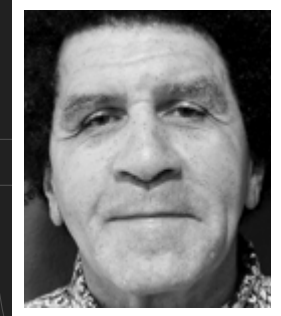


SMALLTALK WITH STEPHEN SMALL: REPARATIONS FOR LIVERPOOL IMPERIALISM AND WEST AFRICA

ANTI-IMPERIAL BLACK
VOICES OF LIVERPOOL



STEPHEN SMALL

Most of what I've described in these articles so far about Liverpool imperialism and West Africa is probably entirely new to everyone reading them. That's because we weren't taught any of this in Liverpool schools and universities or informed by Liverpool politicians or the press.

For hundreds of years almost everything we were taught or told about slavery and imperialism was written or preached by Liverpool (and British) scholars, politicians and the press who focused almost obsessively on white peoples' goals, values and so-called achievements. And white people got that same message too, by the way, which is why so many people in Liverpool continue to celebrate the British Empire and Liverpool's place within it. That's the colonised education we got. And that's why we need to decolonise education and decolonise our minds.

Decolonising our minds can actually be quite simple, and one of the easiest first steps is to identify and listen to Black voices. We need to hear from Black people that lived through slavery and through imperialism; and from Black people living with their legacies today. We need to hear from a wide range of Black educators and teachers, intellectuals and community activists. And we need to hear far more about Black women,

and far more from Black women than ever before. Because we lived these experiences, we have the knowledge and the insights. We have been analysing these experiences for decades, for generations and for centuries. And we've been writing about them too.

The truth is that there have always been African and Black voices that challenged slavery, imperialism and colonised education. Some Black people wrote about these issues during the European invasion of Africa; during the horrors of the so-called middle-passage; and during the horrors of slavery. Far more Black people wrote about our lives under imperialism than we were ever able to do under slavery. We gave public and private speeches, and wrote letters, memoirs and biographies. We wrote religious and spiritual texts. We also produced poetry, folktales and art. Writings, drawings and paintings about our experiences, our hopes and dreams, our inspirations and aspirations, our goals and priorities. We have far more insights by and for Black women that cover issues Black men and white women tended to neglect.

Obviously most of these writings are from Africans and Black people outside Liverpool – in Africa, the West Indies and across the diaspora. But some writings are from Africans and Black people in Liverpool. Remember that Liverpool was the so-called second city of empire, so most Africans and Black people from across the diaspora who visited Great Britain first arrived in Liverpool. Some passed through the city for days,

weeks or months, some stayed for years, and others remained in the city permanently. We have information from Black people born and raised in the city too, and from those outside the city that commented on the Black experience inside the city. Black people in Liverpool always sought knowledge and information – as well as motivation and inspiration – from Black people outside the city. In other words, there are precious gems of knowledge waiting to be mined.

What do these Black voices tell us? It's a cliché to say things are never black and white, but when we compare the Black voices from the past with white voices we see that things were almost entirely black and white. Because Black people were almost always diametrically opposed to the pretexts and proclamations of Liverpool academics and schools, politicians and the press about supposed British benevolence in West Africa and racial harmony in Liverpool.

Dubois believed that American and European colonists were themselves barbaric and backward.

When Great Britain sent its representatives to the Berlin Conference in 1884/85 where European politicians met to carve up Africa for their imperialist interests, it included white men representing Liverpool. Black people like pan-Africanists Edward Wilmot Blyden and WEB Dubois protested against this meeting. Dubois was one of the most important African American intellectuals and pan-Africanists of the 19th and 20th centuries. He believed that American and European colonists were themselves barbaric and backward. And we know he passed through Liverpool.



