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Introduction

The brilliant writer, orator, educator, critic, and political activist Hubert Harrison (1883–1927) is one of the truly important yet little known figures of early-twentieth-century America. The historian Joel A. Rogers, in *World's Great Men of Color*, describes him as "the foremost Afro-American intellect of his time" and "one of America's greatest minds." Rogers adds (amid insightful chapters on the early-twentieth-century Black leaders Booker T. Washington, William Monroe Trotter, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey), "No one worked more seriously and indefatigably to enlighten his fellow-men" and "none of the Afro-American leaders of his time had a saner and more effective program."[1]

Variants of Rogers's lavish praise were offered by other contemporaries. The author Henry Miller, a socialist in his youth, remembered Harrison on a soapbox as his "quondam idol." "There was no one in those days . . . who could hold a candle to Hubert Harrison," explained Miller. "With a few well-directed words he had the ability to demolish any opponent. He did it neatly and smoothly too, 'with kid gloves' so to speak. . . . He was a man who electrified by his mere presence."[2] William Pickens, field secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a former college dean, and an oratory prize winner at Yale, described Harrison as "a plain black man who can speak more easily, effectively, and interestingly on a greater variety of subjects than any other man I have ever met in the great universities." Pickens added that Harrison was a "'walking cyclopedia' of current human facts," especially history and literature, and it made "no difference" whether he spoke about "*Alice in Wonderland* or the most extensive work of H. G. Wells; about the lightest shadows of Edgar Allen Poe or the heaviest depths of Kant; about music, or art, or science, or political history."[3]

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Bertha Washburn Howe, active with the freethought-influenced, interracial, Sunrise Club, would always "seek a seat" at the "jolly" and very approachable Harrison's table at club dinners and recollected that "anything you wanted to discuss, he could talk about it. He knew all the facts" and he "had one of the most marvelous memories of any man I ever knew."[4] Eugene O'Neill, playwright and Nobel Prize winner, lauded Harrison's ability as a writer and critic, considered his review of the ground-breaking play *The Emperor Jones* to be "one of the very few intelligent criticisms of the piece that have come to my notice," and assured Harrison that he would have a place as critic in "any theatre with which I have connection." O'Neill insightfully added, "You know what you are writing about . . . the only propaganda that ever strikes home is the truth about the human soul, black or white. Intentional uplift plays never amount to a damn—especially as uplift. To portray a human being, that is all that counts.[5]

The acclaim was similar in Harlem, the "symbol of Black America" and "Capital of the Black World," where Harrison was loved, respected, and deeply rooted.[6] Montserrat-born Hodge Kirnon, a freethinker, editor of the *The Promoter*, and a race- and class-conscious community activist, explained that Harrison (who lived on Harlem's most densely populated block) "lived with and amongst his people; not on the fringes of their social life" and he "taught the masses" and "drew much of his inspiration from them." Kirnon added that Harrison was "the first Negro whose radicalism was comprehensive enough to include racialism, politics, theological criticism, sociology and education in a thorough-going and scientific manner."[7] The British Guiana–born office worker and communist Hermie Dumont Huiswoud considered Harrison without peer as a street corner orator. She described how, when he spoke in Harlem, "it was not long before the crowd swelled . . . and even children ceased romping, keeping quiet as he developed his subject. His audience was always spell-bound and attentive as his address was so simply presented that his listeners had no difficulty understanding the subject and were also amused at the subtle humor he injected."[8] Virginia-born Williana Jones Burroughs, a teacher, union activist, and communist emphasized Harrison's role in the research and teaching of Black history. She explained that his research demonstrated "a rich heritage of [Black] revolt" and that his work and that of Du Bois helped to put an end to the charge that African Americans "would not resist oppression."[9]

Jamaica-born W. A. Domingo, a socialist and the first editor of Marcus Garvey's *Negro World*, called attention to Harrison as a radical and as a major influence on twentieth-century Black radicalism. He explained that Harrison "was a brilliant man, a great intellectual, a Socialist and highly respected" and "Garvey like the rest of us [A. Philip Randolph, Chandler Owen, Cyril Briggs, Grace Campbell, Richard B. Moore, and other "New Negro" militants] followed Hubert Harrison."[10] Taking a somewhat longer view, the Puerto Rico–born lay historian

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Arthur A. Schomburg, Harrison's friend and pallbearer and the foremost book collector of the African diaspora, presciently pointed to Harrison's importance for future generations when he eulogized that the influential and popular Harrison was "ahead of his time."[11]

Despite such high praise from his contemporaries and despite being rated "one of the 20th century's major thinkers" by the double Pulitzer Prize–winning Du Bois biographer, David Levering Lewis, and "one of the most creative, wide-ranging, biting and perceptive students of race and race relations in the United States" by the historian Eric Arnesen, Harrison is, as Harvard University's Henry Louis Gates Jr., writes, "a major but neglected figure in our history." The historian Gerald C. Horne refers to him as "a scandalously ignored thinker and activist," and Winston James observes that "seldom has a person been so influential, esteemed, even revered in one period of history and [then become] so thoroughly unremembered."[12]

