slaves as they strove to liberate themselves from the bondage of slavery and gain political independence.²⁵¹ In the opening page to *The Black Jacobins*, James lays out the following theme for his book:

The transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organise themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day, is one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement. Why and how this happened in the theme of this book.²⁵²

Throughout *The Black Jacobins*, James continuously emphasized how the revolution had made “new men” out of the former slaves. Specifically, James argued that the slaves, through their revolutionary activity, gained back their confidence and pride. As such, revolutions are a self-transformative process. Through the process of liberating themselves politically, a

²⁴⁸ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”, in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works*, (1991), 93, quoted in Perry, *Marxism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 49.

²⁴⁹ James, “Charlie Lahr”. 1975. Unpublished manuscript in the possession of David Goodway, quoted in Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 75.

²⁵⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), viii.

²⁵¹ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 187.

²⁵² James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), vii.

spiritual liberation also occurred. It was this political and spiritual liberation that James set out to explain.

III. I. III. The rise of Stalinism

Finally, there is also another context that James is engaging with in *The Black Jacobins*, and that is the rise of Stalinism. Because James was a Trotskyist and not a Stalinist, he was from the very beginning critical to Stalin and the Soviet Union. In his 1971 Atlanta lectures on *The Black Jacobins*, James reflects on how he was first introduced to Marxism by reading Trotsky's *History*, and how it became clear to him through reading that book that there had been a rupture within the Marxist movement:

I read the three volumes of *The History of the Russian Revolution*. That is a magnificent book. It is a tremendous book and it is filled with historical development and the role of the masses and the role of the party and so on. But in the course of reading that book I came to the conclusion that something is seriously wrong, because Trotsky is attacking Stalin and the Stalinists. His account of the revolution is an account of what he and Lenin did, and what Stalin and the Stalinists in Russia did not do, and what they have not been doing since.²⁵³

James decided to make his own investigations into the matter, expanding his research into Marxism by reading Marx, Lenin and Stalin himself. "So by the time we come to the beginning of the 1934 season I have a whole lot of books, and I have studied Marxism. I know what Trotsky thinks, I know what Lenin thinks, I know what Marx thinks, and I have come to the conclusion that the Stalinists are the greatest historical liars in the world at the present time – no use I have for them".²⁵⁴ According to Stuart Hall, this marked the beginning of James's long-standing critique of Stalinist organisations, particularly the authoritarian forms of Stalinist rule and the absence of democracy in the revolutionary process.²⁵⁵

But the Stalinist counter-revolution did not just represent the degeneration of the Russian Revolution itself; it also endangered the possibility of socialist revolutions spreading out of

²⁵³ James, "Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*", 68.

²⁵⁴ James, "Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*", 68-69.

²⁵⁵ Hall, "C.L.R. James: A Portrait", 6.

Europe and into the colonies.²⁵⁶ In 1937 James would publish his own critique of the Communist International, fittingly titled *World Revolution: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*. In it, James examines how socialist movements throughout the world had been subordinate to the interests of the Soviet Union through the Communist International, and how this had prevented such movements from growing and expanding.²⁵⁷ This must have been especially evident to James after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. While many Pan-Africanists had hoped that the Soviet Union would aid the Ethiopians in the war against Italy, when the time came, the Soviet government offered no aid. For many Pan-Africanist Communists, the betrayal of Ethiopia made it clear that the Soviet Government had now abandoned world revolution completely in favour of Stalin's doctrine of socialism in one country. This resulted in many Pan-Africanists leaving the Communist International, or even abandoning revolutionary politics altogether.²⁵⁸ James, however, who had never been a Stalinist retained his optimism in world socialist revolution, and he continued to insist that what had happened in Saint-Domingue pointed to the future for the African continent.²⁵⁹

While *The Black Jacobins* is an inquiry into an entirely different revolution, James nonetheless uses the Russian Revolution and its subsequent degeneration as a reference point for his own analysis of the dynamics of the Haitian Revolution. This is particularly evident in the parallels James draws between the leadership of the Russian Revolution, Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin to the leadership of the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint, Moïse and Dessalines. The parallels that James makes most use of are the parallels between Toussaint and Lenin, where James contrasts Toussaint's actions against those of Lenin to point out where Toussaint erred and what he should have done instead. James thus uses the insights he has gained from studying the Russian Revolution and then applies them to his own analysis.²⁶⁰ While *The Black Jacobins*, in contrast to *World Revolution*, is an inquiry into a successful revolutionary endeavour, the danger of revolutionary degeneration is still present in James's analysis of the Haitian Revolution. What is particularly of interest to this thesis is the fact that the inherent danger of revolutionary degeneration is for James most of all a question of revolutionary leadership.

²⁵⁶ Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, "Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*", 10.

²⁵⁷ Hall, "C.L.R. James: A Portrait", 6.

²⁵⁸ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 101-102.

²⁵⁹ Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, "Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*", 10.

²⁶⁰ Douglas, *Making The Black Jacobins* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 94.

While part of James's interest in "great leaders" is peculiar to him, this interest must also be seen within the context of the Trotskyist movement.²⁶¹ Revolutionary leadership has a particularly strong place within the Trotskyist movement because of how the movement developed. The Trotskyist movement developed in opposition to the Stalinist regime and its critique of the Soviet leadership was therefore a central issue. Similarly, Anthony Bogues has argued that the central tenet to Trotsky's political programme was the nature of the Soviet Union, and critical to his analysis of the Soviet Union was the nature of leadership. Because of this, Trotskyist groups focused their energy and polemics largely (but not exclusively) on the nature of revolutionary leadership.²⁶² Revolutionary leadership is also a central theme in Trotsky's *History*, as the *History* is, at least in some ways, a story about how Lenin was right, and all the other Bolshevik leaders were wrong, and how Lenin eventually saved the revolution. James is engaging with this topic in both *The Black Jacobins* and *World Revolution*. In the latter, James is engaging with the topic of Soviet leadership directly, noting that "Stalin's personal character is not the dominating factor of Soviet history since 1914. Far greater forces have been at work. But if Lenin's individual gifts were on the side of progress to Socialism, Stalin touched only to corrupt".²⁶³ This focus on the positive or corrupting influence of the individual personality on a historical process is a central theme in *The Black Jacobins*, one that James explores through his analysis of the revolutionary leadership, most of all Toussaint Louverture. Written with the coming African revolution in mind, James is preoccupied with the choices and dilemmas that leaders of any revolution inevitably face as the movement develop and their powers grow.

III. II. What Trotsky's *History* had to offer James

In a 1940 article on Trotsky's legacy, James argued that Trotsky's *History* was "the greatest history book ever written and one of the most stupendous and significant pieces of literature ever produced in any language" and that "It is the climax of two thousand years of European

²⁶¹ James expressed early in his writing an interest in dominant personalities. His first work of non-fiction was a biography about Captain Cipriani, a central Trinidadian political figure and advocate for West Indian independence. James wrote that book while in Trinidad and prior to his turn to revolutionary politics. As Anthony Bogues has noted, James would always try to analyze the individual personality, and after his turn to Marxism this interest also became central to his political thought. See Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 24.

²⁶² Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 31.

²⁶³ James, *World Revolution* (1937; reis., Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 175.

writing and study of history”.²⁶⁴ Why would James make such a claim? What was it that Trotsky’s *History* had to offer James? In this chapter, I emphasize particularly three things that attracted James to Trotsky’s *History*: first, Trotsky’s “scientific” method, secondly, his emphasis on human agency and finally, his twin theories of uneven and combined development.

III. II. I. “Not Only Art, But Science”

While few commentators have accepted Trotsky’s claim of having written a scientific history, this was precisely one of the things that attracted James to Trotsky’s method. James argued that the “traditionally famous historians”, ranging from Greek and Roman historians like Thucydides and Livy to Whig historians like Edward Gibbon, only shaped their material like an artist does.²⁶⁵ Trotsky on the other hand, because of his method, demonstrated the “objective facts”. “In method and presentation the book is as scientific as the *Origin of Species*”, James argued. “It may be challenged as Darwin was challenged, but on concrete not on abstract grounds”.²⁶⁶ What James meant when he argued that these historians were primarily “artists”, was that because of their idealist philosophy of history, they were only writers of “narrative”.²⁶⁷ James made this point categorically in *The Black Jacobins*:

The writing of history becomes ever more difficult. The power of God or the weakness of man, Christianity or the divine right of kings to govern wrong, can easily be made responsible for the downfall of states and the birth of new societies. Such elementary conceptions lend themselves willingly to narrative treatment and from Herodotus to Michelet, from Thucydides to Green, the traditionally famous historians have been more artist than scientist: they wrote so well because they saw so little.²⁶⁸

To James, such an analysis had no “scientific” foundation because it had nothing to “ground” it in the larger structures of historical development. Historical materialism, on the other hand, because it began its analysis from the economic base, or the “sub-soil” as James called it, provided the historian with a point of focus from which he could build his analysis. However,

²⁶⁴ James, «Trotsky’s Place in History», 117.

²⁶⁵ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 88.

²⁶⁶ James, “Trotsky’s Place in History”, 123.

