




RESEARCH ARTICLE

Confronting the Deportation State: Black American Responses to Immigrant Expulsion in the Interwar Period

Emily Pope-Obeda 

Department of History, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA, USA
Email: emp319@lehigh.edu

Abstract

This article explores responses in the Black press to the rapidly expanding U.S. deportation regime during the interwar period. While their perspectives have been largely absent from scholarship on deportation, Black journalists, editorialists, and commentators have historically been highly engaged with the issue. Black periodicals provided extensive coverage of the expulsion of Black immigrants, as well as of non-Black immigrants who violated the racial structures of American society (either through antiracist political advocacy or through interracial relationships). In doing so, the Black press insisted that deportation was a Black issue, and that antiblackness was central to the functioning of the early-twentieth-century immigration control system. By surveying roughly 1,100 articles on deportation in the Black press, I highlight how Black writers construed deportation as a powerful tool of white supremacy and a threat to Black immigrants and African Americans alike.

In 1932, William Pickens, a well-known National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) organizer and columnist for the Associated Negro Press (ANP), wrote about his recent trip to France for the *Baltimore Afro-American*. Pickens described the various classes traveling aboard his ship, explaining that the “real third class” was housing roughly two hundred deportees. He mused:

These are “foreigners,” being sent back to their own countries because they have become undesirable aliens in the U.S.A. But do you know what the truth is? Many of them have contrived to get themselves sent back to save the cost of fare.... How can you blame them? We have decided to deport people for almost any little irregularity, so when they want to go home, free, they proceed to get deported. That’s easy if you are an “alien.” All you have to do is get up on a soap box on a street corner and make a sensible speech, too sensible for Mr. Hoover and Mr. Doak to understand it, and out you go—all expenses paid.¹

The following year, William Gillett of the *Chicago Defender* described a similar experience on his transatlantic sailing, writing about his encounter with the “other Colored men” onboard—two “penniless and ragged” “Arabian” deportees.² These stories suggest that a small number of Black Americans in the interwar period, like Pickens and Gillett, gained familiarity with the expanding deportation state through first-hand contact with deportees. Many more Black

¹William Pickens, “Bound for Europe on Board the Ship Leviathan,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 23, 1932, 9.

²William Gillett, “Some Observations Made on Sailing to Europe,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 5, 1933, 10.

Americans, however, likely developed their understanding of deportation through the hundreds of articles on the subject in the Black press during the same period.

Too often, however, scholarship on reactions to immigrants and immigration policy has tended to code the “native-born” observer as white and, in the process, effectively erase Black Americans perspectives on the topic. But, as the pages of early-twentieth-century Black newspapers reveal, Black Americans had a great deal to say about deportation. While far from unified in their perspectives on deportation, Black journalists, editorialists, and commentators were deeply engaged with the topic. Indeed, I argue, in many instances these authors maintained that deportation was, fundamentally, a Black issue. Perhaps unsurprisingly, coverage of the deportation of Black immigrants dominated these publications. But even when covering non-Black deportees, many articles focused on white and other non-Black immigrants who were removed for transgressions of the color line, and depicted deportation as an effective tool for policing antiracist advocacy or interracial relationships. In short, authors across various Black newspapers insisted that deportation was, in both explicit and more subtle ways, deeply intertwined with anti-Black racism.

The interwar period was marked by the consolidation of drastic immigration restrictions and a rapidly expanding deportation system. Simultaneously, these decades represented a crucial moment of transformation for the Black press, which widened in circulation and became, in many instances, more politically assertive.³ Furthermore, as a result of their own “Great Migration” to urban centers in the North and Midwest, African Americans experienced increased contact with and awareness of foreign-born populations (including Black immigrants) who settled in many of the same areas.⁴ I suggest, therefore, that this era provides a particularly revealing window into how the Black American public grappled with deportation’s growing power and its meaning for their communities. A close examination of the Black press reveals that while Black nativism and interminority conflict—which have often dominated the scholarship on African Americans and immigration—were indeed central features of writings on deportation, these strains of thought did not dominate the Black press. Instead, I argue that much of the coverage in the Black press presented deportation as a dangerous tool of state racism and, indeed, as a threat to Black migrants and even African Americans.

After a brief overview of the history of Black responses to immigration restriction, the article is composed of two main sections. The first explores how writers in the Black press emphasized the deportation of Black immigrants and analyzes the particularly frequent coverage of Black celebrity deportees. At the same time, however, I note that by supporting the removal of individuals seen as detrimental to the race, Black commentators also monitored the boundaries of foreign-born Black acceptability in order to press for greater inclusion and respect. But the emphasis on Black deportees was only the most obvious way that Black Americans came to

³Thomas Aiello asserts that “the interwar period saw the black newspaper at its most radical, and that militancy grew its audience and made it nationally relevant.” Thomas Aiello, *The Grapevine of the Black South: The Scott Newspaper Syndicate in the Generation before the Civil Rights Movement* (Athens, GA, 2018), 4.

⁴On the migration of Southern African Americans during the 1910s and 1920s, see James Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago, 1989); Joe William Trotter, ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington, IN, 1991); Alferdteen Harrison, ed., *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South* (Jackson, MS, 1991); Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks’ Migration Experiences to Pittsburgh, 1916–1930* (Urbana, IL, 1987); James Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005); and Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009). Violet Showers Johnson explains that in cities like Boston, the influx of Southern African Americans was “compounded” by the arrival of large numbers of British West Indian migrants, and together, these migrations shook up the “established structure” of race relations. Violet Showers Johnson, *The Other Black Bostonians: West Indians in Boston, 1900–1950* (Bloomington, IN, 2006), 2.

understand deportation as one strand of the flexible anti-Black strategies of the state. The second section illuminates how the Black press also depicted deportation as a tool for punishing white or other non-Black immigrants who violated the color line, particularly through antiracist activism or interracial familial ties. Together, these sections show that Black newspaper coverage of deportation in the interwar period offered a multidimensional critique of white supremacy and state repression. The depiction of deportation that emerges over hundreds of articles was of a system that prominently featured anti-Black racism and profoundly impacted Black communities.