These appraisals are accurate. Harrison has never been the subject of a full-length biography, and his life and work have drawn far less general attention and scholarly analysis than those of figures such as Du Bois, Washington, Garvey, or Trotter. There is great loss in this since his writings and oratory offer a unique and extraordinarily articulate, bottom-up, race- and class-conscious analysis of issues, events, and individuals of early-twentieth-century America; since his life so greatly influenced a generation of activists and "common people"; and since his ideas had such an important, though often unacknowledged shaping influence on Black social activism throughout the century. Neither the significance and influence of his activism nor the brilliance and intellectual potential of his ideas concerning race and class in America has been given sufficient recognition.[13]

The life story of this freethinking, Black, Caribbean-born, race- and class-conscious, working-class intellectual-activist is a story that needs to be told. It offers a missing vision and voice that fill major gaps in the historical record and enable us to significantly reshape our understanding and interpretation of the first three decades of the twentieth century. Most important, perhaps, his life story offers profound insights for thinking about race, class, religion, immigration, war, democracy, and social change in America.

Hubert Henry Harrison was born to a poor, laboring-class, Afro-Caribbean, immigrant mother at Estate Concordia, St. Croix, Danish West Indies, on April 27, 1883. The color line was drawn differently in St. Croix than in the United States, and despite his family's poverty and his having to work at an early age, Hubert was also able to spend his early years in youthful exploration and educational pursuits. He grew up with a feeling of oneness with the downtrodden and with

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the belief that he was the equal of any other. He also learned important lessons about African customs, interactions and solidarity between immigrant and native working people, and the Crucian people's rich history of direct-action mass struggle. After his mother's death, he emigrated to the United States as a seventeen-year-old orphan in 1900.[14]

He arrived in New York with the clothes on his back, his Crucian roots, and an extraordinarily fertile and inquiring mind. His arrival coincided with the period of intense racial oppression of African Americans known as the "nadir," with the growth of what he described as the "imperialist tendencies of American capitalism," and with the era of critical writing and muckraking journalism that, according to the social commentator Daniel Bell, produced "the most concentrated flowering of criticism in the history of American ideas." Those three factors were important shaping influences on the remainder of his life.[15]

Over the next twenty-seven years, until his unexpected, appendicitis-related death at age forty-four, Harrison made his mark in the United States by struggling against class and racial oppression, by helping to create a remarkably rich and vibrant intellectual life among African Americans, and by working for the enlightened development of the lives of "the common people." He consistently emphasized the need for working-class people to develop class consciousness; for "Negroes" to develop race consciousness, self-reliance, and self-respect; and for all those he reached to challenge white supremacy and develop modern, scientific, critical, and independent thought as a means toward liberation.[16]

Harrison, who referred to himself as a "radical internationalist," was extremely well versed in history and events in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas, and Europe, and, according to Richard B. Moore, he was "above all" the militant Black socialists in his steady emphasis on "the liberation of the oppressed African and colonial peoples" as being a "vital aim." He opposed capitalism and maintained that white supremacy was central to capitalist rule in the United States, and, more than any other political leader of his era, he combined class consciousness and anti-white-supremacist race consciousness in a coherent political radicalism. Harrison also understood both the abuse of and the potential of "democracy" in America. He emphasized that "politically, the Negro is the touchstone of the modern democratic idea"; that "as long as the Color Line exists, all the perfumed protestations of Democracy on the part of the white race" were "downright lying"; that "the cant of 'Democracy'" was "intended as dust in the eyes of white voters"; and that true democracy and equality for "Negroes" implied "a revolution . . . startling even to think of."[17]

Working from this theoretical framework, he was active with a wide variety of movements and organizations, and he played signal roles in the development of what were, up to that time, the largest class-radical movement (socialism) and the largest race-radical movement (the "New Negro"/Garvey movement) in

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U.S. history. His ideas on the centrality of the struggle against white supremacy anticipated the profound transformative power of the Civil Rights/Black Liberation struggles of the 1960s, and his thoughts on "democracy in America" offer penetrating insights on the limitations and the potential of America in the twenty-first century.