Dubois



Edward Wilmot Blyden

Blyden argued that equality for Black people in the West was impossible because Europeans controlled everything and enriched themselves on African labour; he worked tirelessly to make West Africa a place where Black people could thrive. Born in the West Indies, he visited West Africa multiple times and spent several

months in Liverpool at the start of the 20th century. He believed that Europeans could not survive the disease environment in Africa and that imperialism there would be limited. He did not anticipate that Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine would reduce the impact of diseases on Europeans and make it possible to conquer Africa.

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The extreme brutality and vicious treatment of people in the Belgium Congo – which involved Alfred Jones' and William Lever's companies – were clear examples of European barbarism. Afro-American George Washington Williams – a minister, lawyer and politician – visited the Congo, wrote to King Leopold II, and helped raise an international outcry against these atrocities. Williams became sick while travelling through England and is buried in Layton Cemetery in Blackpool. Before then, Black people had protested the 1897 Punitive Expedition to ransack and plunder Benin City. Even earlier, they had protested the 1867-1868 Punitive Expedition to Abyssinia by the British which plundered precious artefacts and jewellery from Addis Ababa and killed or wounded several thousand men. And they protested the battles, wars, political domination, discrimination, and exploitative economic systems put in place in West Africa.

Afro-American George Washington Williams helped raise an international outcry against atrocities in the Congo. He is buried in Layton Cemetery in Blackpool.



George Washington Williams

At the start of the 20th century the Ethiopian Progressive Association (EPA) was established at the University of Liverpool, and they protested British colonialism and Liverpool's involvement in it. We know that Black people at the Pan African Conference in London in 1900 organised by Henry Sylvester Williams protested British imperialism. As they did again in Paris and London in 1919 and at other meetings and conferences including the Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945.



Henry Sylvester Williams

Black people in Liverpool were inspired by Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey who rose to lead the world's largest and most influential Black organisation – the Universal Negro Improvement Association. The headquarters were in Harlem, New York. His motto was 'Africa for the Africans, at home and abroad', and his goal was to help Black people emancipate themselves from the mental slavery imposed upon them by Europeans. He almost certainly passed through Liverpool.

John Archer was born in Liverpool in 1863 and is regarded as the first Black mayor in Great Britain (He became Mayor of Battersea in 1913). Archer had attended the Pan-African Conference in London in 1900, along with his friend Samuel Coleridge Taylor who prepared music for the conference. Archer was active in British politics and in 1919 after the anti-Black riots in Liverpool he visited the Mayor of Liverpool to discuss what happened. Ernest Marke, from West Africa, spent several years in Liverpool and has left us an account of the 1919 anti-Black riots there in his book 'In Troubled Waters'. Marke was viciously attacked in those riots.



*John Archer by Agence Rol –
Bibliothèque nationale de France*

In the 1920s and 1930s members of the League of Coloured People (LCP) and of the West African Students Association (WASU) also protested and campaigned. Several of them visited Liverpool, like Harold Moody and Ladipo Solanke. Black people in Liverpool formed a branch of the LCP and hosted the 12th Annual General Meeting in the city. The Jamaican writer, poet, activist and feminist, Una Marson was Assistant Secretary at LCP. She probably visited Liverpool. Amy Ashwood Garvey almost certainly passed through Liverpool. And probably Arthur Lewis did too. He earned his PhD in Economics from London School of Economics and was denied a position teaching at the University of Liverpool, despite being the most qualified candidate. He probably visited Liverpool for an interview. Maybe Claudia Jones visited too.

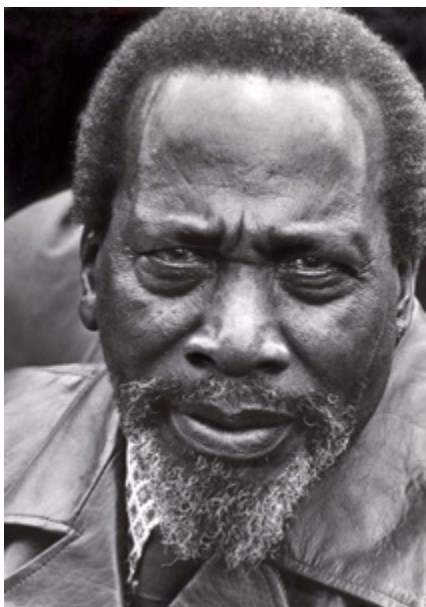


Una Marson

Nnamdi Azikiwe argued that imperialism was a predatory and dehumanizing process in which colonial subjects were nothing but possessions to be used in the interests of the imperialist powers.

