Claudia Vera Jones (1915–1964)

A rather different tie between some of the working-class blacks and the wealthier stratum from abroad was provided though the arts. Jazz had by this time in the early thirties projected itself powerfully in America, and you had your Louis Armstrongs and Duke Ellingtons coming across on tour round the provincial capitals in Britain. Unlike the situation in America there were very few black entertainment areas where the whites could go to hear this stuff as they could in Harlem. However, when these big black entertainers went their rounds, it gave the local black boys a little prestige because the whites thought that they, too, might have this jazz thing in them. Naturally, therefore, you found the black seamen and others going backstage and shaking hands, even though they came from the most terrible slums.

It wasn't only the big-timers; there were vaudeville groups like the Black Birds doing their act in England and Scotland or a more serious set like the Fisk Jubilee Singers with their Negro spirituals. There were also a few personalities—mostly Afro-Americans—who had opened up little clubs in the West End of London. This was allowed by the censors for they recognized the group-consciousness of the West Indian and West African and accepted that there should be places of relaxation. One of the most famous of these was the **Florence Mills Club,** manned by **Amy Ashwood Garvey;** you could go there after you'd been slugging it out for two or three hours at Hyde Park or some other meeting, and get a lovely meal, dance and enjoy yourself.

Ras Makonnen, *Par- Africanism From Within*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press 1973, 130.

In December she was met off the boat-train in London by two West Indians active in socialist, anti-colonial politics, and who drove her off through the thick London fog on a motorbike barely capable of taking even one of them. [...]
In March 1958 she launched the *West Indian Gazette* or, to give it its full title, the *West Indian Gazette* and *Afro-Asian Caribbean News*. Like many such ventures, this was the product of colossal human energy (hers mainly) and minimal material back-up. The paper functioned as an organiser for West Indians in the UK, but in addition addressed issues more strictly particular to the Caribbean.

Bill Schwarz, "Introduction: Crossing Seas", in: Bill Schwarz (Ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press 2003, 14.

Ethiopian sympathizers at London meeting. created: 2 September 1935. With Amy Ashwood Garvey on the left. Photographer: unknown. © Bettmann / Contributor. Held by Getty Images.

Una Marson, BBC Producer, 1941

Besides cultural affinities, these individuals would have no work permit problems in England. Black music historian John Cowley has described the ease of which British West Indian-born, New York resident stars such as singer-comedian Sam Manning and band leading Trinidadian pianist Lionel Belasco were able to forego fooling around with the Home Office for work permits in 1934; Manning left Britain for New York City in 1938 but had made Stateside audiences laugh before, playing a parody of Marcus Garvey in a 1927 New York-to-New Orleans stage revue *Hey ! Hey !*—produced by the political feminist Amy Ashwood (the first Mrs Marcus) Garvey.

Andy Simons, *Black British Swing: The African Diaspora's Contribution to England's Own Jazz of the 1930s and 1940s*.
https://blackbritishswing.wordpress.com/2012/12/22/black-british-swing-the-african-diaspo-ras-contribution-to-englands-own-jezz-of-the-1930s-and-1940s/

Although [Una] Marson's arrival in London in 1932 coincided historically with that of C.L.R. James, the ideas and beliefs she brought with her set her apart from both the young—male—intellectuals of Trinidad in the 1930s and the later generation of emigrants in important ways. She had left Jamaica in the very year in which her first play, *At What A Price*, was staged in Kingston, to public acclaim. She had also, by the age of twenty-seven, established her journalistic credentials, founding in 1928 the monthly journal *The Cosmopolitan: a monthly magazine for the business youth of Jamaica and the official organ of the Stenographers Association*. Both her creative and her journalistic works already articulated her strong commitment to women's rights. [...] For her, the journeys to Britain were prompted more by an awareness of the need to see Jamaica as part of the larger colonial, Caribbean, and later African, picture.
[...]
Indeed, London was not initially an open stage of opportunity for Marson and, as a black woman and a novice traveller, she was daunted by the hostility and the loneliness of the metropolis. Moreover, arriving in 1932, she came to Britain twenty years before mass immigration, before the flourishing of West Indian literary voices and before the recognised presence of a difference had 'creolised the metropole'. Her story cannot invoke the familiar images and narratives of shared crossings, of boats, railway stations and landladies. Rather its telling demands that we extend our history of this creolisation backwards, to account for the smaller but significant places of exchange and encounter between West Indians, Africans and Indians in Britain, such as the Florence Mills café in Oxford Street, London, run by Amy Ashwood Garvey from the early 1930s [...].

Alison Donnell, "Una Marson: feminism, anti-colonialism and a forgotten fight for freedom", in: Bill Schwarz (Ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press 2003, 116.

Black Star Line LTD. https://nathannothinsez.blogspot.com/2016/04/see-what-im-doing-here.html