Harrison served as the foremost Black organizer, agitator, and theoretician in the Socialist Party of New York during its 1912 heyday; as the founder and leading figure of the militant, World War I–era New Negro movement; and as the editor of the *Negro World* and principal radical influence on the Garvey movement (described by the historian Randall K. Burkett as "the largest mass-based protest movement in Black American history") during its radical high point in 1920. His views on race and class profoundly influenced a generation of New Negro militants, including the class-radical socialists A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, the future communists Cyril Briggs and Richard B. Moore, and the race-radical Marcus Garvey. Considered more race conscious than Randolph and Owen and more class conscious than Garvey, Harrison is the key link in the ideological unity of the two great trends of the Black Liberation Movement—the labor and civil rights trend associated with Martin Luther King Jr., and the race and nationalist trend associated with Malcolm X. (Randolph and Garvey were, respectively, the direct links to King marching on Washington, with Randolph at his side, and to Malcolm, whose father was a Garveyite preacher and whose mother was a writer for Garvey's *Negro World*, speaking militantly and proudly on Harlem's Lenox Avenue.)[18]

As the center of national Black leadership shifted from Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee, Alabama, headquarters to New York City in the era of the First World War, Harlem increasingly became an "international Negro Mecca" and "the center of radical Black thought."[19] In this period, Harrison earned the title, ascribed to him by A. Philip Randolph and others, "the father of Harlem radicalism."[20] During the 1910s and 1920s he was either the creator, or among the founders, of "almost every important development originating in Negro Harlem—from the Negro Manhood Movement to political representation in public office, from collecting Negro books to speaking on the streets, from demanding Federal control over lynching to agitation for Negroes on the police force." He was also a key figure in developing Caribbean radicalism; he exhibited a rare willingness to learn from the peoples and cultures of Africa; and his (often unattributed) ideas and writings from this period significantly shaped the contours of radical Black thought on matters of race and class in the twentieth century.[21]

Harrison was not only a political radical, however. Rogers described him as an "Intellectual Giant and Free-Lance Educator," whose contributions were wide-ranging, innovative, and influential. He was an immensely skilled and popular orator and educator who spoke or read six languages; a highly praised

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journalist, critic, and book reviewer (reportedly the first regular Black book reviewer in history); a pioneer Black activist in the freethought and birth-control movements; a bibliophile, library builder, and library popularizer who helped develop the 135th Street Public Library into an international center for research in Black culture; and a promoter and aid to Black writers and artists, including the authors J. A. Rogers and Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje (the first secretary-general of the South African Native National Congress, the forerunner of the African National Congress); the poets Claude McKay, Andy Razaf, Walter Everette Hawkins, and Lucian B. Watkins; the sculptor Augusta Savage; the actor Charles Gilpin; and the musician Eubie Blake. In his later years he was the leading Black lecturer for the New York City Board of Education and one of its foremost orators. Though he was a trailblazing literary critic in Harlem during the period known as the Harlem Renaissance, he questioned the "Renaissance" concept on the grounds of its willingness to take "standards of value ready-made from white society" and on its claim to being a significant new rebirth. (He maintained that "there had been an uninterrupted," though ignored, "stream of literary and artistic products" flowing "from Negro writers from 1850" into the 1920s.)[22]

Soon after his arrival in New York, Harrison began working low-paying jobs and attending high school at night. He finished school, read constantly, and started writing letters to the editor, which, beginning at age twenty, were published in the *New York Times*. In his first decade in New York, his insatiable thirst for knowledge, willingness to consider opposing views, critical mind, and desire to face the world with "eyes wide open" led him to develop an agnostic philosophy of life stressing rationalism, modern science, and evolution and placing humanity at the center of his worldview. He enhanced his self-education efforts through involvement in church lyceums and other Black intellectual circles, workers' groups, community organizations, the freethought movement, and the world of letters and ideas. Toward the end of his first decade in New York, he obtained postal employment, married his wife, Lin, and started to raise a family that eventually grew to seven.[23]

In this vibrant intellectual environment and with a developing self-confidence, Harrison boldly put forth his views, and this soon cost him his postal employment. After writing two letters that criticized Booker T. Washington, the most powerful Black leader in America, Harrison was fired from his postal job through the efforts of Washington's powerful "Tuskegee Machine." It was a devastating blow, and the resultant loss of income and security seriously affected his remaining years.[24]

Shortly after losing his postal job, Harrison turned to full-time work with the Socialist Party. From 1911 to 1914 he was America's leading Black Socialist—a

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prominent party speaker and campaigner (especially in the 1912 presidential campaign of Eugene V. Debs), an articulate and popular critic of capitalism, the leading Black Socialist organizer in New York, and (influenced by work by women and foreigners) the initiator of the Colored Socialist Club (CSC)—an unprecedented effort by U.S. socialists at organizing African Americans. He made major theoretical contributions on the subject of "The Negro and Socialism" by emphasizing that "the Negro" as "a group is more essentially proletarian than any other group" and by advocating that socialists champion the cause of African Americans as a revolutionary doctrine, that they develop a special appeal to and for African Americans, and that they affirm the duty of all socialists to oppose race prejudice. His proposal that "the crucial test of Socialism's sincerity" was its duty to champion the cause of the African American anticipated by more than a year Du Bois's dictum that the "Negro Problem . . . [is] the great test of the American Socialists." (Some of his writings from this period appeared in his first book, *The Negro and the Nation* [1917].) Such efforts were of little avail, however. Socialist Party theory and practice—including segregated locals in the South, the party's refusal to route the campaign of the 1912 presidential candidate, Eugene V. Debs (who insisted that his audiences be integrated), in Southern states, white-supremacist positions on Asian immigration at the 1912 national convention, and the failure to politically and economically support the CSC—led Harrison to conclude that Socialist Party leaders, like organized labor, put the white "race first and class after."[25]

