

Rereading Russia through the Contact Zone of HBCUs

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This article examines contributions Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have made and continue to make to the interdisciplinary fabric of Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies (REEES).¹ HBCUs are a uniquely American phenomenon and reminders of the history of enslavement and segregation in the United States. But HBCUs are also vibrant intellectual contact zones, or “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.”² Contact zones result in intercultural competencies, multilingualism, new methodologies, and critical reassessments. Faculty and alumni have described the extent to which HBCUs function as cultural and discursive sanctuaries. As such, HBCUs are places where legally, culturally, and racially segregated communities develop(ed) alternate ways to engage, experience, and (re)envision “Russia.”

Howard University has had an outsized influence on the evolution of intellectual history when it comes to how African Americans interpreted the Soviet Union. The only HBCU offering a Russian minor at this time, Howard remains an important contact zone between the United States and Russia. As HBCUs are joined by an increasing number of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), however, the contact zones for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and other underrepresented communities to advance the accomplishments of REEES are also expanding. The work and lived-experiences of numerous intellectuals affiliated with HBCUs/MSIs from past and present intersect with REEES. They demonstrate the innovation HBCU/MSI students and mentors bring to our field now and in the future.

The accomplishments of Allison Blakely and Joy Gleason Carew are examples of the significant contributions HBCU-contact zones have made to REEES. A professor at Boston College, Blakely taught at Howard from 1971–2001; Carew, a professor at the University of Louisville, taught at Lincoln University in the 1990s. The importance of Blakely’s *Russia and the Negro: Blacks in Russian History and Thought* and Carew’s *Black, Reds, and Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise* cannot be overstated.³ Both works

1. Defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, “...any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association...” <http://www.thehundred-seven.org/hbculist.html> (accessed April 26, 2021).

2. Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991), 34.

3. Allison Blakely, *Russia and the Negro: Blacks in Russian History and Thought* (Washington, D.C., 1986 [1979]); and Joy Gleason Carew, *Black, Reds, and Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise* (New Brunswick, 2008).

are points of departure in many classrooms for discussing the topic of race across disciplines within our field and beyond.

The interest in REEES at HBCUs among African American and Black intellectuals predates the Soviet Union. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), Howard Trustee from 1871–1895, contrasted the emancipation of enslaved Americans and Russian serfs in 1876.⁴ Before Lenin articulated “the Negro Question,” Douglass set a precedent of comparing American and Russian history to examine racial oppression.⁵ Douglass’s comparison predates “the powerful Soviet mystique” of the 1920s and 1930s: a society free of discrimination that offered African Americans agency, the opportunity to travel with open boundaries, to publish and perform, to study and work.⁶ As Blakely states, “[r]acial equality became one of the axioms for Soviet society, which was made literate on an unprecedented scale and imbued with uniform principles.”⁷ A significant number of African Americans who studied at HBCUs travelled, if not moved, to the Soviet Union or became communist activists: writers Claude McKay (1889–1948; Tuskegee) and Maude White Katz (birth year unknown, likely 1904–1985; Howard); American-Soviet film actor Wayland Rudd (1900–1952; Howard); Pan-Africanist George Padmore (1903–1959; Fisk, Howard); and activist Lovett Fort-Whiteman (1889–1939; Tuskegee, Meharry Medical College).

Sociologist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963) is key to understanding the relationship between African Americans and the former Soviet Union. A graduate of the HBCU Fisk University, Du Bois dedicated his life to examining “the Negro problem,” or “the race problem,” which he conceptualized according to the notion of double consciousness: an inward “two-ness,” a causal condition experienced by African Americans shaped by the duality of their identity as a social group and the social environment of racial prejudice. He first expressed this notion in an article for *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1897 titled “The Strivings of the Negro People” and then modified it for his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*. Throughout his oeuvre, Du Bois persisted in his concern to understand “the strange meaning of being black” and his “two-ness,” a particular self-image seen through the “veil” of the socio-cultural construct of race.⁸

4. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Hartford, CT, 1881), 613. Dedication of the Freedmen’s Monument, Washington, D.C., April 14, 1876: “When the serfs of Russia were emancipated, they were given three acres of ground upon which they could live and make a living. But not so when our slaves were emancipated. They were sent away empty-handed, without money, without friends, and without a foot of land to stand upon.”