²⁶⁷ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

²⁶⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), viii.

while James criticized these historians for their lack of “science”, they did have one admirable quality that they shared with Trotsky, which was that they all represented something bigger than themselves, “some powerful progressive idea” about liberty, an idea that James argued had become distorted in recent historical writing.²⁶⁹ While these writers were “bourgeois intellectuals” as James called them, they had nevertheless pushed the movement for liberty forward, whether it be writing against papal tyranny or the absolute monarchy. The problem with early twentieth century historians, James argued, was that they had abandoned this greater calling, and instead begun to call for Bonapartism or strong “Caesar” like men. This pessimism, concealed as realism, James argued, made a “political virtue out of tyranny”.²⁷⁰ However, with Trotsky, this call for liberty had returned, combined with the scientific discovery of Marx’s historical materialism. With the *History*, there came the promise of a new age of historical writing:

A hundred years of socialist thought and proletarian struggles have gone into the making of that book, the first of its kind. ... But the *History* will remain the bridge between the long line which leads from the Old Testament and Homer, Greek tragedy, Dante and Cervantes, to the books which will be written when, in Marx’s famous phrase, the history of humanity begins.²⁷¹

Apart from its scientific method and its call to liberty, there was one other thing that made the *History* “the greatest history book ever written”, and that was the fact that it was political:

... the book is not only a propagandist tract, the expression of an attitude to society, and a scientific thesis. It is, besides, what none of the others is. It is a summons to action. It is not only a banner and a blueprint. It is a roll of drums. Through it breathes not only the spirit of “this is what we aimed at, this is the way it was done”, but also, “this is the way we do it”. ... Resentment at oppression smolders in hundreds of millions of people all over the world. What they lack is confidence in their own powers. How can we fight and win? The answer is in the *History*.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ James, “Trotsky’s Place in History”, 120.

²⁷⁰ James, “Trotsky’s Place in History”, 120-122.

²⁷¹ James, “Trotsky’s Place in History”, 126.

²⁷² James, “Trotsky’s Place in History”, 123.

III. II. II. The role of the individual in history

While James maintained in *The Black Jacobins* that a purely idealist philosophy of history only led to “infinite caprice and romanticism”, he also warned of the dangers of a purely materialist philosophy of history. Following his argument that the “traditionally famous historians” were more artists, than scientists, James wrote: “To-day by a natural reaction we tend to a personification of the social forces, great men being merely or nearly instruments in the hands of economic destiny”.²⁷³ To James, neither of these alternatives was an adequate philosophy of history.²⁷⁴ I therefore argue that what James found in Trotsky, was a method that neither downplayed the role of individuals, nor separated them from the broader social forces that surrounded them.²⁷⁵ While peoples “freedom of achievement” was limited by their environment, they could still make a profound impact on the course of history. As Trotsky himself stated in the *History*:

We do not at all pretend to deny the significance of the personal in the mechanics of the historic process, nor the significance in the personal of the accidental. We only demand that a historic personality, with all its peculiarities, should not be taken as a bare list of psychological traits, but as a living reality grown out of the definite social conditions and reacting upon them.²⁷⁶

To this I want to add though that I do not believe that James became interested in people because of Trotsky. Quite the opposite: Trotsky offered a solution to a problem James had already observed. This is evident from an article James published in 1931 titled “The Problem of Knowledge” where James stresses the importance of historians not being too narrowly concerned with politics but open to the cultural movements of the day. James was especially disappointed in Edwards Gibbons *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as Gibbons was unable to explain why the Roman Empire had eventually declined. To say that it was due to a “variety of causes” was insufficient for James.²⁷⁷ But how to move past it?

²⁷³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), vii.

²⁷⁴ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 188.

²⁷⁵ Blackledge, “Historical Materialism”, 17.

²⁷⁶ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 71.

²⁷⁷ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 162.

According to Christian Høgsbjerg, the answer was to be found in a collection of Mahatma Ghandi's writings that James was reviewing in the summer of 1931.²⁷⁸ Upon reading it, James was stunned at the amount of power wielded by this man. When reflecting on the secret to his power, James concluded that it could not be explained by anything else but the "personal sincerity" of Ghandi or the "unquestioned integrity" of his soul. Ghandi and the people who followed him had tapped into "some secret well of power, something which Western civilization doesn't understand and against which its militarism, its political organization, its mastery of the physical forces of nature, are quite powerless". The reading about Ghandi had provided James with the solution to a historical problem which in the past had caused him some difficulty: "Whether great men make history or are but crests of inevitable waves of social evolution. I am now more than ever inclined to believe that they shape the environment more than the environment shapes them".²⁷⁹ What attracted James to Trotsky's method was his ability to combine both these perspectives.

III. II. III. Uneven and combined development

James once declared that "In analytical power and imaginative audacity", Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution was "one of the most astounding productions of the modern mind".²⁸⁰ What was it about this theory that so intrigued James? Bill Schwarz has offered an insightful take on this as it pertains to *The Black Jacobins* and argued that it was Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development, which makes up the theoretical underpinnings of permanent revolution, that allowed James to "portray the slaves of Saint-Domingue as agents of their own history".²⁸¹ Schwarz argues that when James first arrived in England in 1932, he was still very much a British intellectual and he appeared to be as sympathetic to the British abolitionists as he was to the revolting slaves. Schwarz's point is that this was not unusual at the time. What was "unusual", if you will, was James's decision to place slaves at the center of history. So, how did this transition occur? Schwarz argues that this transition can be traced to the influence of two books: Trotsky's *History* and Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, which was the second book that Cartmell loaned James in 1932.²⁸²

²⁷⁸ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 162.

²⁷⁹ James, "The Problem of Knowledge". *The Beacon*, 1, 1 (March 1931):22-24, quoted in Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 163.

²⁸⁰ James, "Trotsky's Place in History", 94.

²⁸¹ Schwarz, "Haiti and Historical Time", 101.

²⁸² Schwarz, "Haiti and Historical Time", 94-97.

Although not a traditional pairing, in James's able hands, Spengler's work and Trotsky's *History* turned out to be a particularly potent combination. Specifically, Schwarz argues, it was Trotsky and Spengler's rejection of the idea that there was one unilinear path for global development that so intrigued James. Spengler's work was a compendium of global histories, and in the opening pages of the first volume, he attacked the traditional historical schema where all civilizations were thought to develop through the same uniform pattern, typically from ancient civilizations to medieval and then to modern. The problem for Spengler was that such a conception of historical development rigged the stage for Western Europe, and it eliminated from the historical record those civilizations that did not fit into this schema. Spengler thus advocated for a relativist conception of historical development, where history had no "fixed center".²⁸³ While Trotsky's *History* in no way can be said to mark a "relativist conception of historical development," through his twin theories of uneven and combined development, he postulated that there was not one unilinear path to socialism. And it was this idea that progress did not just belong to the "civilized" that so captured James's imagination.

More specifically, Schwarz has argued that the power of Trotsky's argument derives from his realization that the primitive can never exist in a pure abstract form, it can never exist *only* as the primitive. Instead, what is considered as primitive is only the consequence of the unevenness that capital accumulation itself generates. He argues that to Trotsky, the primitive is always "an amalgam with more contemporary forms" partly because notions of the primitive are produced by modern capitalist conditions. As such, notions of the "primitive" and the "modern" can only exist in relation to each other. Schwarz argues that it is from this vantage point that we can understand what it was that Spengler and Trotsky had to offer James. They enabled him to develop a historical method that broke with the presupposition that history only belonged to the "civilized", an idea that permeated much of early twentieth century historiography.²⁸⁴

Trotsky's *History* is particularly significant here. In the *History*, Trotsky recounted how Lenin was ridiculed by the other members of the Bolshevik Central Committee, because his reading of the situation in Russia defied traditional Marxist conventions that insisted that Russia was too "backwards" to support a revolutionary movement. The Russian Revolution was therefore not only a political revolution, but also a revolution in philosophy, because it challenged the accepted dogma of what it was historically possible to achieve. The same logic can be applied to the Haitian Revolution. When the slaves of Saint-Domingue freed

²⁸³ Schwarz, "Haiti and Historical Time", 93.

²⁸⁴ Schwarz, "Haiti and Historical Time", 101.

themselves from colonial and racial domination, they not only secured their own political independence, but they also challenged the accepted racist dogma that black slaves could not operate as autonomous human beings. What James set out to do in *The Black Jacobins*, armed with Spengler and Trotsky, was to demonstrate how such a political and philosophical revolution had occurred.²⁸⁵

As Isaac Deutscher has explained, what Trotsky's law of combined development is really suggesting, is that the "extreme of backwardness" tends towards the "extreme of progress".²⁸⁶ Just like Trotsky had argued that the Russian workers were "hospitable to the boldest conclusions of revolutionary thought" because of Russia's combined development, James suggested that it was the oppression of slavery combined with the modernity of the Atlantic slave-trade that made the slaves "hospitable to the boldest conclusions of revolutionary thought" radiating from Paris.²⁸⁷ In *The Black Jacobins*, James described the revolting slaves as "Revolutionaries through and through ... own brothers of the Cordeliers in Paris and the Vyborg workers in Petrograd ...".²⁸⁸ Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development therefore provided James with the theoretical means to understand how one of the most radical revolutions in the age of bourgeois revolutions could occur in the "archaic" slave society of Saint-Domingue, instead of in the more "advanced" Europe. What Trotsky's *History* demonstrated to James was therefore how so-called "backward" countries could actually leap to the very forefront of historical development. This allowed him to explain how it could be that it was the slaves of Saint-Domingue who drew the ideas of liberty and equality, which had originated in revolutionary Paris, to its most radical conclusion. By doing so, James granted historical agency to a group of people who were traditionally thought to have no history, or at the very least were thought to be historically insignificant. Moreover, it also pointed to the future of the African continent, as James predicted that what had happened in Saint-Domingue, would also happen in Africa: "The blacks of Africa are more advanced, nearer ready than the slaves of San Domingo".²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ Schwarz, "Haiti and Historical Time", 103.

²⁸⁶ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 231.

²⁸⁷ Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 191.

²⁸⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 231.

²⁸⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938).