Harrison moved away from the Socialists and turned his efforts toward the more egalitarian, militant, direct-action-oriented Industrial Workers of the World. He was a featured speaker (along with the IWW leaders "Big Bill" Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Carlo Tresca, and Patrick Quinlan) and the only Black speaker at the historic 1913 Paterson silk strike. He also publicly defended Haywood against attack by the right wing of the Socialist Party on the issue of "sabotage." SP leaders restricted his speaking, however. As their attacks on both his political views and his principal means of livelihood intensified, his disenchantment grew, and he left the party.

After leaving the Socialist Party, Harrison founded the "Radical Forum," taught at the Modern School, and lectured indoors and out on a variety of subjects including birth control and the racial aspects of the First World War. He was also involved in, and arrested in, free-speech struggles. His outdoor lectures pioneered the tradition of militant street-corner oratory in Harlem. As a soap-box orator he was brilliant and unrivaled. Factual and interactive, logical and playful, he exhibited wonderful mastery of language, humor, and irony, and, when appropriate, he employed a biting sarcasm. J. A. Rogers described how "crowds flocked to hear him" and "would stand hours at a time" as he presented "the most abstract matter in a clear and lively fashion." Claude McKay empha-

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sized how he spoke "precisely and clearly," with "fine intelligence and masses of facts." A. Philip Randolph stressed that he was "far more advanced" than any other speaker, that he "made an enduring and valuable contribution to the life of the negro . . . and the world in general," and that he was "analytical" and "a good logician," with a "fine mind" that "reached in all areas of human knowledge." Henry Miller remembered his "broad, good-natured grin," "easy assurance," "self-possession," and "dignity" as he playfully worked a crowd. With his enlightening, crowd-engaging, popular, memorable, witty, and, at times, militant oratory, Harrison paved the way for those who followed—including Randolph and Garvey—and, much later, Malcolm X.[26]

By late 1916, his experiences with white supremacy within the socialist and labor movements convinced him of the need for a "race-first" political perspective for Black Americans. The final steps in this direction were made through the frontier of art as Harrison wrote several theater reviews in which he described how the "Negro Theatre" revealed the "social mind" of the race and offered a glimpse of "the Negro's soul as modified by his social environment." With his new "race-first" approach Harrison served over the next few years as the founder and intellectual guiding light of the "New Negro Manhood Movement," better known as the "New Negro Movement"[27]—the race-conscious, internationalist, mass-based, autonomous, militantly assertive movement for "political equality, social justice, civic opportunity, and economic power," which laid the basis for the Garvey movement and contributed so significantly (especially with his book reviews and "poetry for the people") to the social and literary climate leading to the 1925 publication of Alain Locke's well-known *The New Negro*. Harrison's mass-based political movement, however, was qualitatively different from the more middle-class, arts-based, apolitical movement associated with Locke.[28]

In 1917, as the "Great War" raged abroad, along with race riots, lynching, segregation, discrimination, and white-supremacist ideology at home, Harrison founded the Liberty League and *The Voice*. They were, respectively, the first organization and the first newspaper of the "New Negro Movement,"[29] and they were soon followed by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen's *Messenger*, Cyril Briggs's *Crusader*, and Marcus Garvey's *Negro World*. The Liberty League was called into being, Harrison explained, by "the need for a more radical policy" than that of existing civil rights organizations such as the W. E. B. Du Bois–influenced National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He felt that the NAACP too often limited itself to paper protests and repeatedly stumbled over the problem of what to do "if these ['white'] minds at which you are aiming remain unaffected" and refuse "to grant guarantees of life and liberty."[30]

In contrast to the NAACP, the Liberty League was not dependent on white supporters, and it aimed beyond the "Talented Tenth" at "the common people" of the "Negro race." Its program emphasized internationalism, political indepen-

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dence, and class and race consciousness. In response to white supremacy, *The Voice* called for a "race first" approach, full equality, federal antilynching legislation, enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, labor organizing, support of socialist and anti-imperialist causes, political independence, and armed self-defense in the face of white-supremacist attacks. It stressed that new Black leadership would emerge from the masses, and it was "under [the Liberty League's] banner [that] the West Indians and American Negroes first cooperated on anything like a large scale."[31]

Contemporaries readily acknowledged that Harrison's work prepared the ground for the Garvey movement. From the Liberty League and *The Voice* (whose weekly circulation reportedly reached 11,000 and estimated readership 55,000) came the core progressive ideas and leaders later used by Marcus Garvey in the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the *Negro World*. Harrison himself claimed, with considerable basis, that from the Liberty League "Garvey appropriated every feature that was worthwhile in his movement" and that the secret of Garvey's success was that he "[held] up to the Negro masses those things which bloom in their hearts—racialism, race-consciousness, racial solidarity—things taught first in 1917 by *The Voice* and The Liberty League."[32]