In order to trace a range of Black perspectives on deportation, this research is based on articles drawn from twenty-six African American newspapers during the interwar period. The majority of these articles were found in widely circulated papers, including the five largest Black newspapers of the era: the *Chicago Defender*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, and *Pittsburgh Courier*.⁵ But I also examine articles from a number of what Fred Carroll calls “dominant regional [Black] news sources,” including the *Cleveland Call and Post*, *Michigan Chronicle*, and *Los Angeles Sentinel*.⁶ Additionally, I analyze stories from smaller local papers (some of which, like the *Plaindealer* of Kansas, covered deportation frequently) or less popular papers in major cities (such as the *Chicago Broad Ax*).⁷ From these varied sources, I have assembled just under 1,100 individual pieces on deportation between 1914 and 1939, including news stories, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor. Of those, roughly nine hundred pertain to official deportations (immigrant removal from one nation to another), while the remaining articles discuss either internal “deportations” of African Americans and others over county or state lines, or colonization proposals to “deport” Black Americans to Africa. Although it is not the main emphasis of this article, it is important to note that the Black press’ presentation of deportation as a mechanism for maintaining the color line was not merely domestic. The Black press provided extensive coverage of deportations of American citizens to the United States and of global

⁵By the end of WWI, the *Chicago Defender* had the largest circulation, at 125,000, and Fred Carroll argues that, until 1930, it was the only “truly national” African American paper (although by the post-World War II period, the *Courier* and *Afro-American* had outstripped its circulation, and the *Amsterdam News* and *Journal and Guide* had also become nationally popular). Fred Carroll, *Race News: Black Journalists and the Fight for Racial Justice in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana, IL, 2017), 81.

⁶Carroll, *Race News*, 81–2.

⁷While I have sought to include a group of papers that range in size, location, political orientation, and structure, I have been limited to papers preserved in searchable, digitized databases, which allowed me to track stories involving deportation. I chose to limit my searches to newspapers, rather than magazines, and to avoid publications that were the direct mouthpieces of specific organizations, such as *The Crisis* or *Negro World*. I do not seek to suggest that the list that follows is comprehensive or fully representative of the Black press as a whole, merely that it allows for an exploration of how a range of Black papers, from highly prominent nationals to local outlets, voiced their engagement with the rising American deportation regime. The full list of newspapers examined is *The Advocate* (Kansas City, KS); *The Appeal* (St. Paul, MN); *Atlanta Daily World*; *Baltimore Afro-American*; *Broad Ax* (Chicago); *Chicago Defender*; *Cleveland Call & Post*; *Cleveland Gazette*; *Hutchinson Blade* (Hutchinson, KS); *Kansas Elevator* (Kansas City, KS); *Los Angeles Sentinel*; *Messenger* (Fort Scott, KS); *Metropolitan Post* (Chicago); *Michigan Chronicle*; *New York Amsterdam News*; *Negro Star* (Wichita, KS); *Norfolk Journal and Guide*; *People’s Elevator* (Wichita, KS); *Philadelphia Tribune*; *Pittsburgh Courier*; *Plaindealer* (Topeka/Kansas City, KS); *Savannah Tribune*; *Washington Bee*; *Western Outlook* (Oakland, CA); *Wyandotte Echo* (Kansas City, KS). Not all of these papers were published throughout the entire interwar period. As Dorothy Smith points out, even states like Kansas had a vibrant array of Black newspapers, including the *Plaindealer*, which she notes had statewide as well as southern readers due to its “editor’s relentless fight against racial discrimination, disenfranchisement, and lynching.” The *Negro Star*, she notes, adopted a similar line, while the *People’s Elevator* was focused on a Washingtonian form of uplift. Dorothy Smith, “The Black Press and the Search for Hope and Equality in Kansas, 1865–1985,” in *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865–1985*, ed. Henry Lewis Suggs (Westport, CT, 1996), 119.

deportation practices, focusing on the expulsion of oppressed and colonized populations around the world.

The Black press of the interwar period was, of course, far from monolithic. The articles explored reflect significant variation in opinion, tone, and focus across publications (and often across articles in the same publication). These differences were likely influenced by distinct editorial structures, political leanings, and by the immigrant composition and socioeconomic dynamics of the cities in which they were published.⁸ While I examine newspapers from across the nation, the most concentrated coverage of deportation emerges in cities with rapidly expanding African American *and* immigrant populations, such as New York, Chicago, and Pittsburgh. Additionally, papers known for their progressive political leanings, such as the *Baltimore Afro-American*, published extensively on deportation and were often quite critical of the U.S. deportation agenda.⁹ Coverage also varied based on authorship. While most of the articles examined were published without author attribution, there are significant differences between pieces from newspapers' staff and contributions from readers, which often demonstrated a deep wariness about economic competition. And yet, despite the diversity of viewpoints, certain trends do emerge across these publications.

Across most of these newspapers, but particularly in papers from the Northeast, Black deportees are covered extensively, in contrast to their relatively scarce presence in the mainstream press of the era *and* in scholarship looking at deportations during the period. Indeed, Black migrants are the subjects of more than one-third of all articles examined, with about half of those articles pertaining to the 1927 deportation of Marcus Garvey. Numerous articles condemned the impact of the deportation regime on Black sailors, students, and others, frequently noting the discrimination they faced from immigration officials. Other articles focused on how deportations of famous Black individuals reflected a desire to suppress Black success. But in a smaller number of cases, Black commentators tacitly or explicitly supported the removal of Black migrants who they saw as damaging to the race. The Black press also covered a large number of non-Black deportations, often integrating them into an analysis of American race relations and repression.¹⁰ Articles that focused on individual white deportees most frequently centered on their subjects' political or intimate involvement with Black Americans, with a particular focus on the racial advocacy work of white radicals.¹¹ Further, a number of articles considered the deportations of non-Black immigrants of color, sometimes stressing competition over jobs, while at other times drawing correlations between their treatment and that of African Americans.