5. V.I. Lenin, *Russians and Negroes*, written late January-early February 1913; first published posthumously in *Krasnaya Niva*, no. 3, 1925: “everyone knows that the position of the Negroes in America in general is one unworthy of a civilized country.”

6. Blakely, *Russia and the Negro*, 90.

7. Blakely, *Russia and the Negro*, 74.

8. W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, 1903), 3: “After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world....It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the

Du Bois drew from Marxist thought in his conceptualization of black political leadership, or “the Talented Tenth,” a black intelligentsia who would lead the masses and demand radical action.⁹ What the Soviet Union represented to Du Bois was a great power in the modern era that supported an anti-colonial struggle. He became a partisan of the Soviet Union, travelling there four times. He was consulted in the development of African/African American studies in the Soviet Union and received the Lenin Peace Prize in 1960 for a life spent seeking both theory and practice of true equality.

Early Soviet internationalism benefited from timing. Blakely argues, on the one hand, that “modernization was taking hold—with all the social and economic dissatisfaction that that entails. It was a time when new roles and new concepts were more likely than ever before to be acceptable.” On the other, “cultural links between the arts in the United States and Russia became apparent in their dedication to utilitarian art expressed in the folk medium,” a process reinforced by the onset of the Great Depression in the United States.¹⁰

Writer, philosopher, and the first African American Rhodes Scholar, Alain LeRoy Locke (1885–1954), is considered the “Father of the Harlem Renaissance” for his 1925 anthology of black and white artists titled *The New Negro*.¹¹ Locke often disagreed with Du Bois, emphasizing the individuality of the artist over his/her social function. An Assistant Professor at Howard (1912–14; on and off until 1925), Locke served as the university’s first African American President from 1928–53. He promoted Howard as one of the “radiant centers of Negro culture,” if not “the national Negro university.”¹²

Locke became acquainted with Marxism during his studies at the University of Berlin (1910–11), engaged Soviet literary criticism, and travelled to the Soviet Union in 1934, 1935, and 1936 through the sponsorship of Soviet diplomatic organizations like the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad. Biographer Jeffrey Stewart asserts that “Locke came away ecstatic about the Soviet experiment. What really impressed him was the way the revolution spoke to the Black situation; it had transformed the outlook and self-concept of the children in the ways he had hoped to do for Negro children with *The New Negro* and the Harlem Museum of African Art. The communist revolution triggered a type of transformed consciousness the Negro needed to fulfill its destiny.”¹³

Beyond HBCUs’ roles as contact zones, their libraries function as repositories for the records of these interactions with the former Soviet Union. The

tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body...”

9. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of Race Concept* (New York, 1940).

10. Blakely, *Russia and the Negro*, 165–66; 164.

11. An intellectual and cultural revival of African American arts, literature, and politics in Harlem, New York during the 1920s/1930s. For a Soviet perspective see Christina Kiaer, “African Americans in Soviet Socialist Realism: The Case of Aleksandr Deineka,” *Russian Review* 75, no. 3 (July 2016): 402–33.

12. Zachery R. Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth: Howard University Public Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race, 1926–1970* (Columbia, 2009), 35.