III. III. James's portrayal of Toussaint's role in the Haitian Revolution

In this chapter I argue that in *The Black Jacobins*, Toussaint Louverture has the same historical role as Lenin has in Trotsky's *History*. While it was not Toussaint that led Haiti to independence – that was Dessalines, the most famous of Toussaint's black generals - James nevertheless argues that it was Toussaint that laid the foundation for independence, without which the last campaign could not have been won. Even though he himself was not present at the end, it was Toussaint that united the scattered and confused slaves (in James's words) into one revolutionary force that over the course of 12 years would acquire enough courage and strength to declare the colony independent.²⁹⁰ "Out of the chaos in San Domingo that existed then and for years to follow, he (Toussaint) would lay the foundations of a Negro State that lasts to this day", James writes.²⁹¹

However, while Toussaint could take the revolutionary opportunity when it presented itself, he could not create it. Throughout *The Black Jacobins*, James continuously emphasized the larger economic forces at play in the revolution. It was the conflict between three forces – the French bourgeoisie, the British bourgeoisie, and the colonists of Saint-Domingue – that created the opportunity for revolutionary transformation. But it was Toussaint's ability to use these forces to the slaves' advantage, to essentially maneuver himself into a favorable position between these competing forces, that created the foundation for the revolution's success. As James himself put it, "We have clearly stated the vast impersonal forces at work in the crisis of San Domingo. But men make history, and Toussaint made the history that he made because he was the man that he was".²⁹² I therefore argue that Toussaint, like Lenin, appear as the last and decisive element in the causal chain leading up to Haitian independence. While Toussaint did not create the revolutionary opportunity, he is nevertheless a crucial factor for the revolution's success.

III. III. I. The economic base of the revolution

Like Trotsky, James begins his analysis from the economic base of the revolution. Three forces - with competing material interests - were important here: the French bourgeoisie, the

²⁹⁰ Røtvold, "Aktør og lederskap i C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins*", 7.

²⁹¹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 74.

²⁹² James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 70.

British bourgeoisie, and the colonial planters. It was the conflict between these three forces, James argued, that created the possibility for emancipation. These forces are “impersonal” because they were tied to the economic interests of Britain, France and Saint-Domingue, whose wealth was built on the Atlantic slave trade. All of them, therefore, had an economic interest in Saint-Domingue and it was these competing economic interests that created the opportunity for revolutionary transformation:

Men make their own history, and the black Jacobins of San Domingo were to make history which would alter the fate of millions of men and shift the economic currents of three continents. But if they could seize opportunity they could not create it. The slave trade-slave and slavery were woven tight into the economics of the eighteenth century. Three forces, the proprietors of San Domingo, the French bourgeoisie and the British bourgeoisie, thrived on this devastation of a continent and on the brutal exploitation of millions. As long as these maintained an equilibrium the internal traffic would go on, and for that matter would have gone on until the present day. But nothing, however profitable, goes on forever. From the very momentum of their own development colonial planters, French and British bourgeois, were generating internal stresses and intensifying external rivalries, moving blindly to explosions and conflicts which would shatter the basis of their dominance and create the possibility of emancipation.²⁹³

James argued that out of these three forces, it was the colonial planters that were the most important. James describes how the planters from the moment of their creation had been generating “internal stresses”, by which James means class and racial tensions. To James, the classes of Saint-Domingue is roughly divided between the white and colored population. The white population is divided into two groups: big whites – the planters, merchants and wealthy agents of the maritime bourgeoisie, and small whites – plantations manager, lawyers, notaries, artisans, vagabonds, and fugitives. In the coming upheaval, these two groups, who were normally in opposition to each other, would unite against the mulattoes and the French bourgeoisie in order to uphold the racial divides of the colony. “In defense of it they would bring down the whole of their world”, James explains.²⁹⁴ Besides the white population, there was the mulattoes and the free blacks. While the relationship between whites and mulattoes

²⁹³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 17.

²⁹⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 23.

had been better in the early years of the colony, with white men marrying black women so that their children could inherit their estate, over time the mulattoes had multiplied and outnumbered the whites. This, in conjunction with the fact that the mulattoes were often wealthier than the whites, had increased white on mulatto racial hostility. In the decades preceding the revolution the mulattoes had been stripped of equal rights and were required to perform mandatory military service.

Then of course there were the slaves, whose excruciating labor was the foundation of Saint-Domingue's prosperity and wealth. "The difficulty was", James explains, "that though one could trap them like animals, transport them in pens, work them alongside an ass or a horse and beat both with the same stick, stable them and starve them, they remained, despite their black skins and curly hair, quite invincibly human beings; with the intelligence and resentment of human beings".²⁹⁵ In order to cow them into the "necessary docility and acceptance", a "regime of calculated brutality and terrorism" was necessary.²⁹⁶ But while some slaves bowed down to this cruelty, others plotted in secrecy, poisoning their families or forming bands of maroons (escaped slaves) in the forests. Occasionally these bands were united under one leader who organized raids on the plantations. In the century preceding the revolution there was also one large-scale rebellion, the Mackendal conspiracy. However, while James emphasized that slaves had always rebelled, and as such the need to be free was a universal phenomenon, he is very adamant that it was the French bourgeoisie, by which he means the French Revolution, that lay the foundations for the Haitian Revolution.

Quoting the French social historian Jean Jaurés, James argued that Atlantic slavery and the slave trade had created the economic base for the French Revolution: "Sad irony of human history ... The fortunes created at Bordeaux, at Nantes, by the slavetrade, gave the bourgeoisie that pride which needed liberty and contributed to human emancipation".²⁹⁷ James argued that it was the immense wealth generated by the Atlantic slave trade that laid the foundations for the maritime bourgeoisie to challenge the aristocracy and the old feudal system. And since it was the French Revolution that would lead to the Haitian Revolution, the slave trade had paradoxically created the material preconditions for its own destruction. Besides the French Revolution, two other factors were important: the growing wealth of Saint-Domingue and the restrictions placed on trade and commerce by the Exclusive (the French mercantile system). While the exploitation of millions of African slaves had made

²⁹⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 5.

²⁹⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 5.

²⁹⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 35.

Saint-Domingue the world's wealthiest colony, James argued that it was the "very prosperity" of Saint-Domingue that would lead to the revolution.²⁹⁸ The wealthier the colonists became, the more they resented the restrictions imposed upon them by the French government. Consensus among the colonists was that France was now "retarding the economic growth" of Saint-Domingue.²⁹⁹ Thus, when the French Revolution broke out, the colonists, weary of the old mercantile system saw an opportunity for more self-government and greater profits, so they joined in on the revolution and demanded colonial representation in the newly established Constituent Assembly.

This, however, had unintended consequences because it brought up the question of the state of the colony and the people living there, such as the mulattoes and the slaves. The planters initially asked for seats in the Assembly proportionate to the number of inhabitants in Saint-Domingue but was denied this on account of slaves being considered property and mulattoes not having the right to vote. Thus, James explains, it was the planters themselves that had brought the question of mulattoes and slaves before the assembly: "The San Domingo representatives realised at last what they had done; they had tied the fortunes of San Domingo to the assembly of a people in ferment, and thenceforth the history of liberty in France and slave emancipation in San Domingo is one and indivisible".³⁰⁰ The problem, James explains, was that the French Revolution was created on the basis of equal human rights, and so not granting the same to the oppressed people of the colonies was a stain on their new rule.³⁰¹ While revolutionary France did nothing on this question until their hands were forced by the revolting slaves, the mere whisper of abolition would unleash the full wrath of the planters, and in their attempt to protect their material interests, which lay in the access to slaves that could work the plantations, they would incite a class war that would destroy the foundations of their world.

As the colonists made their bid for more self-government, the mulattoes of Saint-Domingue petitioned the Constituent Assembly for equal rights. This was met with massive resistance from the white planters, who were afraid that by granting mulattoes equal rights, abolishing slavery would be next. A bloody conflict ensued with mulattoes being lynched and murdered by whites which led to a wide-spread mulatto revolt that culminated in the brutal execution of their leader Vincent Óge. When the news of Óge's torture and death reached Paris, the

²⁹⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 34.

²⁹⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 34.

³⁰⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 46.

³⁰¹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 63.

colonial question could no longer be ignored and after four days of debate, the Constituent Assembly granted voting rights to every mulatto whose parents were both free, of which there was about 400.³⁰² However, the white colonists refused to ratify the decree and the conflict continued with heightened intensity. The French Revolution therefore intensified the class and racial tensions that already existed in Saint-Domingue between whites and mulattoes. The point for James here is that while the colony was incredibly wealthy and prosperous, that was no guarantee of social stability: “that rests on the constantly shifting equilibrium between the classes”, he argued.³⁰³ With the French Revolution, the class conflicts of Saint-Domingue was brought out into the open and it was this “quarrel between whites and Mulattoes that woke the sleeping slaves”.³⁰⁴

While the whites and mulattoes of Saint-Domingue had their eyes fixed on each other, the slaves held secret meetings of their own. “They had heard of the revolution and had constructed it in their own image: the white slaves in France had risen, and killed their masters, and were now enjoying the fruits of the earth. It was gravely inaccurate in fact, but they had caught the spirit of the thing. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”.³⁰⁵ Furthermore, the colonists were “giving a better example than all the revolutionary tracts which found their way to the colony. ... Their quick resorts to arm, their lynching, murders and mutilations of Mulattoes and political enemies, were showing the slaves how liberty and equality were gained or lost”.³⁰⁶ In lieu of the forest at night, the slaves were organizing an insurrection on a massive scale. On the night of the 22 August 1791, on the order of their leader, Boukman, the slaves of the north plain rose against their masters and set fire to the plantations. The Haitian Revolution had begun.