While it may seem self-evident that Black Americans would have an interest and a stake in the complex debates around migration and national belonging in the early twentieth century,

⁸On the Black press in the interwar period, see Carroll, *Race News*; Kathy Roberts Forde and Sid Bedingfield, eds., *Journalism and Jim Crow: White Supremacy and the Black Struggle for a New America* (Urbana, IL, 2021); Eurie Dahn, *Jim Crow Networks: African American Periodical Cultures* (Amherst, MA, 2021); Aiello, *The Grapevine of the Black South*; and D'Weston Haywood, *Let Us Make Men: The Twentieth Century Black Press and a Manly Vision for Racial Advancement* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2018).

⁹As Carroll notes, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, while not openly affiliated with radical organizations, had significant radical influences and adopted a largely progressive bent. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, in contrast, had "the most conservative of the major publishers" throughout this era. Carroll, *Race News*, 75.

¹⁰The remainder of domestically focused articles discussed general deportation policies, including proposed and enacted legislative changes.

¹¹A number of cases of white or Chinese deportees also seem to have made their way into the Black press because the immigrants in question hired an African American lawyer to plead their case. One of the most prominent examples was the 1934 deportation case of the notorious Charles Ponzi, who hired the "Negro attorney, former Assistant United States Solicitor General William H. Lewis." See "Ponzi Retains Colored Lawyer in New Fight," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Feb. 24, 1934, 5.

those perspectives have rarely been explored.¹² In recent years, political scientists and sociologists have increasingly studied contemporary African American perspectives on immigration, but few have centered their work on earlier periods.¹³ The limited scholarship on African American perceptions of immigration (both contemporary and historical) often stresses the development of a form of uniquely Black nativism based primarily around competition with immigrants for jobs and marked by a distinctive ambivalence. Political scientist Niambi Michele Carter, for instance, asserts that “Blacks have been ... highly ambivalent regarding immigrants. In the main, blacks believe deeply in the right of all groups to self-determination; yet, they are wary that another group’s self determination will come at their expense.”¹⁴ Certainly, as scholars have demonstrated, there have been deep and pervasive anxieties around immigration, underpinned by the reality that structural racism in America has often facilitated the advancement of various groups of newcomers (both white and nonwhite) over that of Black Americans. But scholars have also begun to explore the broader implications of immigration control for Black Americans, particularly for their understandings of citizenship and inclusion. Legal scholar Kevin Johnson introduces a framing for how African Americans have perceived immigration control in more recent decades, explaining that “rather than just a peculiar feature of U.S. public law, the differential treatments of citizens and noncitizens serves as a ‘magic mirror’ revealing how dominant society might treat domestic minorities if legal constraints were abrogated. Indeed, the harsh treatment of noncitizens of color reveals terrifying lessons about how society views citizens of color.”¹⁵ An examination of the Black press in the interwar period reveals that its commentators were astute students of such lessons.

Furthermore, while a small body of historical scholarship has increasingly considered how Black immigrants were targeted through the immigration bureaucracy, it has largely focused on

¹²The most notable exceptions are the scholarship of David Hellwig and Arnold Shankman from the 1970s and 1980s on African American perceptions of different immigrant groups. See Arnold Shankman, *Ambivalent Friends: Afro-Americans View the Immigrant* (Westport, CT, 1982); David Hellwig, “Black Leaders and United States Immigration Policy, 1917–1929,” *Journal of Negro History* 66, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 110–27; and David Hellwig, “Strangers in Their Own Land: Patterns of Black Nativism, 1830–1930,” *American Studies* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 85–98. See also Jeff Diamond, “African-American Attitudes Towards United States Immigration Policy,” *International Migration Review* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 451–70; Susan Roth Breitzer, “Race, Immigration, and Contested Americanness: Black Nativism and the American Labor Movement,” *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 4, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 269–83; and Lawrence H. Fuchs, “The Reaction of Black Americans to Immigration,” in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York, 1990), 293–314.

¹³R. Khari Brown, “Religion, Economic Concerns, and African American Immigration Attitudes,” *Review of Religious Research* 52, no. 2 (Dec. 2010): 146–58; Scott Cummings and Thomas Lambert, “Anti-Hispanic and Anti-Asian Sentiments Among African Americans,” *Social Science Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (June 1997): 338–53; Bryan O. Jackson et al., “Coalitional Prospects in a Multi-Racial Society: African-American Attitudes Toward Other Minority Groups,” *Political Research Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (June 1994): 277–94; Tatishe Nteta, “The Past Is Prologue: African American Opinion Toward Undocumented Immigration,” *Social Science History* 38, nos. 3–4 (Fall/Winter 2014): 389–410; Irwin L. Morris, “African American Voting on Proposition 187: Rethinking the Prevalence of Interminority Conflict,” *Political Research Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Mar. 2000): 77–98.

¹⁴Nimabi Michele Carter, *American While Black: African Americans, Immigration, and the Limits of Citizenship* (New York, 2019), 16. Hellwig and Shankman use the term “ambivalent” repeatedly, as does Stephen Steinberg, who describes a “uniquely black ambivalence toward immigration.” Stephen Steinberg, “Immigration, African Americans, and Race Discourse,” *New Labor Forum* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 49.

