Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance

A review by Itibari M. Zulu

Itibari M. Zulu, Th.D. ([imzsr@yahoo.com; imz@ucla.edu]) is editor-in-chief of The Journal of Pan African Studies; provost of instruction and curriculum at Amen-Ra Theological Seminary (Los Angeles, California); the head librarian at the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies Library & Media Center at the University of California, Los Angeles (www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu); executive director of the Los Angeles Black Book Expo (www.labbx.com); provisional director of the King-Luthuli Transformation Centre Peace Library and Distance Learning Centre (Johannesburg, South Africa), and vice president of the African Diaspora Foundation (www.theadf.com).


Joyce Moore Turner's Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance is an eighth-chapter study of the often untold emergence of African American radicalism in Harlem, drawn on the papers and writings of Hermina Huiswoud, Cyril Briggs, the Rev. E. Ethelred Brown, Langston Hughes, and Richard B. Moore (the Caribbean crusaders), as well as interviews and biographies of related contemporary figures. Hence in painstaking research the study incorporates census records, hundreds of documents from the recently opened Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, and FBI files released through the Freedom of Information Act that were ironically of limited use due to extensive deletions and incorrect accounts of event.

Turner's book is set within the context of Harlem with the cultural ethos of Caribbean migration, and personal dignity, the book outlines how the journalism and oratory of Otto Huiswood and Hermina Dumont Huiswood contributed to the Harlem Renaissance and socialist thought via Otto Huiswood, a native of Guiana whose father had been born an enslaved person, and later becomes the sole African American charter member of the Communist Party and participates in the complex developments within the socialist and communist parties on the question of race that transfers to other parts of the world (Europe, Africa, and the USSR) to reveal the breadth, depth, and nearly global reach of the African-Caribbean activist community.
Often viewed as a cultural Mecca, Harlem in this project takes the stage as a political base for the Black middle class and intelligentsia, and interjectionally states in detail how location (Harlem) “…provided the conduits that facilitated the crosscutting of the fundamental American social cleavages of race, color, class, and condition” and thus represents a place where people encountered life changing opportunities via a Harlem ‘state of mind’ that give it its ‘qualitative distinctiveness’ (xix).

Turner has indeed contributed a new dynamic to understanding the African-Caribbean/African-American role in twentieth century political thought and action with *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance*, and secondly, through its biographical emphasis, demonstrated (via Otto and Hermina Huiswood) the uniqueness of protracted political activism in the face of racism and wholesale colonialism. Students and scholars of political thought and science will find this work rewarding (in addition to the main text, introduction by John Hopkins University professor Franklin W. Knight, and assistance from State University of New York at Stony Brook professor emeritus of history W. Burghardt Turner [also, the husband of the author], the book has preface, a prologue, an epilogue, notes, a selected bibliography, and an index to complete its presentation).