Several of the men that passed through Liverpool later became leaders of independent nations across Africa. Nnamdi Azikiwe, first president of Nigeria, passed through Liverpool several times and spent days, weeks and possibly longer. He met with Pastor Daniels Ekarte and later on recommended that fellow Nigerians passing through Liverpool should visit the African Church Mission too. He argued that imperialism was a predatory and dehumanising process in which colonial subjects were nothing but possessions to be used in the interests of the imperialist powers. Kwame Nkrumah, first prime minister and president of Ghana, also spent some time in Liverpool. He insisted that imperialism operated for Africa's impoverishment and that 'capitalism is but the gentlemen's method of slavery'. Nkrumah argued that for centuries Europeans robbed the continent of vast riches and inflicted unimaginable suffering on the African people.

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Jomo Kenyatta

Some of the most profound insights were stated in simple language. Jomo Kenyatta, the former prime minister and president of independent Kenya, observed that when

Europeans came to Africa, they had the Bible and we Africans had the land; yet after colonisation Europeans had the land and we Africans had the Bible. He probably passed through Liverpool too.

Jomo Kenyatta observed that when Europeans came to Africa, they had the Bible and we Africans had the land; yet after colonisation Europeans had the land and we Africans had the Bible.

George Padmore, born in Trinidad, one of the most active anti-imperialists who later became advisor to Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana questioned European imperialism at its very core. He insisted that Great Britain's main goal in establishing the League of Nations at the end of World War I, was 'to guarantee the spoils of war' for itself, and 'stifle Germany's ambition'. He added that Britain established indirect rule in West Africa – using native chiefs and white officials – because it was more profitable than being there in large numbers. It also allowed them to give the impression that Africans were in charge, and they could then be blamed for anything that went wrong. The British, he said, employed anthropologists to 'bolster up the most reactionary native institutions and customs' and keep 'the Africans backward, a condition which facilitates capitalist exploitation'. For Padmore, British colonial governors were almost dictators because 'African workers have no vote, are denied the right of assembly, freedom of speech and press, and even free movement'. They were forced into labour and trade unions were also illegal.

George Padmore revealed that the British employed anthropologists to 'bolster up the most reactionary native institutions and customs' and keep 'the Africans backward, a condition which facilitates capitalist exploitation'.



George Padmore

None of these Black men and women accepted the nonsense that the British preached about imperialism. They knew it was nothing more than deception and subterfuge. No one told me in Liverpool schools about any of these Black voices, I found out despite my colonised education, with great insights from Black community elders. Since I left school, I've learnt far more from local writers and activists like Ray Costello, Ray Quarless, Mike Boyle, Madeline Heneghan and Emy Onuora. I've read PhD dissertations on Liverpool by Carleton Wilson and Mark Christian. And by Afro-American scholar St Clair Drake, and Jamaican lawyer and politician Donald Manley before them (whose PhDs were awarded in the 1950s). Books by Ron Ramdin (in the 1980s) gave a lot more leads. And Wally Brown has shared his biography with me – a fascinating and compelling story that is yet to be published.