¹⁵For instance, Johnson notes that treatment of Haitian immigrants in the late twentieth century left “little room for doubt—if there were any—about how this society as a whole views its own poor Black citizens.” Kevin R. Johnson, “Race, the Immigration Laws, and Domestic Race Relations: A ‘Magic Mirror’ into the Heart of Darkness,” *Indiana Law Journal* 73, no. 4 (1998): 1114. Meanwhile, Bill Ong Hing, another legal scholar, argues that “U.S. immigration policies send messages of exclusion to many African Americans. The message is not only one of physical exclusion from the country, but exclusion from deliberations on matters that appear to affect their community.” Bill Ong Hing, “Immigration Policies: Messages of Exclusion to African Americans,” *Howard Law Journal* 37 (1994): 238.

political radicalism. Llana Barber's recent study of antiblackness and immigration control suggests that the "US government did not hesitate to use the nativist state to undermine Black activism and protect white supremacy," but her discussion of deportation focuses primarily on Black political activists like Garvey, Claudia Jones, and C. L. R. James.¹⁶ Black American observers of the time, however, identified the state's project of "protect[ing] white supremacy" through deportation as a broader and more insidious endeavor. Indeed, as marginalized citizens, Black American commentators regularly commented on the targeting of noncitizens as part of an intertwined state assault on blackness and foreignness, which extended well beyond the small (but significant) number of Black political deportees. As Michael Hanchard reminds us, "the monitoring, surveillance, and restriction of movement by the state" were "common to African Americans and many immigrant populations," and Black observers highlighted these commonalities in their coverage of deportation.¹⁷ Charisse Burden-Stelly argues even more forcefully that the "conjunction of antiforeignness, antiradicalism, and antiblackness has been constitutive of and endemic in U.S. governmentality." She points out, however, that understanding this nexus requires taking a broader view of antiforeignness, which accounts for the ways in which Black Americans "irrespective of citizenship" have been construed as "outsider[s] that must be contained and circumscribed."¹⁸

Drawing on this work, I demonstrate therefore that while the common narrative of Black "nativism" tells a vital part of the story, it has been incomplete. First, scholars who have explored responses to immigration restriction have often overlooked reactions to deportation as a related, but distinct, exercise of state power. Post-entry deportation (as opposed to restrictive legislation), I show, often generated a more varied and nuanced contemplation in the Black press. Unlike potential future entrants, Black observers more frequently depicted immigrants already living and working within their midst as victims of an unjust state, and as more directly connected to their own lives and political struggles. Furthermore, while scholars have generally presented Black resistance to anti-immigrant policies as the result of either abstract solidarity with other immigrants of color or consternation over civil liberties, I find that these concerns often took a far more personal tone—arguing that deportations targeted individuals who were intertwined with Black Americans, either politically or intimately. Finally, I argue, too much of the scholarship has treated the categories of "immigrant" and "Black" as mutually exclusive, while in early-twentieth-century Black writings on deportation, the categories of "immigrant" and "Black" were often one and the same.

In the years following World War I, Black observers encountered an expanded immigration control regime, featuring both major legislative changes and a growing enforcement infrastructure.¹⁹ Much of the new federal immigration legislation that had developed in the aftermath of

¹⁶Llana Barber, "Anti-Black Racism and the Nativist State," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 42, no. 4 (Summer 2023): 24. Similarly, while deportation historians such as Torrie Hester and Deirdre Moloney briefly mention the targeting of Black Caribbean immigrants, they discuss the same few political figures. See Deirdre Moloney, *National Insecurities: Immigrants and U.S. Deportation Policy since 1882* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012); and Torrie Hester, *Deportation: The Origins of U.S. Policy* (Philadelphia, 2017). An important exception is Julio Capo Jr.'s study of the sexual policing of early-twentieth-century Black Bahamian immigrants. Julio Capo Jr., *Welcome to Fairyland: Queer Miami before 1940* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017). There has, however, been somewhat more attention to nonpolitical Black deportees in the mid-twentieth century. See Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton, NJ, 2011).

¹⁷Michael Hanchard, *The Spectre of Race: How Discrimination Haunts Western Democracy* (Princeton, NJ, 2018), 160.

¹⁸Charisse Burden-Stelly, "Constructing Deportable Subjectivity: Antiforeignness, Antiradicalism, and Antiblackness during the McCarthyist Structure of Feeling," *Souls* 19, no. 3 (2017): 342–343.

¹⁹For general scholarship on deportation in the early twentieth century, see Moloney, *National Insecurities*; Hester, *Deportation*; Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ, 2004); Ethan Blue, *The Deportation Express: A History of America through Forced Removal* (Berkeley, CA, 2021); Adam Goodman, *The Deportation Machine: America's Long History of Expelling Immigrants* (Princeton, NJ, 2020); and Daniel Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

the Civil War was explicitly race-based, beginning with the Page Act in 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Bolstered by rising waves of nativism, pseudoscientific racial research, morality scares, and antiradicalism, a series of restrictive laws followed, culminating in the quota regime of the early 1920s. Just as new restrictions excluded large numbers of new immigrants, expanded deportation efforts led to unprecedented numbers of post-entry removals.²⁰ As Mae Ngai argues, the 1920s represented “an extraordinary time when immigration policy realigned and hardened racial categories in the law.”²¹

Black journalists and commentators of the interwar period watched these developments closely and responded with a complex and multifaceted discourse on immigrant expulsion. That discourse represented a continuation of decades of African American debate on immigration.²² In the post-Civil War period, leaders such as Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington were split on whether supporting nativist movements was an effective way to protect the economic position of Black workers.²³ Most Black leaders, scholars have concluded, welcomed the immigration restrictions of the early twentieth century (if at times grudgingly), hoping they would bring economic opportunities for African Americans.²⁴ But as David Hellwig explains, as “fellow sufferers of intolerance,” even supporters of restriction generally declined to support race-based legislation.²⁵ And many were alarmed by the impact of the 1924 Immigration Act, which slashed Black migration from the Caribbean.²⁶

Coverage of deportation in the Black press evolved significantly over the course of the interwar period. Hellwig asserts that “black interest in immigration declined by the late 1920s.”²⁷ However, while this may have been true for immigration restriction, coverage of post-entry deportations, I demonstrate, actually *increased* and grew ever more complicated by the 1930s. After the onset of the Great Depression, some writers did, as might be expected, pivot toward more overt support for deportation. Some Black periodicals, most prominently the *Chicago Defender* (which scholars have noted was perhaps the most protectionist African American newspaper on immigration) published regularly on the alleged threat posed by foreign-born laborers.²⁸ For example, in a 1932 weekly reader write-in feature, the *Defender*

²⁰Over the course of the 1920s, for instance, the annual number of deportees rose from 2,762 in 1920 to 16,631 by 1930. *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration to the Secretary of Labor* (Washington, DC, 1930).