After *The Voice* ceased publication in early 1918, Harrison briefly served as an organizer for the American Federation of Labor and then chaired the Negro-American Liberty Congress. The June 1918 Liberty Congress (co-headed by the long-time activist William Monroe Trotter) was the major wartime protest effort of African Americans and an important precursor to subsequent protests during World War II and the Vietnam War. The Liberty Congress issued demands against discrimination and segregation and petitioned the U.S. Congress for federal antilynching legislation. The Liberty Congress's wartime demands for equality and thoroughgoing democracy were forerunners of the March on Washington Movement led by A. Philip Randolph during World War II and the August 28, 1963, March on Washington during the Vietnam War led by Randolph and Martin Luther King Jr. As an elderly Randolph knowingly pointed out in 1972, with Harrison undoubtedly in mind, "The black militants of today are standing upon the shoulders of the New Negro radicals of my day."[33]

The autonomous and militant Liberty Congress effort was undermined by the U.S. Army's antiradical Military Intelligence Bureau in a campaign that was spearheaded by the NAACP founder Joel E. Spingarn and involved W. E. B. Du Bois. Following the Liberty Congress, Harrison criticized Du Bois for urging African Americans to forget justifiable grievances, for "closing ranks" behind President Woodrow Wilson's war effort, and for following Spingarn's lead and seeking a captaincy in Military Intelligence, the branch of government that monitored radicals and the African American community. Harrison's exposé, "The Descent of Dr. Du Bois," was a principal reason that Du Bois was denied

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the captaincy he sought in Military Intelligence, and more than any other document it marked the significant break between the "New Negroes" and the older leadership.[34]

This first volume of Harrison's biography concludes after he has been recognized as a major national protest figure and as the founder and prominent leader of the growing New Negro Movement. Though only thirty-five years old he had earned the title "the Father of Harlem Radicalism." He had challenged the powers of capitalism and white supremacy, offered articulate and insightful criticisms of the leadership of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, served as the leading Black activist in the Socialist Party, founded *The Voice* and the Liberty League, and been a radicalizing influence on the next generation of class and race radicals. Harlem was establishing itself as the international center of radical Black thought and Hubert Harrison was the leading voice of Harlem radicalism.

The second volume of this biography, *Hubert Harrison: Race Consciousness and the Struggle for Democracy, 1918-1927* begins in 1918 after the Liberty Congress. Harrison attempted to take his race-conscious message into the Deep South, but illness caused him to return to New York. Then, after a series of bloody "race riots" in 1919, he edited the militant *New Negro* magazine, which was "intended as an organ of the international consciousness of the darker races—especially of the Negro race." In January 1920 he became the principal editor of the *Negro World*, the organ of Marcus Garvey's UNIA, as that paper swept the globe with its race-conscious and internationalist message. In one of the important chapters in the history of Black journalism, he reshaped and developed that paper—changed its style, format, content, and editorial page—and was primarily responsible for turning it into the preeminent radical, race-conscious, political, and literary publication of that time. (Many of his most important editorials and reviews from this period [as well as from the earlier Liberty League period] were reprinted in his book *When Africa Awakes* [1920].) Over the first eight months of 1920, he was the *Negro World*'s chief radical propagandist, and in August he was the one who gave radical tone to the UNIA's "Declaration of the Negro Peoples of the World."[35]

By the UNIA's August 1920 convention, however, Harrison was highly critical of Garvey. His criticisms, articulated over the next few years, concerned the extravagance of Garvey's claims, his ego, his organizational leadership, the conduct of his stock selling and financial schemes, and his politics and practices. Though Harrison continued to write columns and book reviews for the *Negro World* into 1922, their political differences grew, and Harrison worked against

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and sought to develop political alternatives to Garvey. In particular, Harrison urged political action in terms of electoral politics: he attempted to build an all-Black Liberty Party; he argued that African Americans' principal struggle was in the United States (and that they should not seek to develop a state or empire in Africa); and he stressed that Africans, not African Americans, would lead struggles in Africa.[36]

In the 1920s, after breaking with Garvey, Harrison continued his full schedule of race-conscious activities. He lectured for the New York City Board of Education's elite "Trends of the Times" series, which included prominent professors from the city's foremost universities, as well as for its "Literary Lights of Yesterday and Today" series. Through his lectures, book donations, reviews, recommendations, and active involvement he helped to develop the 135th St. Public Library's "Negro literature and history" collection into what became the world-famous Schomburg Center for Research in Black History, which stands as a living connection between Black people and their history. His book and theater reviews and other writings appeared in many of the leading periodicals of the day—including the *New York Times*, *New York Tribune*, *New York World*, *Nation*, *New Republic*, *Modern Quarterly*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Chicago Defender*, *Amsterdam News*, *Boston Chronicle*, and *Opportunity* magazine. He also spoke out against the revived Ku Klux Klan and the white-supremacist attacks on the African American community of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and he worked with numerous groups, including the Virgin Island Congressional Council, the Democratic Party, the Farmer-Labor Party, the Single Tax Party, the Sunrise Club, the American Friends Service Committee, the Urban League, the Institute for Social Study, the Harlem Education Forum, the American Negro Labor Congress, the Workers School, and the Workers (Communist) Party.