Dorothy Kuya

One immediate voice we should follow up on right away is the voice of Dorothy Kuya. Dorothy's tremendous contributions to the International Slavery Museum (ISM) are well-known, as is her work on tours of Black history in Liverpool. But this is just a tiny slice of what she actually did over multiple decades. Dorothy was born in the 1930s, and while she was young, was active in pan-African organisations like the Colonial People's Defence Association and was mentored by Ludwig Hesse, a long-time Liverpool resident and also lead Pan-Africanist. (We need to know far more about him too). She was the first Community Relations Office in Liverpool in 1970. Later on, she was active in many anti-racist organisations in London, and also worked with MP Bernie Grant and the UK Reparations Movement. I was personally at several meetings with her in London in the early 1990s. Dorothy was a student of mine when she did her Master's Degree at Warwick University in 1991. Some important initial information about her life can be found in the profile by Ray Costello in the 2007 book 'Liverpool Black Pioneers': and the obituary written by Louis Julienne in 2014. We need to build on these

initiatives and document far more of her life. I understand from Richard Benjamin that Dorothy's collection of papers is being held and organised at the ISM – the sooner we can get access to that collection the richer we will be in knowledge. This is a fine opportunity for community-based researchers in Liverpool.

I'm convinced that many more Black men and some women passed through Liverpool. I don't know that I'm right, but I'm probably right. Probably certainly right. And I'm going to find out about them too, by doing more research over the remainder of this year. And there are substantial writings by West Africans in West Africa that simply don't make it into Liverpool (or British) schools.

Today, we owe a great debt to these Black voices. Identifying and unearthing Black voices should be a priority. With insights from these writers, we can directly challenge the partiality of Liverpool education and develop more accurate, more comprehensive and more inclusive understanding of that long period in imperial history. Knowledge and education that will benefit not only Black people but also every other population in the city and nation, including the majority white population.

What are the reparations issues arising from the silencing and suppression of Black voices during Liverpool imperialism and West Africa? What insights into reparatory justice, and decolonising knowledge production and education can be attained by listening to Black voices? The knowledge that we have by, and about Black people is highly limited at the present time; but the insights Black voices can provide is limitless. We need to identify the racist knowledge and education that silenced the voices of Black women and men. We need to identify, research and reveal the voices of Black women and men over the decades and hear far more from them about what happened. That will be the antidote to the colonised education we've received in Liverpool. Far more funds need to be directed by a range of institutions into more fully documenting the rich and textured history of Black people in the city, especially the experiences and lives of Black women. That is the kind of reparations we need to decolonise education. There is so much to be done and our knowledge will vastly increase. So, we must get the resources.

We need to identify, research and reveal the voices of Black women and men over the decades and hear far more from them about what happened.

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Stephen Small is a Professor in the Department of African American Studies and African Diaspora Studies where he has taught since 1995; and he is Director of the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues (since June 2020). He earned his Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley (1989); his M.Sc in Social Sciences from the University of Bristol (1983); and his B.A. (honours) in Economics and Sociology from the University of Kent at Canterbury (1979). He researches the history and sociology of Black people across the diaspora, including the United States, Western Europe, the Caribbean and Brazil. He has held visiting positions at universities in Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Brazil, Japan and Zimbabwe.

His most recent book is *20 Questions and Answers on Black Europe* published in January 2018. His next book is tentatively entitled: *Inside the Shadows of the Big House: 21st Century Antebellum Slave Cabins and Heritage Tourism in Louisiana*, to be published in 2022. He is currently writing a book on

Slavery, Imperialism and their legacies in Black Liverpool. As part of that project, he's investigating the voices and visions of Black men and women from across Africa and the diaspora in anti-colonial movements for self-determination. He is co-editor of *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, 2009.

Stephen is a child of the Windrush Generation, his dad having arrived in England from Jamaica in 1947. He was born and raised in Liverpool – the city with the nation's longest-standing Black population. He was a member of several Black and multi-racial organisations across England, and in the 1990s was research assistant to the Right Honourable Bernie Grant, MP, researching and lecturing on reparations and museums. He was a member of the Consortium of Black Organisations and the Federation of Black Liverpool Organisations, both in Liverpool, in the early 1990s. And he was a Guest Curator at the Atlantic Slave Trade Gallery at the Merseyside Maritime Museum (which became the International Slavery Museum in 2007).