²¹Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 7.

²²On the mid-nineteenth-century dimensions of these debates, see Jay Rubin, “Black Nativism: The European Immigrant in Negro Thought, 1830–1960,” *Phylon* 39, no. 3 (1978): 193–202.

²³Shankman, *Ambivalent Friends*; Carter, *American While Black*, 52–3; Robert Malloy, “‘Cast Down Your Bucket Where You Are’: Black Americans on Immigration,” Center for Immigration Studies, 1996, <https://cis.org/Report/Cast-Down-Your-Bucket-Where-You-Are-Black-Americans-Immigration>. Frederick Douglass, for instance, critiqued nativist groups and the Chinese Exclusion Act, while Booker T. Washington argued for a more protectionist approach to immigration. However, scholars have noted, even Washington rarely spoke directly against immigrants and, on occasion, spoke out against Chinese exclusion. David J. Hellwig, “Building a Black Nation: The Role of Immigrants in the Thought and Rhetoric of Booker T. Washington,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1978): 529–50; Carter, *American While Black*, 39–40.

²⁴Hellwig, “Black Leaders and United States Immigration Policy,” 121; Diamond, “African-American Attitudes,” 455. W. E. B. Du Bois, they note, remained one of the only major African American commentators to consistently oppose restriction, arguing that immigration restriction required alignment with white supremacist organizations.

²⁵Hellwig, “The Afro-American and the Immigrant,” 14–5.

²⁶While the act did not overtly target Black migrants, by subsuming the British West Indies under the British quota, it led to a massive reduction in Black migration. See Lara Putnam, “Unspoken Exclusions: Race, Nation, and Empire in the Immigration Restrictions of the 1920s in North America and the Greater Caribbean,” in *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History*, ed. Leon Fink (New York, 2011), 267–94.

²⁷Hellwig, “Black Leaders and United States Immigration Policy,” 111.

²⁸Hellwig, “The Afro-American and the Immigrant.” Shankman states that the *Defender* was an outlier in supporting Japanese exclusion not just due to economic competition, but because of perceived inability to assimilate. Shankman, “‘Asiatic Ogre’ or ‘Desirable Citizen’? The Image of Japanese Americans in the Afro-American Press, 1867–1933,” *Pacific Historical Review* 46, no. 4 (Nov. 1977): 567–87. In contrast, I find that the *Afro-American*,

queried "... should the United States deport all foreigners not qualified as citizens who are now employed in America, or who are subjects of charity?" The answers printed the following week were uniformly affirmative, many expressing hostility toward America's allegedly lenient immigration policy. "The United States has been fooled by foreign interests into believing that it is the great melting pot ...," wrote Walter Felton of North Carolina, "but we will dish out our jobs to foreigners while good Americans go to the breadlines...." Earle Motley of St. Louis put his response more bluntly: "Give America back to Americans.... Deport as many as you can find."²⁹

But while some articles and letters staunchly supported deportation during the Depression, those stories represented only one strain of thought about immigrant removal, and they were significantly outnumbered by contrasting coverage. Throughout the interwar period, as I explore in the pages that follow, Black newspapers published an array of stories that critiqued the state's use of deportation for racially oppressive agendas. These critiques, I argue, represented more than expressions of solidarity with other populations. Instead, they reflected a belief that deportation was being used to carry out specifically anti-Black agendas.

Black Deportees in the Black Press

Across the Black press, there was a clear focus on Black immigrants, who often received less attention in mainstream white periodicals.³⁰ Approximately three-quarters of the articles on individual deportation cases focused on Black immigrants, as did many of the articles on wider deportation politics. While inflated by the dozens of articles about Marcus Garvey's removal—a momentous event that garnered extensive if less nuanced attention in the white press, these numbers demonstrate African Americans' keen awareness of the heavy impact of immigration control on Black migrants. While Black immigrants comprised only a small percentage of early-twentieth-century deportees, they were expelled at disproportionately high rates. In 1920, for instance, Black immigrants composed only 0.53 percent of the total foreign-born population of the United States, but represented 1.5 percent of all deportations that year. By 1930, Black immigrants made up 0.69 percent of the foreign-born population, but 1.1 percent of deportations that year.³¹ An examination of the Black press, therefore, both highlights the need for further research on Black deportations and provides scholars with an important source base for doing so.

Even newspapers that sometimes urged higher deportations often differentiated between Black immigrants and others. Throughout the period, despite ongoing and well-documented tensions between African Americans and Black immigrants, many authors argued the need

Journal and Guide, *Courier*, and *Amsterdam News* all featured less negative coverage of immigration during the early twentieth century.

²⁹"What Do You Say About It?" *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 22, 1932, 15. The prevalence of these sentiments in the *Defender* likely reflects both the concrete experiences of African American workers who were regularly pushed aside in hiring for new immigrants and the *Defender's* editorial stance toward immigrants. As Mark Solomon argues, *Defender* publisher Robert Abbott actively promoted the belief that immigrant populations "constituted a serious source of job competition for blacks." Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917–1936* (Jackson, MS, 1998), 141.

³⁰Many of the cases referenced throughout this article do not appear in searches of major white newspapers from corresponding cities, such as the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Baltimore Sun*, and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. While some of the cases of well-known Black deportees do appear, the coverage is often brief and, in contrast to Black newspapers, does not treat these removals as evidence of racial oppression.