One of his most important activities in this period was the founding of the International Colored Unity League and its organ, *The Voice of the Negro*. The ICUL was Harrison's most broadly unitary effort and attempted "to do for the Negro the things which the Negro needs to have done without depending upon or waiting for the co-operative action of white people." It urged Black people to develop "race consciousness" as a defensive measure—to be aware of their racial oppression and to use that awareness to unite, organize, and respond as a group. The 1924 ICUL platform had political, economic, and social planks urging protests, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and collective action and included as its "central idea" the founding of "a Negro state, not in Africa, as Marcus Garvey would have done, but in the United States" as an outlet for "racial egoism." It was a plan for "the harnessing" of "Negro energies" and for "economic, political and spiritual self-help and advancement."[37] It preceded a somewhat similar plan by the Communist International by four years.[38] In addition, the ICUL, with

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Schomburg on its executive committee, took major steps in promoting the study of Black history by hosting Harrison's 1926 series of lectures on "World Problems of Race."[39]

Overall, in his writing and oratory, Harrison's appeal was both mass and individual. He focused on the man and woman in the street, those whom he referred to with love and respect as "the common people," and emphasized the importance of each individual's development of an independent, critical attitude. His work was encouraged, sustained, and developed by his intimate involvement with the Black community. By encouraging the development of strong individuals working with "unity of purpose," he was instrumental in awakening and nurturing the growing strength and consciousness of that community.[40]

The period during and after the First World War was one of intense racial oppression and great Black migration from the South and the Caribbean into urban centers, particularly in the North. Harrison's (working-class and Black-community-based) race-conscious mass appeal used newspapers, popular lectures, and street-corner talks and marked a major shift in style and substance from the leadership approaches of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, the paramount Black leaders of Harrison's youth. He rejected Washington's reliance on powerful white patrons and an internal Black patronage and pressure machine (which deemphasized outward political struggle) and Du Bois's reliance on left or liberal white support and the "Talented Tenth of the Negro Race." Harrison's affective appeal, later identified with that of Garvey, was aimed directly at the urban masses and, as the Harlem activist Richard B. Moore explained, "More than any other man of his time, he [Harrison] inspired and educated the masses of Afro-Americans then flocking into Harlem."[41]

Though he lived amid and was extremely popular among the masses that "flocked to hear him," Harrison, according to Rogers, was often overlooked by "the more established conservative Negro leaders, especially those who derived support from wealthy whites." Others, "inferior . . . in ability and altruism, received acclaim, wealth, and distinction" that were his due. When he died on December 17, 1927, the Harlem community, in a major show of affection, turned out by the thousands for his funeral. A church was (ironically) named in his honor, and his portrait was to be placed prominently on the main floor of the 135th Street Public Library, which he, along with bibliophile Arthur Schomburg and others, had helped to develop.[42]

Despite these manifestations of love and respect from his contemporaries, Harrison was quickly "unremembered" in death. He lies buried in an unmarked, shared plot in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx; the church named in his honor

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was abandoned; his portrait donated to the library cannot be found; and his life story and contributions are little known.

Some reasons for this "unremembrance" are readily apparent. Harrison was poor, Black, foreign born, and from the Caribbean. Each of these groups has suffered from significant discrimination in the United States and limited inclusion in the historical record. He opposed capitalism, white supremacy, and the Christian church—dominant forces of the most powerful society in the world. He supported socialism, "race consciousness," racial equality, women's equality, freethought, and birth control. The forces arrayed against the expression of such ideas were, and continue to be, formidable. Others, most notably (the similarly poor, Black, Caribbean-born) Garvey, who challenged the forces of white supremacy, only began to receive increased attention with the increase in Black studies and popular history, which were by-products of the civil rights and Black power struggles of the 1960s.[43] Even then, however, Harrison did not draw similar attention. In part this was undoubtedly due to his "radicalism" on issues other than race—particularly on matters of class and religion.

Age (and what one does over time) is another factor. Harrison died young, much younger than Washington, Du Bois, or Garvey. He was not martyred like King and Malcolm, who also died young. His prolific pen and exhilarating oratory did not continue into the 1930s or any later decades.

