

From C. L. R. James

5 April 1957
London, England

On their return trip from Ghana, the Kings stopped in London for four days. After touring Buckingham Palace, Parliament, and Westminster Abbey, they spent the afternoon of 24 March talking with a group of black intellectuals that included West Indian writer C. L. R. James, who was working on a book about Ghana and Nkrumah.¹ Later recounting the meeting with King in a letter to his political

1. The group also included West Indian writer George Lamming and English activist David Pitt. Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901–1989), born in Trinidad, was a historian, novelist, Marxist theoretician and activist in the anticolonial and Pan-African movements. Before moving to the United States in 1938, James worked as a schoolteacher in Trinidad and as a sportswriter in England. After being expelled from the U.S. on a passport violation in 1953, James returned to London but remained involved in the Johnson-Forest Tendency, a small group of U.S. radicals and Marxist theorists. James's group also championed the cause of non-Marxist anticolonial movements. James wrote an historical account of the Haitian independence struggle, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San*

5 Apr
1957

associates, James enthusiastically described the Montgomery bus boycott as "one of the most astonishing events of endurance by a whole population that I have ever heard of." James viewed the Montgomery boycott as evidence of the "always unsuspected" yet "tremendous" power of mass movements.² King replied to the following letter on 30 April.³

Dear Dr. King,

I expect that you are safely home by now. I hope you and your wife had a pleasant journey and that when you reached home you found the baby well, and the organisation in good shape.

I have by now been able to send a copy of THE BLACK JACOBINS to Louis and Lucille Armstrong and have asked them, when they have finished with it, to send it on to you.⁴ You will have realised by now that my political frame of reference is not "non-cooperation", but I examine every political activity, strategy, and tactic in terms of its success or failure.⁵

I wish you the best of success and hope to hear from you periodically.

I am thinking in terms of re-writing THE BLACK JACOBINS. The facts of the case and my general interpretation will remain the same, but there are many references and certain tones and attitudes which I think spoil the book for the general public.

With best wishes for yourself and the family, and with warm greetings to all your fellow workers.

Yours sincerely,
[signed]
(C. L. R. James.)

P.S. The G. Report will be sent to you in a day or two.
C. L. R. J.

TLS. MLKP-MBU: Box 60A.

Domingo Revolution (New York: Dial Press, 1938) and *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1977), which drew parallels between the Montgomery movement and the Ghanaian revolution (p. 58 and p. 129).

2. James to Martin and Jessie Glaberman, 25 March 1957. Martin and his wife, Jessie, were Detroit auto workers and members of the Johnson-Forest Tendency.

3. See p. 194 in this volume.

4. Louis Armstrong (1900–1971), the New Orleans-born trumpeter, was America's best known jazz musician. In her husband's absence, Lucille Armstrong presented a copy of "The Louis Armstrong Film," a documentary of Armstrong's 1956 performances in Accra and Europe, to Nkrumah at the film's premier during Ghana's independence celebrations.

5. In his 25 March letter to the Glabermans, James noted the parallels between Nkrumah's notion of positive action and King's conception of nonviolence: "The revolutionary movement on the whole and the Marxist movement in particular will be making a fundamental mistake, (i) if it does not recognise these movements for what they are, a technique of revolutionary struggle characteristic of our age; (ii) if we allow ourselves to be misled by this label of non-violence which they have pasted upon it [which] can cause a lot of confusion unless we look beyond the surface and see the tremendous boldness, the strategic grasp and the tactical inventiveness, all of these fundamentally revolutionary, with which they handled it."