³¹Table 9, Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850–1990, Census Working Paper POP-WP029, February 1999, *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration* (Washington, DC, 1920, 1930).

to stand with Black immigrants against deportation.³² Deportation coverage, therefore, adds an important dimension to our understanding of intraracial relations by demonstrating the range of responses to the targeting of Black immigrants.³³ One representative 1935 editorial in the *Pittsburgh Courier* insisted that the “most ridiculous of all is the group which is pointing a finger of accusation at the West Indian.” Caribbean immigrants, the author continued, could not be blamed for the lack of voting rights in the South, housing conditions in Harlem, or any number of social ills. Indeed, he queried, what real solutions would be created, even if “we deport all the West Indians in the world to the Land of Kingdom Come?”³⁴ As the stories throughout this article reveal, Black commentators most often critiqued the removal of Black immigrants, although they did, at times, evaluate their deportations as advantageous for the race.

While much of the coverage centered on high-profile individuals, everyday Black immigrants also found their way into the pages of the Black press when they were apprehended by deportation authorities. Many stories tracked the experiences of stowaways (primarily West Indian men) who were apprehended after illegal entry. Others focused on individuals charged with crimes ranging from burglary to vagrancy. Still others centered on migrants afflicted with physical or mental disabilities or diseases, such as James Waite, who was apprehended for deportation from the Hudson State Asylum for the Insane or Boynouh Wher of Liberia, who was referred for deportation by the Union County Anti-Tuberculosis League in New Jersey.³⁵

The targeting of Black immigrant university students also featured in a number of stories. In 1932, for instance, the *Afro-American* reported on the potentially devastating impact of a new deportation ruling on foreign-born students at Howard University, as well as on a number of “colored” students at Columbia. While there is no indication the ruling led to actual deportations at these institutions, the attention in the Black press shows a protective concern for non-native Black students.³⁶ In a more concrete 1930 case, the *Courier* reported on the forthcoming deportation of James Karoh of Nigeria, who had entered unlawfully before enrolling at Tuskegee. The author noted that he had been detained at Ellis Island “still wearing his Tuskegee uniform,” and declared Karoh was merely “praying that this government” would allow him to finish his studies. In other cases, however, students who violated the boundaries of respectable behavior received less sympathetic coverage. In 1928, for example, multiple papers followed the deportation of Milton Ebimber, a medical student at Columbia University, to the Dominican Republic after he had been charged with bigamy.³⁷

³²As Violet Showers Johnson points out, scholarship on Black immigrants has been “skewed by its excessive concentration on the rivalry between West Indians and African Americans.” Showers Johnson, *The Other Black Bostonians*, 3. On African American commentary about Black immigrants during the period, see David Hellwig, “Black Meets Black: Afro-American Reactions to West Indians in the 1920s,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 72 (1978): 206–25; Alvin Bernard Tillery Jr. and Michell Chresfield, “Model Blacks or ‘Ras the Exhorter’: A Quantitative Content Analysis of Black Newspapers’ Coverage of the First Wave of Afro-Caribbean Immigrants to the United States,” *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 5 (2012): 545–70.

³³The lack of broader attention to deportation as a facet of these relations may derive from the overwhelming focus on Garvey and the UNIA, which frequently generated more hostile responses from African Americans. As Winston James notes, one paper described UNIA members as “undesirable aliens” who should be “deported to islands whence they came, the same as any other group of anarchists.” Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 1998), 4.

³⁴Alfred Green, “Let’s Stop Kidding Ourselves About West Indians, Urges,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 25, 1935, 14.

³⁵“Upholsterer Flees Mental Infirmary,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Dec. 16, 1931, 6; “Liberian Victim of ‘T.B.’ Exiles Self to Escape Deporting,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Aug. 11, 1928, 11.

³⁶“Alien Student Ruling Affects 150 at Howard,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Oct. 22, 1932, 13. The author notes that the ruling would impact Howard students from the British West Indies, South America, Central America, and elsewhere (and erroneously includes the six students attending from Puerto Rico, who would not in fact have been deportable under immigration law).

³⁷“2 Accuse Medical Student of Bigamy,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 4, 1928, 11; “Dr. M.T. Ebimber Jailed for Bigamy,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Jan. 9, 1929, 1.

The Black press also reported on the racism of immigration officials, including the discrimination faced by individual Black immigrants. Phyllis Edmeade of the West Indies, one paper reported in 1928, had the rare luck of eluding deportation after a judge determined that stealing ninety-two cents did not, as originally charged, constitute a crime of “moral turpitude.” But, the author explained, her attorney filed a complaint alleging that, while detained awaiting deportation, “Miss Edmeade was called vile names and mistreated.”³⁸ In 1936, the *New York Amsterdam News* published a letter to the editor providing an even more direct indictment of racist immigration enforcement. The author, who identified as “Just An Alien,” wrote to the paper, “We, the colored aliens at Ellis Island, wish” to bring to your attention “the conditions practiced here.” One of the primary challenges, the missive explained, was that while other immigrant groups had national representatives to provide advice, translation, and supplies, no one provided such care for Black detainees (including the white representative charged with caring for “English-speaking people,” who reportedly ignored Black immigrants altogether). Furthermore, the letter claimed, Black deportees were frequently kept in the dark about their legal cases and were forced into segregated seating in the detention center’s dining facilities.³⁹

And in a dramatic 1930 case, the *Defender*, highlighting the precarity of Black citizenship, charged that discrimination had led to the deportation of a native-born U.S. citizen, John Thomas Whitfield. Whitfield, a Texas native, had been deported to Brazil after “immigration authorities refused to consider the evidence” of his citizenship. Only the intervention of the NAACP and the Brazilian government, the article explained, eventually forced U.S. officials to permit Whitfield’s return.⁴⁰ In other cases, the racial targeting was depicted as more personal, with racist white individuals using the immigration state to enact their own agendas. The *Defender*, for instance, wrote about the attempted deportation of Elma Street as an effort to punish the young woman for “passing.” Street had met the white “scion of a wealthy family” in Jamaica and followed him to New York after he promised to marry her. Upon her arrival, after discovering that “notwithstanding her fair skin she was not white,” the *Defender* claimed, he not only refused to marry her (despite having “lived as man and wife”), but actually attempted (unsuccessfully) to have her deported.⁴¹