There are also other additional factors that have served to keep Harrison's achievements and ideas from the prominence they deserve. He lived in poverty, had major family financial responsibilities, and handled money poorly; these factors limited the success and promotion of some activities. He was more of a freelance activist than many of his better known contemporaries. He was not "somebody's man, whether that somebody was a Vesey Street Liberal, or Northern millionaire or a powerful politician" who would promote him and his ideas. He would not, as he said, "bow the knee to Baal, because Baal is in power." As a leader, he generally disdained flattery and would not wheedle or cajole followers or supporters. He found it difficult, in his words, "to suffer fools gladly." Though he worked with many organizations and played important roles in several key ones, he had no long-term, sustaining, and identifying relationship with any organization or institution, and so lacked the recognition and support that would have come with such a tie. As he explained in a 1922 letter, "I haven't any group. I always go alone, and find this much more productive of internal peace than the contrary process. And, of course, I have no chieftains—well meaning or other."[44]

Importantly, Harrison was also an inveterate critic whose style was candid and, at times, bitingly sarcastic. He criticized the ruling classes, white supremacists, organized religion, organized labor, politicians, journalists, historians,

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scientists, civil rights and race leaders, socialists and communists. Though his comments were usually perceptive, well researched, and without malice, they often challenged the established order and existing leaders and engendered reaction. As Rogers explains:

> Most of the enmity against Harrison was incurred by his devastating candor. . . . He spoke out freely what he thought, and more often than not it was with such annihilating sarcasm and wit, that those whom he attacked never forgave him. Before he began his attacks, he usually collected "the evidence" as he called it, consisting of verbatim utterances, verbal or printed, of the prospective victim. . . . There was, however, no personal malice in Harrison's shafts. Like a true sportsman, he was willing to shake hands with an opponent as soon as he had descended from the platform, and was surprised and hurt that others were not.[45]

In particular, Harrison's willingness to directly challenge prominent leaders and organizations in left and African American circles stung many of the individuals (Booker T. Washington, Mary White Ovington, Oswald Garrison Villard, Ernest Untermann, Kate Richards O'Hare, Charles W. Anderson, Fred R. Moore, Joel E. Spingarn, W. E. B. Du Bois, Chandler Owen, Kelly Miller, George E. Haynes, Emmett Scott, Robert Russa Moton, Marcus Garvey, James Weldon Johnson, Carl Van Vechten, and William Z. Foster) and groups (the American Federation of Labor, Socialist Party, Communist Party, Urban League, NAACP, *New York Age*, *Amsterdam News*, *New Review*, and *Nation*) most likely to keep his memory alive.

Also of great importance is the fact that his freethought and agnostic views and scientific approach posed serious challenges for many religious leaders and distanced him from the Black church, the most powerful institution in the Black community. Harrison was fully aware that "those who live by the people must needs be careful of the people's gods," but it was advice he did not often heed.[46] He was often more candidly critical than calculatingly cautious, and "leaders" and organizations that might have publicly preserved his memory made little effort to do so. Some actually led in the great neglect that followed.

In February 1928, less than two months after his massive funeral, Hodge Kirnon, the influential grassroots Harlem activist, ominously observed in a letter to the editor of the Black weekly *New York News*:

> It has now become a subject of popular discussion among thoughtful people as to the reason for the absence of any mention of the late Hubert Harrison in the columns of the three leading Negro monthly periodicals in this country. *The Messenger*—"a journal of scientific radicalism" [edited by the socialist A. Philip

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Figure 0.2. J. A. Rogers, Ethiopia, 1935. Jamaica-born and self-educated Joel Augustus Rogers (1880–1966) was a Pullman porter, journalist, and prolific researcher and writer of Black history. In *World's Great Men of Color*, Rogers describes Hubert Harrison as "the foremost Afro-American intellect of his time" and claims that "none of the Afro-American leaders of his time had a saner and more effective program." *Source:* Courtesy of Thabiti Asukile and Special Collections, John Hope and Aurelia Elizabeth Franklin Library, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn.

Randolph] has not a word to say concerning the death of the first and ablest Negro exponent of scientific radicalism. *The Crisis*—"A Record of the Darker Races" [edited by the NAACP's W. E. B. Du Bois] laments the passing of [the boxer] "Tiger" Flowers, but omits to record the services of a man who was a lecturer for the Board of Education, and of whom William Pickens says "can speak more easily, effectively and interestingly on a greater variety of subjects than any other man I have met, even in the great Universities." *Opportunity*—"a Journal of Negro Life" [edited by the Urban League's Charles S. Johnson] is equally silent over the demise of an acknowledged first rate thinker—one who gave liberally to the intellectual life of the Negro, and whose writings have appeared in that journal.