The Boukman rebellion was a thorough mass uprising with preparations going on for months between leaders from different plantations stretching across the whole of the north plain. The plan was to massacre the whites and take the colony for themselves. However, due to some slaves rising pre-maturely, the colonists were able to organize some resistance, which inhibited the slaves from taking Le Cap, the largest city of the north plain. The Colonial Assembly then took charge of the colony and began to terrorize and massacre all the slaves they could get their hands on, which only made the rebellion grow even larger. Some free blacks and mulattoes also joined in on the slave rebellion. Then, “To help the slaves and

³⁰² James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 57-60.

³⁰³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 43.

³⁰⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 56.

³⁰⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 63.

³⁰⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 63.

confuse the white planters came news of a Mulatto revolt in the West”.³⁰⁷ A group of mulattoes, weary of being persecuted and lynched by whites, had assembled under the leadership of Rigaud, a figure that would be a dominating force in Saint-Domingue in the coming upheaval. The white colonists sought at once to make use of the Mulattoes to suppress the slave rebellion and for a while white and mulatto proprietors joined forces. However, when a group of whites hanged a mulatto, the mulattoes “In a frenzy of excitation and rage ... summoned the slaves of the West Province and drew them into the revolution. In the advanced North the slaves were leading the Mulattoes, in the backward West the Mulattoes were leading the slaves”.³⁰⁸

To further complicate an already chaotic situation, on January 21, 1793, the king is executed, and France becomes a republic, followed by war with Britain and Spain in February. As James explains it; “... the ruling classes of Europe armed against this new monster – democracy”.³⁰⁹ First Spain invades Saint-Domingue, then the British, an ally of Spain at the time, who now see an opportunity to acquire a colony in the West Indies for themselves. While the British were the biggest slave traders in the world, James explains, after they lost their American colonies, their interest in the slave-trade had declined, and they began watching the growing wealth of Saint-Domingue “with alarm and envy”.³¹⁰ Furthermore, by selling slaves to Saint-Domingue, for which the prosperity of the colony was completely dependent, the British were only increasing the wealth of the French. “Britain was cutting its own throat”, as James put it.³¹¹ With no real economic interest in the slave trade anymore, the British began to push for abolition in order to hurt French commerce. Thus, the British abolitionist society was formed. However, when the revolution broke out and the British saw an opportunity to gain another colony, abolition was abandoned, and they made a bid for Saint-Domingue.

It was this rivalry between the British and the French bourgeoisie that created the opportunity for liberation, amplified by the fact that the colonial planters abandoned France in favour of Britain in hopes that the British would restore order to the colony. While the planters initially welcomed the new revolutionary regime in France because they hoped it would grant them more self-government, once they begin to fear that slavery might be abolished, they turn on the revolution. The planters therefore attempted to use the rivalry

³⁰⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 75.

³⁰⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 80.

³⁰⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 98.

³¹⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 37.

³¹¹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 39.

between the British and the French to secure their own economic interests. But in doing so, they opened up a road to liberation for the slaves, who under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture, are able to use this conflict to gain their own freedom. In James's narrative, this is predicated on Toussaint's exceptional abilities as a revolutionary leader, his political maturity, his vision, and his determination. As James put it, "from the very beginning he (Toussaint) manoeuvred with an uncanny certainty not only between local parties in San Domingo but between the international forces at work".³¹²

III. III. II. Toussaint appears before the Colonial Assembly

While Toussaint was not present during the first few weeks of the Boukman rebellion, when he does join the revolution, he immediately takes on a leading role: "From the moment he joined the revolution he was a leader", James argued, and he "moved without serious rivalry to the first rank".³¹³ At the time, the slave camp was divided into two large bands, one led by Biassou and the other by Jean François, however, it quickly becomes evident that neither of these leaders were equipped to lead the revolution any further. While Biassou and Jean François were "men born to command", as James put it, they lacked the necessary vision and determination to move the revolution forward and the slaves, although in a ferment, were unable to organize themselves without appropriate leadership.³¹⁴

Masses roused to the revolutionary pitch need above all a clear and vigorous direction. But the first coup had failed and Jean Francois and Biassou, though they could keep order, had not the faintest idea what to do next. ... To these bewildered leaders Toussaint brought his superior knowledge and the political vices which usually accompany it.³¹⁵

Furthermore, after about four months of insurrection, the revolution reaches an impasse. The insurrection is unable to spread into the West Province and the destruction of the country around them made it impossible for them to exist. Starving and frightened of being beaten into submission, the leadership begins to vacillate. When three commissioners arrive from

³¹² James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 71.

³¹³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 70.

³¹⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 74.

³¹⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 74.

France to restore order to the colony, Jean François and Biassou are ready to strike a deal. In return for the liberty of a few hundred leaders, they would co-operate with the King's troops and hunt down those slaves who refused to submit. James describes how Toussaint, as a subordinate to Biassou, is given a leading role in this scheme. Although James emphasized that this was an abominable betrayal, it ultimately turned out to be a pivotal moment in the history of the revolution because it was from this experience that Toussaint developed his revolutionary policy.

While the Commissioners had been delighted at the opportunity for peace, the Colonial Assembly refused to ratify the deal. It was therefore arranged a meeting between Toussaint, as a representative of the leadership, and the Colonial Assembly. However, when Toussaint appears before the Assembly, the president would not speak to him. He would only communicate by note and demanded that the slaves gave proof of their repentance before the Assembly would decide on their fate. According to James, he wanted to impress on the blacks that the Commissioners were subordinate to the Assembly, and he succeeded. It is at this moment, when faced with the arrogance and contempt of the Colonial Assembly, that Toussaint makes a decision that would transform the course of the revolution. This meeting teaches him two things that would shape his policy in the coming years. Firstly, that the Commissioners power was subordinate to those of the Assembly. From then on, he would never accept any offer from the Commissioners that were not already ratified in France. Secondly, he realizes that there is no negotiating with the colonists, they were never going to budge as much as an inch for what they perceived to be theirs by rights. The slaves would have to win freedom on their own terms and the only way to do that was through an army.

Then and only then did Toussaint come to an unalterable decision from which he never wavered and for which he died. Complete liberty for all, to be attained and held by their own strength. ... Henceforth it was war, and war needed trained soldiers.³¹⁶

When he returned to camp, he told his leaders not to look to the Commissioners for anything, and he began to train his own revolutionary army. This was a crucial moment in the revolutionary process because the army was everything. While the basis of Toussaint's power was the black masses, James explains, "its framework was the army".³¹⁷ And in the coming upheaval, it was Toussaint and his army that would be the decisive factor in the revolution:

³¹⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 85.

³¹⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 213.

Toussaint alone among the black leaders, with freedom for all in his mind, was in those early months of 1792 organising out of the thousands of ignorant and untrained blacks, an army capable of fighting European troops. ... These and not the perorations in the Legislative would be decisive in the struggle for freedom.³¹⁸

With Toussaint's decision that it would have to be freedom for all, the course of the revolution begins to take shape. I therefore argue that this moment is comparable to Lenin's arrival at the Finland Station in April 1917. Both these events mark a pivotal moment in the revolutionary process because it is only at this moment that the movement finds its direction.

III. III. III. Toussaint's rise to power

In January 1793 the French monarchy is overthrown, followed by war with Spain and then Britain. When the Spanish invade Saint-Domingue, Toussaint and the other black leaders join them against the French Republic. The Spanish, promising to "re-establish order" in the colony, became a rallying point for the disgruntled colonists. However, in contrast to Biassou and Jean François, who were committed to "re-establishing order" by leading the revolting slaves back to the plantation, James argued that Toussaint was never loyal to the Spanish. While keeping up the appearance of working under the Spanish Crown, Toussaint is biding his time, secretly promising the slaves their freedom, and building up his army: "But although he had fought under the flag of the counter-revolution", James argued, "he knew where his power lay, and under the very noses of the Spanish commanders he continued to call the blacks to freedom".³¹⁹ According to James, he even wrote a letter to one of the Commissioners, Laveaux, offering to join the French in return for the liberty of the blacks. However, Laveaux refused, and Toussaint continued to work for the Spanish, and by 1794 he had taken a great deal of the colony for them.

In late 1793, the British make an armed bid for Saint-Domingue. The planters had urged Britain to invade ever since the slaves revolted, and now, both white and mulatto proprietors rushed to welcome them. The mulatto soldiers, like Rigaud and his brother Beauvais and the detachments that they commanded, stayed with the French, "but the Mulatto proprietors,

³¹⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 92-93.

³¹⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 105.

particularly those of the West Province, preferred their slaves to liberty and equality”, James argued, and went with the British.³²⁰ With the support of the planters, the British were soon in control over almost the entire island. It was a crucial moment in world history, James argued, because if the British could hold Saint-Domingue, they would not abolish slavery, but continue the slave trade on levels unprecedented. Furthermore, “if the British completed the conquest of San Domingo, the colonial empire of revolutionary France was gone; its vast resources would be directed into British pockets, and Britain would be able to return to Europe and throw army and navy against the revolution”.³²¹ With the planters in support of the British, the colony was hanging on by a thread. The French Commissioners – Sonthonax, Polverel and Laveaux – fought to save Saint-Domingue for the sake of the revolution, Sonthonax even abolished slavery in the colony to raise the slaves against the British and the planters. However, the British proved too strong, and Sonthonax and Polverel eventually had to flee.