13. Jeffrey C. Stewart, *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke* (New York, 2018), 687.

Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard houses narratives of African American and Black intellectuals deserving attention. The Locke archive contains documents from his trips to the Moscow Theater Festival in 1935 and 1936.¹⁴ The archive of Paul Robeson (1898–1976), bass-baritone, activist, actor, and recipient of the 1952 Stalin Peace Prize alongside Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg (1891–1967), contains large amounts of personal correspondence and fan mail from the Soviet Union.¹⁵ “Dear grandfather Paul!” wrote middle-schoolers in 1963 from Chebocsary, “We heard the songs which you have sung in English and Russian. We love you very much.”¹⁶ Robeson explained the allure of the Soviet Union: “What was demanded was an objective appraisal of history,” asserting that “[the Soviet Peoples] had established the first fortress of a new world. Like it or not, there it stood, the first socialist state in the world, a rallying point for the progressive forces of mankind.”¹⁷

Moorland-Spingarn also contains manuscripts from African Americans who travelled to and lived in the Soviet Union. Examples include George Washington Carver’s (1864–1943) protegee John Wesley Sutton (1897–1978; Prairie View College, Tuskegee), who worked as an agricultural scientist in the Soviet Union from 1931–38; and journalist George Murphy, Jr. (1906–1986), grandson of the founder of the Harlem-based *Afro American* newspaper and later the Editor-in-Chief of the *Washington Afro American*.¹⁸ Murphy’s archive contains correspondence with intellectuals and political leaders that spans from the Harlem Renaissance to his passing. In 1971 Murphy travelled to the Soviet Union with an American Negro Delegation and recorded his experience in *A Journey to the Soviet Union*, printed in English by the Novosti Press Agency Publishing House in 1974. Murphy documents discussions about the “positive and negative aspects of Pan-Africanism, nationalism, African and Afro-American Studies,” and the legacy of Du Bois.¹⁹

Murphy was affected by the Soviet valuation of African American writers and intellectuals, educational opportunities, and the prominence given to libraries, like the one he visited in Tashkent. This reflected the efforts of educators like Lenin’s wife Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaja (1869–1939) who upheld that libraries are key to liberating the masses and valued the role exchanges among libraries played at home and abroad. In the US this

14. “Locke, Alain” (2015). Manuscript Division Finding Aids. 123. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (MSRC), Howard University, Washington, D. C. at https://dh.howard.edu/finaid_manu/123 (accessed April 26, 2021).

15. Paul Robeson, *Russian Correspondence*, MSRC, Howard University at https://dh.howard.edu/probeson_russia/ (accessed April 26, 2021).

16. Soviet, Pioneers of the Kuiunskii middle school friendship, Altai region, “Note from Pioneers of the Kuiunskii middle school friendship soviet (see translation)” (1955), *Russian Correspondence*, 4, at https://dh.howard.edu/probeson_russia/4 (accessed April 26, 2021).

17. Philip S. Foner, ed., *Paul Robeson Speaks: Writing, Speeches, Interviews 1918–1974* (New York, 1978), 111.

18. His uncle Carl Murphy (1889–1967) was a Howard alum and German professor (1913–1918), who later became a trustee at Morgan State. Both George and Carl helped organize Martin Luther King Jr.’s August 1963 “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.”

19. George Murphy, *A Journey to the Soviet Union* (Moscow, 1974), 71.

valuation of literacy as a liberating force was mirrored by Carter G. Woodson (1875–1950), Dean of Arts and Sciences at Howard. Founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, in 1916 Woodson started *The Journal of Negro History*. In 1926, he called for a yearly “Negro Week” celebration of African American intellectual achievements, what is now Black History Month. Woodson saw education or its denial as a primary concern and esteemed HBCUs as a locus for the development of academic methodologies.