This concerted silence is ominous. It does appear that there is something wrong somewhere.[47]

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There was indeed something wrong. A major figure, compared to Socrates by his peers, was being ignored.[48] The tragedy in this lies in the fact that Harrison's life story has so very much to offer. His journey from the depths of plantation poverty to political and intellectual achievements of great influence is a powerful testament to human potential. He was, according to Rogers, one of those "individuals of genuine worth and immense potentialities who dedicate their lives to the advancement of their fellow-men." His life was lived in poverty, yet he struggled relentlessly for knowledge, understanding, and the uplift of common people. According to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Harrison, "despite the handicap of poverty, . . . became one of the most learned men of his day and was able to teach the wide masses of his race how to appreciate and enjoy all the finer things of life, to glance back over the whole history of mankind, and to look forward [in the words of George Bernard Shaw] 'as far as thought can reach.'"[49]

Harrison's life story is made much more personal and human by the survival of his papers, which include writings, books, photos, scrapbooks, memorabilia, and a diary that detail his intimate thoughts on a wide range of subjects, personal matters, and relations with organizations and individuals. These more intimate aspects of his biography further open the way for newer and deeper understanding of the social and intellectual milieu of the early twentieth century.

In recounting this story, certain personal characteristics and limitations are important to recognize. Harrison focused more on intellectual, educational, and agitational matters than organizational ones, and this fact, coupled with his often critical approach, his disdain for flattery, and his unwillingness to "suffer fools gladly," somewhat limited his organizational leadership. He was an intellectual whose message was more rational than emotional, and this limited the breadth of his appeal, particularly in comparison to Garvey. He was an autodidact who ventured where his interests led, and he often did not tend to practical matters well. He repeatedly underestimated the value of money and handled it poorly, and, since he lived in poverty, money problems constantly beset his efforts and caused severe hardship for his wife and five children. He sought to apply science and rationality to social problems during a period when the sciences (like the rest of society) contained many racist views, and he encountered contradictions (such as those pertaining to the concept and "shifting reality" of race)[50] that affected the work he did. He advocated rationalist freethought and severely distanced himself (particularly in the early years) from the Black church—the most important institution in the African American community. His political independence and willingness to openly challenge existing leaders and leadership often resulted in financial difficulties, circumscribed some political options, and at times put pressure on him to move in less desired political directions. His views on women and gender oppression were, at times, as Bill Fletcher Jr. of the Black Radical Congress suggests, not up to the level of "his otherwise radical

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approach to life and politics." He also was a man of amorous affairs (including interracial affairs and one with Garvey's first wife, Amy Ashwood), and he, at times, practiced a sexual double standard. These more personal matters hurt his home life and, despite his great love for his children, caused his relationship with his wife, Lin, to suffer some particularly difficult times.[51]

Harrison, however, had strengths that were remarkable. He faced the world with a critical mind, intellectual honesty, and "eyes wide-open." His radicalism was grounded in his study, his analysis of society, and his practical work. He was not rhetorical, utopian, or dogmatic. He stressed modern and historical knowledge, critical and scientific approaches to problems, political independence while working with different groups and parties, and concern with the great democratic issues of the day. His approach was eminently sane, and he worked tirelessly and indefatigably for the "common people." The radicalism in all this stems from the fact that it came from an African American who would not deny that race and class divided America. Then, as now, the basic demands for economic justice premised on true racial equality struck at the very heart of the existing social order and were inherently radical.[52]

This last point suggests a principal reason why Harrison's life story is important. In the period of the First World War, Harrison was the most class conscious of the race radicals, and the most race conscious of the class radicals. This seeming incongruity was made possible by the political-economic system of the United States, a system in which, according to the historian Theodore W. Allen, racial oppression was central to capitalist rule. An exploration of how Harrison was radical on both issues sheds considerable light on the nature of U.S. society and the essence of racial oppression. It also sheds considerable light, as Harrison explained, on the radical implications of true democracy and equality for African Americans.[53]

The observations of journalist Oscar J. Benson offered at the time of Harrison's death are instructive. Benson recognized both the importance of Harrison's life story and the key to capturing its essence when he explained:

> [There are those] in every generation whose knowledge is not hoarded: whose intellect is practical; and whose services are unlimited in the community in which they live, and naturally no one knows of their community without knowing of them. To this class of preceptors Hubert Harrison belongs.
>
> Literary men of this class are seldom honored by posterity . . . their philosophy must be caught on a fly. Like the plain "old uncle" Socrates they go about teaching here and there, their audiences are vast, and they are always in popular demand . . . Harrison was of this type. But he was more. He was original. . . . he instituted a new school of social thought, packed a new forum, dignified the soap-box orator; blocked Lenox and Seventh Avenue traffic; sent

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humble men to libraries and book stores; sent them about to day and night schools; taught Negroes to think for themselves; taught them that in spite of all the handicaps of slavery and propaganda of anthropologists and sociologists, who said that the Negro was an imitator, that no one knew what the Negro could do until he tried. . . .

He . . . made great men his teachers, but not his masters. He was always willing to help or encourage a young writer or speaker. He saw the present condition of the Negro but anticipated a brighter future. . . .

His biography . . . [cannot be written], unless it be culled from the influence his teachings had upon the lives of others.[54]