There was only one person left in Saint-Domingue who could save it, James argued, but Toussaint refused to do anything until slavery had been abolished by the French government. He had learned from experience that the words of the Commissioners meant nothing unless it was also ratified in France. But the revolution first had to move forward in France, and it was not until the Girondins were replaced by Robespierre and the Mountain that anything happened. However, as soon as the news came that France had abolished slavery, Toussaint “did not hesitate a moment but at once told Laveaux that he was willing to join him”.³²² Laveaux immediately made Toussaint a Brigadier-General and “in a campaign as brilliant as the one by which he had captured the line of camps for the Spaniards, he recaptured them for the French, either conquering them or winning over commanders and men, so that when he joined the French he had 4,000 troops, the North Province was almost recaptured, and the Spaniards, Biassou and Jean François were not only routed but demoralised”.³²³ From this moment forward “the whole relation of forces in San Domingo was not completely changed and although few recognised it fully at the time, Toussaint and the blacks were henceforth the decisive factor in the revolution”.³²⁴

By 1796 Toussaint has defeated the Spanish and after having prevented an attack on the Governor by the Mulattoes of the West Province (who were pro-British) Toussaint is

³²⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 108.

³²¹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 109.

³²² James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 115.

³²³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 115-116.

³²⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 117.

appointed Assistant to the Governor by Laveaux and General of Division by the Directory. Through his incessant activity on their behalf, Toussaint has also gained the confidence of the black laborers, or the former slaves, who see him as a man devoted to their interests. “A growing army and the confidence of the back labourers meant power”, James explains, “But Toussaint saw early that political power is only a means to an end” and that the “salvation of San Domingo lay in the restoration of agriculture”.³²⁵ Thus, Toussaint begins to restore the colony and lay the foundations of a new regime. Cultivation prospers and despite racial and class tensions in Saint-Domingue causing trouble at every turn, Toussaint is able to keep good relations with all parties: “Sought after by blacks, Mulattoes and whites, the suave and discreet Toussaint was gradually becoming the one man in San Domingo on whom everything hinged”.³²⁶

III. III. IV. Currents of counter-revolution

However, by 1797 the revolution in France was dead. It had begun already in 1794 when Robespierre was executed, and the Convention was replaced by the Directory. The white planters in Paris began to press the Directory for “establishing order” in Saint-Domingue and the French Government began to suspect that Toussaint was planning to make the colony independent. Toussaint on the other hand is becoming increasingly worried that France intends to re-instate slavery. While Toussaint had no wish to declare the colony independent, James argues, in order to protect the now free laborers he decided that he had to hold on to power, even at the cost of defying France. He makes one last attempt to negotiate with the new representative sent by the Directory, Hédouville, but when this fails, he decides to take power for himself. In 1798 he succeeds in driving out the British and except for the South, which was ruled by Rigaud, Toussaint was now master over the entire colony. While Toussaint and Rigaud had cooperated in the previous years, Hédouville attempt to use Rigaud against Toussaint and a civil war breaks out, which ends with Rigaud leaving for France. Toussaint is now in undisputed command, but one problem remains. In 1797 the Directory was overthrown by Napoleon and while Napoleon had confirmed Toussaint’s position as Commander-in-Chief, he was preparing to restore slavery in secrecy. In a letter addressed to the citizens of Saint-Domingue, Napoleon declared that the colonies would no longer be

³²⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 126.

³²⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 151.

represented in the French Parliament but that they would be governed by “special laws”, and Toussaint began to suspect that a restoration of slavery was imminent.

As a response to this threat Toussaint instigates a dictatorial regime in the hopes that he can convince France that the colony can remain prosperous without slavery. Although this was despotism, James explains, it was “not for base personal ends or the narrow interests of one class oppressing another. His government, like the absolute monarchy in its progressive days, balanced between the classes, but his was rooted in the preservation of the interests of the labouring poor”.³²⁷ So, while he binds the laborers to the plantations to increase productivity, this is done with the intent to protect them. He also set himself sternly against any form of racial discrimination and “Race prejudice, the curse of San Domingo for two hundred years, was vanishing fast”, James explains.³²⁸ However, in his attempt to appease France he forgot to look towards his own people who were beginning to feel that Toussaint was favoring the whites on their expense. Because while the black masses labored so that Saint-Domingue might prosper, Toussaint was filling his administration with whites. And although he kept his army overwhelmingly black because he knew that was the basis of his power, he afforded white officers’ important positions within the army, and encouraged both white and mulatto proprietors to come back to Saint-Domingue.

The problem was not racial prejudice, James explains, it was fear of the counter-revolution. France did not let the blacks know where they stood. The black laborers were afraid for their liberty, and they did not understand what Toussaint was doing. Even when news came that Bonaparte was preparing an expedition to Saint-Domingue, Toussaint did not declare the island independent, but continued in his attempts to appease the whites. Neither did they understand Toussaint’s policy against Spanish Saint-Domingue. While Toussaint did not want to believe that France would restore slavery, he had taken the Spanish part of the island as a bulwark against a possible French invasion, even though Bonaparte had strictly forbidden him from doing so. “This strange duality, the preparation for war but hoping to avoid it” confused the laborers.³²⁹ However, it was not Toussaint’s policy that was misguided. According to James, the reason why Toussaint appeared to favor the whites was because he needed their knowledge, education, and experience to rebuild the colony. The problem was rather that he failed to explain the necessity of what he was doing to the laborers:

³²⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 207.

³²⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 218, 207

³²⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 235.

With vision, courage and determination, he was laying the foundations of an independent nation. But, too confident in his own powers, he was making one dreadful mistake. . . . His error was his neglect of his own people. He took no trouble to explain. It was dangerous to explain, but still more dangerous not to explain.³³⁰

The consequence of Toussaint's silence was that the laborers grew dissatisfied with his regime which led to a widespread insurrection in the North. The laborers wanted to overthrow Toussaint's government, kill the whites and put Moïse, Toussaint's nephew, in his place.

III. III. V. Toussaint's tragic mistake

It is while discussing this revolt that James makes the most use of parallels between the Haitian Revolution and the Russian Revolution. Determined to explain Toussaint's mistake as well as provide guidance as to what he should have done instead, James contrasts the actions of the leadership of the Haitian Revolution against the leadership of the Russian Revolution. When commenting on Toussaint's execution of Moïse, for taking the sides of the black masses against him, James wrote: "And to shoot Moïse, the black, for the sake of the whites was more than an error, it was a crime. It was almost as if Lenin had had Trotsky shot for taking the side of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie".³³¹ James continues to use this parallel between Lenin and Toussaint in order to explain the nature of Toussaint's mistake:

Criticism is not enough. What should Toussaint have done? A hundred and fifty years of history and the scientific study of revolution begun by Marx and Engels, and amplified by Lenin and Trotsky, justify us in pointing to an alternative course.³³²

James argued that the Bolsheviks had faced a lot of the same problems as Toussaint. Due to the "backwardness" of the Russian masses, Lenin had been forced to use the Russian bourgeoisie until the proletariat had developed itself. While he had excluded the bourgeoisie from political power, he had given them important posts and good salaries, often higher than those of the Communist Party members. The plan was that the Bolshevik Party would

³³⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 200.

³³¹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 238.

³³² James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 236.

gradually win over those who had been forced to accept it by force, and James argued that Toussaint tried to do the same:

We can measure Toussaint's gigantic intellect by the fact that, untrained as he was, he attempted to do the same, his black army and generals filling the political role of the Bolshevik Party. If he kept whites in his army, it was for the same reason that the Bolsheviks also kept Tsarist officers. Neither revolution had enough trained and educated officers of its own, and the black Jacobins, relatively speaking, were far worse off culturally than the Russian Bolsheviks.³³³

The problem was not Toussaint's policy, it was the fact that he had lost touch with the masses, something James argued that Lenin never did:

But whereas Lenin kept the party and the masses thoroughly aware of every step, and explained carefully the exact position of the bourgeois servants of the Worker's State, Toussaint explained nothing, and allowed the masses to think that their old enemies were being favoured at their expense. In allowing himself to be looked upon as taking the side of the whites against the blacks, Toussaint committed the unpardonable crime in the eyes of a community where the whites stood for so much evil.³³⁴

What James admired the most about Lenin was his ability enter into the minds of the masses, to determine their mood and aspirations and allowing this to guide his policy.³³⁵ Writing on Lenin in *World Revolution*, James recounted how Lenin had proposed a demonstration in April "to test the feeling and temper of revolutionary Petrograd" and that it had showed him "that the moment was not yet".³³⁶ Contrasting Toussaint against Lenin, James therefore concluded that it was "in method, and not in principle, that Toussaint failed".³³⁷ While race was subsidiary to the class question in politics, James argued, "to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental".³³⁸ Toussaint had failed to realize just how much the former slaves feared the whites. The problem was

³³³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 237.

³³⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 237.

³³⁵ Bogue, *Caliban's Freedom* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 36.

³³⁶ James, *World Revolution* (1937; reis., Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 127.

³³⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 237.

³³⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 237.

therefore his lack of communication with them, ultimately leading him to lose the confidence of his people. It therefore becomes evident that while adequate leadership was instrumental to James if a revolution were to succeed, a leader is ultimately judged by his relationship to the masses. Reflecting on Toussaint's loss of communication with the laborers, James notes: "Gone were the days when Toussaint would leave the front and ride through the night to enquire into the grievances of the labourers, and, though protecting the whites, make the labourers see that he was their leader".³³⁹ The problem that James is struggling with here is his belief in the necessity of revolutionary leadership in mass movements versus the tendency of leaders to grow estranged from the very people they are meant to represent.