Murphy’s memoir joins a legacy of travelogues to the Soviet Union like those of poet-laureate of the Harlem Renaissance Langston Hughes (1901–1967; Lincoln), writer Dorothy West (1907–1998), writer Otto Huiswood (1893–1961), and writer, activist, and HBCU professor (Hampton) Louise Thompson Patterson (1901–1999). The many trips between the US and the Soviet Union African Americans recorded in autobiographies express a “declaration of independence.”²⁰ Murphy repeated the same sojourn to Uzbekistan that Hughes, West, Patterson, and others underwent in 1932–33 to make the unrealized Soviet film, *Black and White*. Patterson, founder of the Harlem chapter of the Friends of the Soviet Union in 1932, organized the trip. Her archive holds invaluable photographs of this cultural exchange.²¹

African American intellectuals were cognizant of the Soviet Union’s shortcomings. In 1933, Du Bois acknowledged Soviet contradictions in an unpublished article: “There was something rather splendid in the way in which this great new land slashed at Negro prejudice throughout the world. But we recognize the real politik in Russia’s present attitude. Perhaps sometime when this great experiment finds its feet, it will again essay to stretch rescuing hands to the dark submerged millions of the world.”²² Slavists today are (re)evaluating the effects of this complicated legacy.

HBCUs are visible today thanks to contemporary cultural leaders who have studied at these institutions, such as Oprah Winfrey (Tennessee State) and Kamala Harris (Howard).²³ HBCUs have benefited from the attention that writer, comic book author, and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates has brought to them. A MacArthur Fellow and lecturer, Coates is celebrated for his memoir *Between the World and Me*, in which he dubs Howard University “The Mecca.”²⁴ In a style that pays homage to writer and activist James Baldwin’s (1924–1987) *The Fire Next Time* (1963), Coates wrote his memoir as a letter to his son and describes the experience of being a black man living in the United States. He captures the real and figurative library—the scholarship and culture—that is

20. “Code Switch: The Birth of ‘A New Negro,’” *NPR*, December 25, 2019 at <https://www.npr.org/2019/12/20/790381948/the-birth-of-a-new-negro> (accessed April 26, 2021).

21. Louise Thompson Patterson papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University at <http://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/8zr8k> (accessed April 26, 2021).

22. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Soviets and the Negro*, ca. 1933. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, at <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b213-i016> (accessed June 15, 2021). One typed page, unpublished.

23. Alumni include: Booker T. Washington (Hampton); Ida B. Wells (Rust, Fisk); Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Morehouse), Thurgood Marshall (Lincoln, Howard); Toni Morrison (Howard); and Stacy Abrams (Spelman).

24. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, 2015), 47.

Howard and the safe, cultivating, and restorative place it is for the black mind and body. Coates writes about the place all HBCUs occupy. In interviews since the release of the theater and HBO adaptations of his memoir, Coates emphasizes “the blast” of “something deeper” he gained while studying at an HBCU.²⁵

When Coates was as a correspondent for *The Atlantic* from 2008 to 2018, he wrote against the backdrop of the historic presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump and events such as Euromaidan (2013–14) and the Ferguson riots of August 2014/August 2015 in Missouri. Throughout his blog posts, Coates asked questions about Russia/the former Soviet Union and cited the scholarship of historians working in REEES like Timothy Snyder, Anne Applebaum, and Tony Judt to make sense of current events. In this, we are reminded of the many Black intellectuals who contrasted the racial oppression of the United States to the personal agency offered to them by the Soviet Union. Coates joins this conversation in a new century, after the experiment of the Soviet Union had failed.

Coates’s *Between the World and Me* tells the story of racism as he has lived it and also the redemptive and restorative power of the “library”—the intellectual inheritance—and the love he came to know at Howard. He locates his memoir at the contact zone that is an HBCU and details a ritual of sitting down to read from the archives of Moorland-Spingarn: “I went into this investigation imagining history to be a unified narrative, free of debate, which, once uncovered, would simply verify everything I had always suspected. The smokescreen would lift. And the villains who manipulated the schools and the streets would be unmasked.”²⁶ A problem arose for Coates: “I did not find a coherent tradition marching lockstep but instead factions, and factions within factions.”²⁷ This quest for clarity through the lens of history was likely complicated by the nature of autobiography and that the genre dominates African American writing.²⁸ Coates’s passion for reading did not subside, nor his quest to understand Black-identity and Black-consciousness movements in the tomes of historical scholarship.