Beyond individual cases, the targeting of Black immigrants was portrayed as broad and indiscriminate. African American writers, especially in New York, where the highest proportion of Black immigrants resided, often closely intertwined with the large African American population in Harlem, regularly reminded their readers that Black immigrants were uniquely vulnerable to deportation. A 1934 article in the *New York Amsterdam News* responded to calls from local politicians for the deportation of noncitizens in Harlem by charging that “the resolution was directed at Negro foreign-born residents.” After quoting an organizer who declared that “when they get ready to lynch a Negro they never ask where he was born,” the article’s author noted: “We may add that white people (who run this country and most others) are seldom interested in a Negro’s national origin unless they are able to use the information as a wedge to pry black men apart.”⁴² In 1939, the *Amsterdam News* again warned that “the mills of the legislative gods are grinding exceedingly well,” and that the “thousands of Negro aliens in Harlem and other communities” were “on the spot more than any other group of aliens.”⁴³

By the early 1930s, Black papers also focused on the large and growing population of Black immigrants in the Southeast, covering efforts to expel Bahamian laborers who had been recruited for farm work. The *Afro-American* reported in 1932 that there was a crusade being

³⁸“Girl Not Deported Who Took 92 Cents,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 23, 1928, 2.

³⁹“Bias at Ellis Island,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 9, 1936, 12.

⁴⁰“Had Hard Time Proving He’s an American Citizen,” *Chicago Defender*, Apr. 5, 1930, 2.

⁴¹“Travelers’ Aid Saves Girl from Deportation,” *Chicago Defender*, July 16, 1921, 9.

⁴²“Intra-Racial Unity,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Mar. 24, 1934, 8.

⁴³“Aliens on the Spot,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug. 5, 1939, 6. Many of these articles urged Black immigrants to take out citizenship papers as a safeguard against such actions.

waged to “rid the [E]verglades of unnaturalized Bahaman Islanders” and that “the first move will be ... to make a roundup of all Negroes who have entered the country illegally from the British possessions and deport them.”⁴⁴ By 1935, articles stressed that these efforts were extending beyond immigrants and were in fact serving, as one headline put it, to “Terrorize Race Folk in Florida.” “Wholesale arrests of residents are a daily occurrence,” the paper explained, and many Black Miamians had been “grilled mercilessly.”⁴⁵ Similarly, the *Atlanta Daily World* accused local authorities of using trumped-up claims to justify mass raids and of unnecessarily harassing “thousands of thrifty law abiding people ... who have lived here all of their lives and who have helped to develop this country.”⁴⁶

Black Celebrity Deportations

Within coverage on Black deportees, Black newspapers were especially attentive to well-known cultural icons, including athletes, musicians, and actors. Carrie Teresa argues that “by the mid-1920s, discussions of celebrity culture,” in the Black press “shifted from discussions about race representation to more sensational coverage of celebrities’ personal lives.”⁴⁷ But while Black celebrity deportation stories undoubtedly reached for the sensational, they retained a clear focus on racial politics, as Black commentators often contended that these celebrities were facing removal precisely because they threatened the racial order. At the same time, however, Black observers did not uniformly defend famous individuals. Instead, in cases ranging from misbehaving athletes to cult leaders, Black authors frequently upheld a politics of respectability by supporting the expulsion of individuals who they felt had threatened the image of the race.

Of course, no Black deportee neared the fame of Marcus Garvey, the contentious head of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), whose removal encapsulated these diverging forms of coverage. The UNIA, which promoted a militant and controversial form of Pan-African, diasporic politics, peaked from the 1910s through the early 1920s, when it attracted tens of thousands of members across multiple continents. Garvey, the Jamaican-born leader of this massively popular Black nationalist movement, was indicted in 1922 and deported in 1927.⁴⁸ As Judith Stein explains, his prosecutors hoped to eliminate the “leading black alien agitator in the United States” and settled on mail fraud “after a long search for a deportable offense.”⁴⁹ Charisse Burden-Stelly further insists that while Garvey was not a communist, we must understand his removal as intertwined with the anticommunist crusade. “The disciplining of Marcus Garvey,” she explains, “conveys how the West Indian’s race consciousness, mass appeal, internationalism, and demand for Black economic self-determination sutured the Black Scare and Red Scare and positioned them as vectors of communism, *irrespective of ideology*.”⁵⁰

⁴⁴“Florida Wants to Deport Bahamans,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Aug. 20, 1932, 22.

⁴⁵“Terrorize Race Folk in Florida,” *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 14, 1935, 2.

⁴⁶“Dade County Has Very Few Aliens, Reports Untrue,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Aug. 29, 1935, 1.

⁴⁷Carrie Teresa, *Looking at the Stars: Black Celebrity Journalism in Jim Crow America* (Lincoln, NE, 2019), 2.

⁴⁸On Garvey’s deportation, see Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1991); E. David Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison, WI, 1960); James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*; Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*; Justin Hansford, “Jailing a Rainbow: The Marcus Garvey Case,” *Georgetown Journal of Modern Critical Race Perspectives* 2 (2009), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1321527; Adam Ewing, *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Black Politics* (Princeton, NJ, 2016); Shelley Streeby, *Radical Sensations: World Movements, Violence, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC, 2013); Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Dover, MA, 1986).

⁴⁹Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 186.

⁵⁰Charisse Burden-Stelly, *Black Scare/Red Scare: Theorizing Capitalist Racism in the United States* (Chicago, 2023), 61.