The tragedy of Toussaint however was that there was no need for the clash between him and the laborers because their interests were essentially the same. Comparing Toussaint's actions against those of Robespierre in the French Revolution, James argued that "Robespierre struck at the masses because he was bourgeois and they were communist" and as such that clash was inevitable. "But between Toussaint and his people there was no fundamental difference of outlook or aim".³⁴⁰ If Toussaint had only communicated with the masses, taken their grievances seriously, the clash between them could have been avoided. Referencing Lenin's thesis to the Second Congress of the Communist International, where he warned that wide concession would have to be made to natives in colonial countries due to the justified prejudice that these might feel towards the oppressing classes, James noted: "Toussaint, as his power grew, forgot that. He ignored the black labourers, bewildered them at the very moment that he needed them the most, and to bewilder the masses is to strike the deadliest of all blows at the revolution".³⁴¹

III. III. VI. Toussaint's historical role

But whereas Toussaint was busy "sawing off the branch on which he sat", Dessalines, one of Toussaint's black generals, "was fast coming to the conclusion at which Toussaint still boggled. He would declare the island independent and finish with France".³⁴² However, James argues that Toussaint's hesitations to declare the island independent was because he did not want to see the people suffer. With the counter-revolution in France came the

³³⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 231.

³⁴⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 239.

³⁴¹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 240.

³⁴² James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 231, 249.

restoration of slavery, and there was no other option than to break with France and declare the island independent. But a break with France meant war, it meant destruction of the island and it meant that Saint-Domingue would be cut off from the “civilized” world, and this is what Toussaint wished to avoid, according to James.

And yet, in this moment of his greatest uncertainty, so different from his usual clarity of mind and vigour of action, Toussaint showed himself one of those few men for whom power is a means to an end, the development of civilization, the betterment of his fellow-creatures. His very hesitations were a sign of his superior cast of mind. Dessalines and Moïse would not have hesitated.³⁴³

While Toussaint ultimately pulls himself together when the French expedition arrives, and leads one final campaign against the French, in the end there was a limit to where he could go. Although James argues that Toussaint’s “grasps of politics” had led him to make all preparations, he could not declare the island independent.³⁴⁴ James argues that the decree of February 4, 1794, where the Convention abolished slavery in all its colonies, represented for Toussaint the beginning of a new era for all French blacks. He therefore refused to believe that France would re-instate slavery. What he failed to realize was that the situation had changed, and that the France of 1794 was long gone. As James put it: “The black revolution had passed him by”.³⁴⁵ In the end it was therefore Dessalines that led Haiti to independence while Toussaint was captured (due to being betrayed by Dessalines) and sent to prison in France, where he died some months later. However, even though it was not Toussaint that led the final campaign to victory, James nevertheless considers the revolution to be his work:

A sudden torrential rain stopped the fighting. But it was the end. That night Rochambeau held a council of war and decided to evacuate the island. Toussaint had been dead only seven months, but his work was done. Of men who cowered trembling before the frown of any white ruffian, he had made in ten years an army which could hold its own with the finest soldiers Europe has yet seen.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 235.

³⁴⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 236.

³⁴⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 266.

³⁴⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 305.

So, while it was not Toussaint that led Haiti to independence, James sees that final campaign as a continuation of his work. There are several reasons for this. First of all, it was Toussaint that had created the revolutionary army without which Napoleon's army could not have been defeated. James is very adamant that none of the other leaders in the early days of the revolution had any conception of what to do next. The army, which became the slaves' weapon in their struggle for freedom, was a product of Toussaint himself. "None but a man like Toussaint could have held the men together against both British and Spaniards during those early years".³⁴⁷ Secondly, James argued that without Toussaint and his army, the revolution would most likely never have developed beyond 1794. It was Toussaint's army that kept the British at bay and ensured that Saint-Domingue remained a French colony. Had he not done so, slavery would not have been abolished for a long time and Britain would have been able to use the wealth of Saint-Domingue towards the revolution in France. James therefore argued that the significance of Toussaint's actions here went far beyond the fate of Saint-Domingue, it had a crucial bearing on world history. A similar thing occurred in the civil war against Rigaud. If Rigaud and his mulatto army had defeated Toussaint, France might have used Rigaud to reinstate slavery.

Finally, James appears to emphasize that Toussaint's leadership had an important impact on the psychology of the masses, which was essential for a people who wanted to liberate themselves from oppression. As has already been discussed, a central theme in *The Black Jacobins* is the transformation of consciousness that occurred among the slaves through their revolutionary activity. This of course also applies to Toussaint, who reinvents himself at the beginning of the revolution from Toussaint Bréda to Toussaint Louverture (a name Toussaint takes for himself which means "the Opener"). Or as James put it: "The great revolution had propelled him out of his humble joys and obscure destiny, and the trumpets of its heroic period rang ever in his ears".³⁴⁸ There are therefore larger forces at work here, combined with the activities of the oppressed themselves. However, it does appear that Toussaint's particular vision for Saint-Domingue and his preparations towards that aim – the creation of a revolutionary army and the rebuilding of the colony, had a bearing on this process, a process that would transform the once brutalized slaves into a people that would no longer tolerate the intrigue of imperialism. In the end, it did not matter that Toussaint was not present because he had already provided them with the physical and psychological means to liberate themselves:

³⁴⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 119.

³⁴⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 222.

That courageous, adventurous spirit was in all the people. They had defeated white colonists, Spaniards and British, and now they were free. They were aware of French politics, for it concerned them closely. Black men who had been slaves were sometimes deputies in the French Parliament, black men who had been slaves negotiated with the French and foreign governments. Black men who had been slaves filled the highest positions in the colony. There was Toussaint, the former slave, incredibly grand and powerful and incomparably the greatest man in San Domingo. There was no need to be ashamed of being black. The revolution had awakened them, had given them the possibility of achievement, confidence and pride. That psychological weakness, that feeling of inferiority with which the Imperialists poison colonial peoples everywhere, these were gone.³⁴⁹

Toussaint's vital role in the revolution therefore rests on his ability to create a strong and self-conscious revolutionary movement out of the rebel slaves, that is capable of defeating the most powerful European nations of their day, and when the time comes, declare the colony independent. However, it needs to be inferred here that while Toussaint provides the revolutionary movement with direction and organization, James is very clear on the fact that Toussaint is only the slaves' leader so long as he represents their interests. The slaves already know what they want, they want their freedom, and they follow Toussaint because he more than anyone else expresses that aim. James argued that the insurrection against Toussaint proved that the masses "were following him mainly because he represented that complete emancipation from their former degradation which was their chief goal. As soon as they saw that he was no longer going to this end, they were ready to throw him over".³⁵⁰ As William Clare Roberts has argued, the ultimate test of leadership for James "was *always* its loyal subservience to the revolutionary instincts of the masses".³⁵¹

I therefore argue that in *The Black Jacobins*, Toussaint Louverture has the same historical role that Lenin has in Trotsky's *History*. Just like Lenin, Toussaint appear as a "great link" in the "historic chain" leading up to Haitian independence. While Toussaint could not create the revolutionary opportunity, he was nevertheless a crucial factor for the revolution's success. The success of the Haitian Revolution was therefore not inevitable to James, but predicated on Toussaint's ability to direct and protect the revolutionary movement:

³⁴⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 204.

³⁵⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 231.

³⁵¹ Roberts, "Centralism is a Dangerous Tool", 232.

The revolution had made him; but it would be a vulgar error to suppose that the creation of a disciplined army, the defeat of the English and the Spaniards, the defeat of Rigaud, the establishment of a strong government all over the island, the growing harmony between the races, the enlightened aims of the administration, - it would be a crude error to believe that all these were inevitable. At a certain stage, the middle of 1794, the potentialities of the chaos began to be shaped and soldered by his powerful personality, and thenceforth it is impossible to say where the social forces end and the impress of personality begins. It is sufficient that but for him this history would be something entirely different.³⁵²

However, James's conclusion that without Toussaint the history of the revolution would have been entirely different, does not mean that he thought that any outcome was possible. There were severe limitations as to what Toussaint could accomplish (or anyone else for that matter). James argued that the reason why Toussaint could not declare the island independent was because he was still hoping that a new arrangement could be made between Saint-Domingue and France. What Toussaint wanted, according to James, was absolute local independence on the one hand and on the other, French capital and French administrators that would help develop and educate the country, and a high official from France as a link between governments. However, because the Haitian Revolution and the French Revolution was intrinsically linked, the counter-revolution in France inevitably dragged with it the revolution in Saint-Domingue. When that happened, there were only two options: either allow the revolution to be swept away by the counter-revolution or break with France completely. There was really nothing Toussaint could have done:

If he failed, it was for the same reason that the Russian Socialist Revolution might still fail, even after all its achievements – the defeat of the revolution in Europe. Had the Jacobins been able to consolidate the democratic republic in 1794, Hayti would have remained a French colony, but an attempt to restore slavery would have been unlikely.³⁵³

³⁵² James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 208.

³⁵³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 237.

After 1794, there were only two options left: counter-revolution or independence. So, while James recognized the profound effect that the individual personality could have on a historic process, he did not reject Marx's historical materialism. While Toussaint could imagine an entirely different future trajectory, he could not create it. The historic process creates both possibilities and limitations, and human beings can only act within this parameter. As James put it, "Their freedom of achievement is limited by the necessities of their environment".³⁵⁴

III. III. VII. How could Toussaint play this role?

James explains that Toussaint's vital role in the revolution rested on his unique qualities as an individual. It was a combination of fortunate circumstances and individual genius: "If Toussaint's genius came from where genius comes, yet circumstances conspired to give him exceptional parents and friends and a kind master".³⁵⁵ First of all, James explains, he had been fortunate with the people who owned him and had probably never been whipped or suffered other forms of physical abuse that many slaves had experienced, his character was therefore "quite unwarped".³⁵⁶ To James, this is significant because it meant that Toussaint's judgement was not clouded by bitterness which made it possible for him see past some of the racial issues in the colony and find a policy that could balance between the white and black population.³⁵⁷ This is particularly evident in the contrasts between Toussaint and Dessalines. While Toussaint strove to eradicate race and class prejudice, Dessalines rise to power culminated in him massacring the remaining white population. This, however justified, James explains, ultimately led to Haiti's subsequent isolation and poverty. In his explanation of the psychological difference between Toussaint and Dessalines, James makes a point out of their different experiences. While Toussaint had "probably never been whipped", Dessalines on the other hand is often described as having whip marks on his back: "... this old slave, with the marks of the whip below his general's uniform" and "... the fierce and uncultured Dessalines, though with the marks of the whip on his skin".³⁵⁸ Dessalines was therefore, quite literally, physically branded by his experiences. Some of the difference between Toussaint and Dessalines' political policies is therefore explained in terms of their psychology.