While blogging for *The Atlantic*, Coates persisted in his steady diet of reading historical texts, citing paragraphs at a time, to carry his readership along with him in his “studies.” Three books stood out as he weighed and considered the topics of ethnic racism, law and order, and totalitarianism: Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*; Anne Applebaum’s *The Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944–1956*; and Tony Judt’s *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*.²⁹ Coates assessed the histories of central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to help him understand

25. “Craig Melvin’s extended interview with Ta-Nehisi Coates,” *The TODAY Show*, November 25, 2020 at <https://www.today.com/video/watch-craig-melvin-s-extended-interview-with-ta-nehisi-coates-96602693668> (accessed April 26, 2021).

26. Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 47.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Kate A. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red 1922–1963* (Durham, NC, 2002), 160.

29. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2012); Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944–1956* (New York, 2013); and Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York, 2005).

racism and division in the United States. “The Soviet Union pitched itself in opposition to the racism of Nazi Germany, and even America. There’s a Stalin-era film, which I’m dying to see, in which the American heroine gives birth to a black child and finds peace in the Soviet Union,” Coates reflected, referencing Mosfilm’s 1936 *Circus*.³⁰ “But it is hard not to look at Ukraine, or look at dekulakization, or look at the Polish operation, or the Latvian operation, and not see—if not racism—a lethal ethnic bias,” Coates continued, citing Snyder’s *The Bloodlands* to draw comparisons between American and Soviet actions committed by citizens against citizens.³¹ In a second blog post: “It is my guiding thesis that people who claim a serious interest in America but consider racism to be a niche topic are divided against themselves.”³² Coates again referenced Snyder’s book, comparing this division to the Nazi Plan for eastern Europe, asserting that we should not be surprised when we see something “hauntingly familiar” in America’s history of enslavement.³³ Coates regards Applebaum’s book as “an epic essay on the actual meaning of totalitarianism,” and engages her work to discuss law enforcement.³⁴ Coates appreciated Judt’s book as courageous, “a rejection of the kind of moralizing tidiness which marked my own early education about Europe, World War II and its aftermath,” stating that an observation from Yugoslav dissident Milovan Dilas will remain with him forever.³⁵ “I think we all see our ‘theories and visions’ come to dust in the ‘starving, bleeding, captive land’ which is everywhere, which is politics,” asserted Coates.³⁶ In 2019 at a Judt memorial lecture, Coates revealed: “I felt like when I read [his book], it gave me permission to write about the world as I saw it.”³⁷

30. *Circus*. Directed by Grigori Aleksandrov and Isidor Simkov. Moscow: Mosfilm, 1936. Based on *Under the Circus Dome* by Il’ia Il’f and Evgenii Petrov (1934). An American circus artist and her Black son find love and refuge from racism in the USSR. The film culminates with a lullaby for the baby boy, sung in turn by representatives of Soviet ethnicities in their languages.

31. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Grappling with Holodomor: Thoughts on Timothy Snyder’s *The Bloodlands*,” *The Atlantic*, January 3, 2014 at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/01/grappling-with-holodomor/282816/> (accessed April 26, 2021).

32. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Hitler on the Mississippi Banks: Thoughts on Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands*,” *The Atlantic*, January 16, 2014 at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/01/hitler-on-the-mississippi-banks/283127/> (accessed April 26, 2021).

33. Coates, “Hitler on the Mississippi Banks.”

34. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Meaning of ‘Totalitarian’: Anne Applebaum talks to us like we’re stupid. And it’s awesome,” *The Atlantic*, March 26, 2014 at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/03/the-meaning-of-totalitarian/359615/> (accessed April 26, 2021).

35. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “‘In a Starving, Bleeding, Captive Land’: Some thoughts on Tony Judt’s opus *Postwar*,” *The Atlantic*, October 21, 2013 at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/10/in-a-starving-bleeding-captive-land/280723/> (accessed April 26, 2021). The Milovan Dilas quote in full: “For hours both armies clambered up rocky ravines to escape annihilation or to destroy a little group of their countrymen, often neighbors on some jutting peak six thousand feet high, in a starving, bleeding, captive land. It came to mind that this was what had become of all our theories and visions of the workers’ and peasants’ struggle against the bourgeoisie.”