³⁵⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), viii.

³⁵⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 12.

³⁵⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 71.

³⁵⁷ Røtvold, "Aktør og lederskap i C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins*", 6.

³⁵⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 249, 308.

James also emphasized that Toussaint had some education which meant that he had been able to read up on western politics and economics. “His superb intellect had therefore had some opportunity of cultivating itself in general affairs at home and abroad”.³⁵⁹ But what most separated Toussaint from the other slaves and cemented his role as leader of the revolution, was Toussaint’s vision. The “problem” with the other leaders were not their capacities as soldiers or commanders, the problem was rather that they lacked imagination. They could not lead the revolution forward because they could not imagine how to get there. As Trotsky does with Lenin, James emphasizes the sheer boldness of Toussaint’s vision for Saint-Domingue: “Firm as was his grasp of reality, old Toussaint looked beyond San Domingo with a boldness of imagination surpassed by no contemporary”.³⁶⁰ It was Toussaint and Lenin’s political realism, their “grasp of reality” combined with their imagination and determination that made them such exceptional revolutionary leaders. It is this vision that drives Toussaint and to which he ultimately succumbs. James describes Toussaint’s weakness as “the obverse of his strength”.³⁶¹ He could not make that final decision towards independence because he could not let go of this dream that he had. The tragedy of Toussaint, as opposed to Lenin, was that he was never able to complete the vision that he had for Saint-Domingue. However, it is more of a personal tragedy than a tragedy for the revolution. The objective situation made it impossible for this vision to materialize and in the end, it was Dessalines that made the right call.

Where does this vision come from? James actually provides a possible explanation for this by suggesting that Toussaint’s vision came from him reading the Abbé Raynal’s prophecy of a black Spartacus. The Abbé Raynal was a French priest and abolitionist who published a history of the West Indies titled *Philosophical and Political History of the Establishments and Commerce of the Europeans in the Two Indies* in 1777. In this work, he prophesized that a “courageous chief” would rise from the ranks of the oppressed and liberate the slaves. According to James, “It was a book famous in its time and it came into the hands of the slave most fitted to make use of it, Toussaint Louverture”.³⁶² James then describes how Toussaint “over and over again” read Raynal’s passage that “A courageous chief is only wanted. Where is he?”.³⁶³ The point for James here is not that Toussaint actually *was* the “black Spartacus”. There was nothing pre-ordained about Toussaint’s role in the revolution, as is evident by

³⁵⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 71.

³⁶⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 222.

³⁶¹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 240.

³⁶² James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 16.

³⁶³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 17.

James's comment later on when reflecting on Toussaint's success in the revolution: "No wonder he came in the end to believe in himself as the black Spartacus, foretold by Raynal as predestined to achieve the emancipation of the blacks".³⁶⁴ The point is rather to highlight how Toussaint saw himself and his role in the revolution and how this was significant to how the revolution unfolded. This is also contrasted against the other leaders who did not read Raynal:

Of the men who were to lead their brothers to freedom none of them as far as we know was yet active. Dessalines, already 40, worked as a slave for his black master.

Christophe listened to the talk in the hotel where he worked but had no constructive ideas. Toussaint alone read his Raynal. ... He said afterwards that, from the time the troubles began, he felt he was destined for great things.³⁶⁵

While discussing James's passages on Toussaint imagining himself as the "black Spartacus", Nick Nesbitt has argued that this passage says absolutely nothing about Toussaint's psychology (in fact he argues that James never says anything about Toussaint's psychology):

On close reading, even the famous passage on Louverture reading Raynal, for example, says literally nothing about Toussaint's psychological interiority but merely registers the repetition of an action. ... Even and especially the descriptions of Louverture's "decisions" can be read in this materialist fashion, as no more than the actions of bodies and their effects, without any imputed notion of psychological interiority.³⁶⁶

I strongly disagree with this interpretation. I believe that James wrote the passages on Toussaint reading Raynal precisely to highlight Toussaint's psychology, more specifically, his self-understanding and motivation to act. By seeing himself as the "black Spartacus" that had come to liberate the slaves, Toussaint actually visualized himself as part of a larger historical movement. Toussaint is therefore more conscious of his own historical role than the other leaders which enables him to actually step into the historic process and influence the outcome.

However, while James emphasizes Toussaint's "personal genius", Toussaint is also a product of historical development itself, as are his black generals and the masses. As James

³⁶⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 209.

³⁶⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 63-64.

³⁶⁶ Nesbitt, "Fragments of a Universal History", 144-145.

put it: “But Toussaint was no phenomenon, no Negro freak. The same forces which moulded his genius had helped to create his black and Mulatto generals and officials”.³⁶⁷ Here I want to build on a suggestion made by Bill Schwarz, that Toussaint too is a product of uneven and combined development.³⁶⁸ It was the combination of Toussaint’s slave experience as well as his exposure to the “advancements” of western culture that made him the most complete expression of the revolutionary possibilities of that “pregnant age”. While Toussaint hesitated to declare the island independent, Dessalines “had no such scruples” and this was according to James, because of his lack of connection to western culture.³⁶⁹

Yet Toussaint’s error sprang from the very qualities that made him what he was. ... If Dessalines could see so clearly and simply, it was because the ties that bound this uneducated soldier to French civilization were of the slenderest. He saw what was under his nose so well because he saw no further. Toussaint’s failure was the failure of enlightenment, not of darkness.³⁷⁰

Furthermore, in one of the most famous passages of *The Black Jacobins*, James, after re-iterating a letter sent by Toussaint to the French government, compares Toussaint’s declaration to the works of figures like Diderot, Rosseau, Robespierre and Danton. However, there is one crucial difference which separates Toussaint from people like Rosseau and Robespierre, and that is the fact that Toussaint had been a slave himself. The slogans of the French Revolution meant far more to a slave than any Frenchman, James notes, and that was why “in the hour of danger Toussaint, uninstructed as he was, could find the language and accent of Diderot, Rousseau, and Raynal ...”. But Toussaint went even further than this, James argued, precisely because he was a slave. While these writers, “due to the class complications of their society, had always to pause, to hesitate, to qualify”. Toussaint on the other hand, “could defend the freedom of the blacks without reservation ...” and this is what made him the boldest of revolutionaries.³⁷¹ Toussaint, having been a slave himself, embodied

³⁶⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 214. It should be inferred here that James wrote *The Black Jacobins* within the context of twentieth century scientific racism, which partly accounts for his reverence towards Toussaint. James’s first known written reference to Toussaint was in 1931, in an article titled “The Intelligence of the Negro” which James published as a response to a series of racist claims made by the Trinidadian resident dr. Sidney Harland. See Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 26). In *The Black Jacobins*, Toussaint therefore appear both as an exception *and* as a representation of the untapped potential of the African people.

³⁶⁸ Schwarz, “Haiti and Historical Time”, 102.

³⁶⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 200.

³⁷⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 241.

³⁷¹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 163.

that same need for freedom as all the other slaves and this is what allowed him to never lose sight of the ultimate goal, which was liberation for all.

As has been noted by Robbie Shilliam, even though Trotsky refuted the classical developmental schema of Marx, and as such argued that “backwards” countries could leap to the forefront of historical development, he did not reject western culture. To become truly revolutionary, the workers still had to “digest the bourgeois habitus” because the prerequisite for socialism was capitalist accumulation.³⁷² James appears to be taking the same position here. While James emphasized the revolutionary potential of “backwardness”, it was Toussaint’s “digestion” of western culture that made him such an outstanding revolutionary leader. In that sense, Toussaint was a man ahead of his time, James argues, as he was the only one in Saint-Domingue who was able to fight imperialism while still respecting western culture:

It needed another 150 years before humanity could produce and give opportunity to men who could combine within their single selves the unrelenting suspicion and ruthless ferocity necessary to deal with imperialism, and yet retain undimmed their creative impulse and their respect for the attainments of the very culture they fought so fiercely.³⁷³

Toussaint therefore appear as a product of uneven and combined development. While James emphasizes the importance of Toussaint’s education, which meant that he had some knowledge of western politics and economics, it was equally important that Toussaint had been a slave himself: “... he accomplished what he did because, superbly gifted, he incarnated the determination of his people never, never to be slaves again”.³⁷⁴ It was the fact that Toussaint inhabited both these worlds (much in the same way as James himself did) that placed him at “the forefront of the great historical movement of his time”.³⁷⁵

³⁷² Shilliam, «The Hieroglyph of the Party”, 201.

³⁷³ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 241.

³⁷⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 198; Røtvold, “Aktør og lederskap i C.L.R. James’ *The Black Jacobins*”, 8.

³⁷⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), 198.

CONCLUSION

The topic of this thesis has been the fundamental influence of Trotsky's *History* on how James imagined the historical role of the Haitian revolutionary leader, Toussaint Louverture. I have argued that just like Lenin was a "great link" in the causal chain leading up to October, Toussaint was a "great link" in the causal chain leading up to Haitian independence. By attributing the success of the revolution to the actions of a single individual, Trotsky and James are essentially saying that an individual personality can "make or break" an entire revolution. However, it is important to infer here that personality only matters in the last instance. Toussaint and Lenin could only take the revolutionary opportunity when it presented itself. Both Trotsky and James emphasize that there were vast impersonal forces at work in both these revolutions. There are also limitations to what an individual can do, and these are ultimately determined by the development of the forces of production. In Trotsky's analysis of the Russian Revolution, there were only two options available: a dictatorship of the proletariat or a "military dictatorship of capital". Similarly, in James's analysis of the Haitian Revolution, after 1794, there were only two alternatives left: the restoration of slavery or independence. But even though there were a limited number of options available, there was still a choice. Without the personal interference of Toussaint and Lenin it was impossible to know which of these two options had materialized. There was therefore nothing "automatic" about either of these revolutions.

When there are no guarantees that a revolutionary process will be successful, then the personal qualities of the individual leadership become singularly important, as their personal interference can both progress and hinder this process. The personal qualities of leadership that both Trotsky and James emphasized was political realism combined with extraordinary vision and imagination. It was Toussaint and Lenin's superior understanding of the historical movement that they were a part of that allowed them to step into the historic process and influence the outcome. This is contrasted against the rest of the leadership who were unable to lead the revolution forward because they were confused about what to do next. While the problem with the Haitian leadership was that they were not able to see far enough, the problem with the Russian leadership was that they were looking towards something that was already in the past. Toussaint and Lenin's role in the revolution was therefore to provide the movement with direction. While both Trotsky and James emphasized the instinctive

revolutionary temper of the masses, they still maintained that revolutionary leadership was necessary to organize and direct the movement.

But the ultimate test of leadership was a leader's relationship to the masses. In the Russian Revolution, Lenin's vital role was predicated on his ability to "enter into the minds" of the masses which is what made him realize that the situation in Russia had changed, and that there now was a possibility for a proletarian revolution. As Trotsky put it: "The art of revolutionary leadership in its most critical moments consists nine-tenths in knowing how to sense the mood of the masses. ... An unexcelled ability to detect the mood of the masses was Lenin's great power".³⁷⁶ James, too, emphasized this quality and he used Lenin as a figure of comparison to highlight Toussaint's mistake. It therefore appears that to both Trotsky and James, there is something universal about the qualities of leadership. While the external circumstances are not the same, there are still some generalizations that can be made from one revolution to another. Trotsky, for instance, often argued that for revolutions to succeed in other countries, they too had to have a leader like Lenin.³⁷⁷

The unique and the universal is at the heart of Trotsky and James's method.³⁷⁸ As Marxists, they believed that "history possesses a certain movement to it", as James put it.³⁷⁹ An important part of their method is therefore to generalize about how society develops. While most historians direct their attention towards the peculiarities of their fields, for revolutionary Marxists like Trotsky and James, generalizations are a way to make predictions and as such they are an integral part of their political projects.³⁸⁰ In *The Black Jacobins*, this is evident in the parallels that James draws between the Haitian Revolution, the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution, which are used to make generalizations about the dynamics of revolution. However, what is "peculiar" about Trotsky and James's method, is that despite their tendency towards generalizations, they are also very preoccupied with the particular and the accidental, as is evident in their analysis of Lenin and Toussaint. Therefore, what most of all seems to characterize Trotsky and James's method, is their desire to generalize patterns of historical development on the one hand, and their sensitivity to the unique and accidental on the other.

³⁷⁶ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932; reis., UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 87.

³⁷⁷ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 245.

³⁷⁸ Baruch Knei-Paz has written about the universal and the unique as it pertains to Trotsky's writing, see Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 496.

³⁷⁹ James, "Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*", 67.

³⁸⁰ Maza, *Thinking About History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 217), 164.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

James, C.L.R. *Beyond a Boundary*. London: Penguin Random House, 2019. First published 1963 by Hutchinson.

James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: The Dial Press, 1938.

James, C.L.R. "Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*". *Small Axe* 8 (2000): 65-112.

James, C.L.R. "Revolution and the Negro". In *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James 1939-1949*, edited by Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc, 77-87. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994.

James, C.L.R. "Trotsky's Place in History". In *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James 1939-1949*, edited by Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc, 92-130. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994.

James, C.L.R. *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017. First published 1937 by Secker & Warburg Ltd.

Trotsky, Leon. *History of the Russian Revolution*. UK: Penguin Random House, 2017. First published 1932.

Secondary sources

Adi, Hakim. *Pan-Africanism: A History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Beilharz, Peter. "Trotsky as Historian". *History Workshop* 20 (Autumn 1985): 36-55.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4288648>

Blackledge, Paul. *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.

Blackledge, Paul. "Leon Trotsky's Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History". *Studies in East European Thought* 58, 1. (March 2006): 1-31.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20099925>

Blackledge, Paul. "Historical Materialism. In *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Marx*, edited by Matt Vidal, Tony Smith, Thomás Rotta and Paul Prew, 1-22. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190695545.001.0001

Bogues, Anthony. *Caliban's Freedom: The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James*. London: Pluto Press, 1997.

Bogues, Anthony. "C.L.R. James, Pan-Africanism and the black radical tradition". *Critical Arts*, 26, no. 3 (December 2011): 484-499, DOI: 10.1080/02560046.2011.639957

Chattopadhyay, Kunal and Marik, Soma. "The Thucydides of the Russian Revolution". *Economic and Political Weekly* LII, 10 (2017): 43-53.

Cox, Michael. "Trotsky and His Interpreters: or, Will the Real Leon Trotsky Please Stand Up? *The Russian Review*, 51, 1 (January 1992): 84-102.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/131248>

Daniels, Robert V. *Trotsky, Stalin, and Socialism*. Boulder, Westview Press, 1991.

Davidson, “History From Below”. *Jacobin* <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/01/leon-trotsky-russian-revolution-stalin-lenin>

Deutscher, Isaac. *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky: 1929-1940*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

Douglas, Rachel. *Making The Black Jacobins: C.L.R. James and the Drama of History*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019.

Dubois, Laurent. “Reading The Black Jacobins, Seven Decades Later”. *NACLA Report on the Americas* 42, 2 (May 2009): 38-42. DOI: 10.1080/10714839.2009.11725446

Elster, Jon. *Making Sense of Marx*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Forsdick, Charles and Høgsbjerg, Christian. “Introduction: Rethinking *The Black Jacobins*”. In *The Black Jacobins Reader*, edited by Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg, 1-52. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017.

Glaberman, Martin. “C.L.R. James: A Recollection”. In *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James 1939-1949*, edited by Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc, 45-52. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994.

Hall, Stuart. “C.L.R. James: A Portrait”. In *C.L.R. James’s Caribbean*, edited by Paul Buhle and Paget Henry, 3-16. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.

Høgsbjerg, Christian. *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014.

Iggers, Georg G. “The Marxist Tradition of Historiography in the West”. In *Marxist Historiographies: A Global Perspective*, edited by Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers, 19-40. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

Knei-Paz, Baruch. *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.

Le Blanc, Paul. "Introduction: C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism". In *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James 1939-1949*, edited by Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc, 45-52. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994.

Marxists Internet Archive, "The Leninist Concept of the Revolutionary Vanguard Party". 2022-5-18.

<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/socialistvoice/partyPR46.html>

Maza, Sarah. *Thinking About History*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Meeks, Brian. "RE-READING THE BLACK JACOBINS: JAMES, THE DIALECTIC AND THE REVOLUTIONARY CONJUNCTURE". *Social and Economic Studies* 43, no. 3 (September 1994): 75–103. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27865976>.

Muldoon, Amy. "Leon Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution". *International Socialist Review*. <https://isreview.org/issue/58/leon-trotskys-history-russian-revolution-part-1/index.html>

Nesbitt, Nick. "Fragments of a Universal History". In *The Black Jacobins Reader*, edited by Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg, 139-161. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017.

Nielsen, Aldon Lynn. "On the Wings of Atalanta". In *The Black Jacobins Reader*, edited by Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg, 297-310. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017.

Perry, Matt. *Marxism and History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.

Roberts, William Clare. "Centralism is a Dangerous Tool: Leadership in C.L.R. James's History of Principles". *The CLR James Journal* 26, 1-2 (Fall 2020): 219-240.

Rosengarten, Frank. *Urbane Revolutionary: C.L.R. James and the Struggle for a New Society*. The United States of America: University Press of Mississippi, 2008.

- Røtvold, Hanna Emilie. “Aktør og lederskap i C.L.R. James’ *The Black Jacobins*”. Upublisert bacheloroppgave. Universitetet i Oslo. 2018.
- Schwarz, Bill. “Haiti and Historical Time”. In *The Black Jacobins Reader*, edited by Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg, 93-114. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Sepinwall, Alyssa Goldstein. “Beyond ‘The Black Jacobins’: Haitian Revolutionary Historiography Comes of Age”. *Journal of Haitian Studies* 23, no. 1 (2017): 4-34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44478370>.
- Shilliam, Robbie. “The Hieroglyph of the ‘Party’: Contextualising the Agent—Structure Debate through the Works of Trotsky, C. L. R. James and Althusser.” *International Relations* 22, 2 (June 2008): 193–219. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117808089895>.
- Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: University Press, 2000.
- Swain, Geoffrey. *Trotsky: Profiles in Power*. Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006.
- Thatcher, Ian D. *Trotsky*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Twiss, Thomas M. “Trotsky’s Analysis of Stalinism”. *Critique* 38, 4 (November 2010): 545-563. DOI: 10.1080/03017605.2010.522119
- Van Gelderen, Charles. “C.L.R. James – Thinker, Writer, Revolutionary”. In *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James 1939-1949*, edited by Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc, 45-52. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994.
- Warth, Robert D. “Leon Trotsky: Writer and Historian”. *The Journal of Modern History* 20, 1 (March 1948): 27-41. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1876456>