36. Coates, “‘In a Starving, Bleeding, Captive Land.’”

37. Mansee Khurana, “Ta-Nehisi Coates: ‘The Power of Invisibility is Dissipating,’” *Washington Square News*, February 28, 2019.

Coates's journey was not to Uzbekistan nor does he have illusions about the Soviet experiment. His writing is not forced to adjust, characteristic of Du Bois, to "the Russian causality tables in light of the Atlantic slave trade."³⁸ But Coates perpetuates the tradition of pondering "Russian causality" in the fate of history. This does echo Du Bois, who revealed: "I come back [from the Soviet Union] to re-interpret to myself my native land."³⁹ Kate Baldwin has written: "Russia is the zone in which all elsewhere gets reimagined."⁴⁰ In post-Cold War geopolitics and the current atmosphere of weaponized information and emotion, this statement that "Russia—real, imagined, and re-imagined—is a nexus of (self)-reflection" is, in many ways, true for Americans in general. What has held over the last century is that the "aspirations of hosts and visitors" of the Soviet Union—to borrow a phrase from Blakely—have been filtered through the lens of autobiography by African American intellectuals.⁴¹ What twenty-first-century writers like Coates reveal is that autobiography persists as, in the words of Baldwin, "political praxis continually in process."⁴² The contact zone that is an HBCU plays a critical role in these reassessments.

Coates jokes that he wanted to be a historian but that too much study was required, so he turned to journalism instead. Yet the texture of his corpus demonstrates how important historians are to journalists and journalists to historians. There is opportunity for collaboration at that intersection, especially in the age of social media and digital humanities, and journalists like Du Bois and Murphy remind us how important journalism has been as a platform for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and underrepresented communities to express individuality, address socio-cultural concerns, and enact educational initiatives. Journalist and podcast host Terrell Starr, graduate of HBCU Philander Smith College, Kimberly St. Julian-Varnon, and Jennifer Wilson are leading this charge in our field.⁴³ Coates reaffirms the socio-cultural role HBCUs/MSIs serve as contact zones for students, mentors, and the communities they inspire.

HBCUs/MSIs persist as contact zones where Russian, east European, and Eurasian culture affects global patterns of thought and where Black identity and Black-consciousness movements are defined, redefined, and reimagined. Coates has reframed for the twenty-first century what, in Blakely's terms, was "the depth of the dilemma of African Americans in search of dignity and social justice" in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁴ Coates suggests that an ongoing inter-

38. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain*, 171.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. Allison Blakely, "Foreword: Contested Blackness in Red Russia," *The Russian Review* 75, no. 3 (July 2016): 360.

42. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain*, 199.

43. Terrell Starr (Fulbright Scholar-Ukraine and Peace Corp Volunteer-Georgia) <https://terrellstarr.com/> (accessed June 10, 2021); Kimberly St. Julian-Varnon, "The Ties That Bind: Black Lives Matter, Ukraine's Euromaidan, and the Realities of European 'Integration,'" *Krytyka*, (Kyiv), May 2020 at <https://krytyka.com/en/articles/ties-bind-black-lives-matter-ukraine-euromaidan> (accessed June 10, 2021); and Jennifer Wilson, "The Cornel West—Ta-Nehisi Coates Twitter Feud Explained Through Russian Writers," *The Paris Review*, January 12, 2018.

44. Blakely, "Foreword," 361.

rogation of the history of Russia, eastern Europe, and Eurasia and the promises and practices of the Soviet Union are valuable objects of study if we are to understand race and bias in the United States. HBCUs have an important social and cultural function in America. The libraries they house and the contact zones they provide can help us gain a more complete understanding of the US-Russian relationship.