As scholars have argued, Garvey's case both revealed and provoked deep fissures among Black activists in the United States. An organized "Garvey Must Go" campaign emerged by the early 1920s, led by a number of native and foreign-born Black leaders.⁵¹ While there had been pre-existing agitation against Garvey, after his widely publicized meeting with a leader of the Ku Klux Klan, public sentiment turned against him more widely.⁵² Indeed, Winston James argues that the "Garvey Must Go" campaign might be considered the "nadir" in the "strained relationship between Afro-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans."⁵³ Irma Watkins-Owens points out that Robert Abbott was particularly antagonistic, and suggests that "such attacks were often motivated by rivalries ... the [UNIA's newspaper] *Negro World* was widely read in Chicago, posing direct competition to the editor's *Chicago Defender*."⁵⁴ Throughout the early and mid-1920s, many of the most widely circulated organs of the Black press featured support for Garvey's deportation.⁵⁵ "We believe the peace and safety of this country demand that Garvey serve his sentence as an alien and when his time is up, he should be deported," wrote William Byrd in the *Cleveland Gazette*.⁵⁶ Another author declared "American citizens ... need the advice of no alien Britisher.... Public sentiment backs the Federal courts which are showing Mr. Garvey to the door."⁵⁷ Some supported removal more reluctantly, like Floyd Calvin, who explained in the *Courier* that while Garvey had "instilled pride on a national scale," his deportation was the "only sensible thing" due to the controversy he had generated.⁵⁸

This should not suggest, however, that contributors to the Black press were universally supportive of Garvey's deportation. For many, Garvey's deportation showed that the immigration bureaucracy could and would be used to suppress Black activism. As one 1928 article in the *Wichita Negro Star* argued (while still characterizing his political opinions as "regrettable"), that Garvey's treatment contrasted starkly to that of other politically active immigrants. "It seems that as a rule," the author wrote, "the Negro is the first always to get the benefit of severe and testing measures."⁵⁹ And by the time Garvey was released for deportation in 1927, much of the antagonism in the Black press had mellowed, and some seemed to have reconsidered the political implications of his deportation. As one commentator observed, "much of the vehemence against him by Negroes had subsided.... In marked contrast with the days when Garvey was in his heyday, there is very little or no, sentiment among Negroes now supporting his deportation."⁶⁰

⁵¹On the "Garvey Must Go" movement, see Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*; Martin, *Race First*; Cronon, *Black Moses*; Ronald Dorris, "'Garvey Must Go': Alignment of Public and Private Opposition," *Griot* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 62–71; Ewing, *The Age of Garvey*; and Nicholas Patsides, "Allies, Constituents or Myopic Investors: Marcus Garvey and Black Americans," *Journal of American Studies* 41, no. 2 (Aug. 2007): 279–305.

⁵²As Colin Grant explains, to many Black American leaders, "Garvey had sinned, not just in convening with the masked devils of the Ku Klux Klan, but in the implication of surrender, that black Americans should forfeit their rights to life and liberty in America." Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (New York, 2008), 336.

⁵³James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 4.

⁵⁴Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*, 116.

⁵⁵However, Carroll points out that reader sentiment often diverged from that of editors, and argues "Abbott's unyielding opposition to Garvey's movement" drew readers to rival local papers with more favorable coverage, like the *Broad Ax* and *Whip*. Furthermore, this dynamic forced papers like the *Amsterdam News* to adopt a more "measured editorial position" on Garvey. Carroll, *Race News*, 52. Juliet Walker points out that during the interwar era, the *Whip* (which focused heavily on promoting Black business and economic development) may have matched the *Defender's* local circulation in Chicago, although it lacked its national reach. Juliet Walker, "The Promised Land: The *Chicago Defender* and the Black Press in Illinois, 1862–1970," in *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865–1985*, ed. Henry Lewis Suggs (Westport, CT, 1996), 31.

⁵⁶William A. Byrd, "Coolidge's Segregation Must Go!," *Cleveland Gazette*, May 17, 1924, 1.

⁵⁷"Marcus Garvey—This Way Out," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Feb. 7, 1925, 9.

⁵⁸Floyd J. Calvin, "The Digest," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug. 8, 1925, 16.

⁵⁹"Watch Tower Notes," *Negro Star*, Jan. 6, 1928, 1.

⁶⁰"U.N.I.A. Head on Way Home," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Dec. 3, 1927, 1.

In a study of Black responses to deportation, the significance of the Garvey case can hardly be ignored. But, I insist, it is critical to consider his removal not merely as an exceptional case, but also within the wider context of Black deportations. As D'Weston Haywood reminds us, Garvey's deportation was part of a broader repressive agenda, explaining that the Bureau of Investigation "deemed many black leaders in Harlem a threat to national interests."⁶¹ Despite the prominent role of Black Caribbean radicals during the period and their accompanying targeting by the state, however, coverage of deportations on the basis of political ideology most often (except in the case of Garvey) focused on non-Black immigrants.⁶² Although the Black press frequently covered the political activities of foreign-born Black radicals, it only occasionally presented them as the targets of deportation efforts. One exception was the case of Charles Romney, a Harlem orator who was deported to Trinidad in 1938 and was declared by some Black journalists to be the target of a frame-up for his political activism. One paper claimed Romney was deported because of his "reputation for militancy," while another published Romney's claim that "he was sent out of the country because of his strength as a mob raiser."⁶³ The *Amsterdam News* printed even more damning assertions, explaining that Romney had charged Ellis Island authorities with "making false passports to deport West Indians."⁶⁴

Well-known athletes, in contrast, figured regularly in coverage of Black deportees. One of the biggest celebrity deportation cases of the interwar period was the multiyear saga of Eligio Sardinias, or "Kid Chocolate," the Black Cuban boxer and world featherweight champion. As Enver Casimir explains, "the African American press paid close attention to Chocolate, claiming him as one of their own."⁶⁵ Dozens of articles in Black newspapers described Kid Chocolate's initial removal (which some described as an extradition) from the United States in 1931 after Cuban authorities demanded his return to face charges of abducting his under-aged "sweetheart."⁶⁶ Kid Chocolate resolved the issue by marrying the young woman, but again found himself in the clutches of immigration officials a year later. After he was deported for entering the United States for a fight without the required permits, many Black commentators insisted this was a "plot" designed to keep him from trouncing his white opponent.⁶⁷ "The Buy

⁶¹Haywood, *Let Us Make Men*, 62. Or, as Winston James insists, "It is no exaggeration to say that the FBI files on 'Negro Activities' in the United States during the 1920s are also very much intelligence reports on Caribbean radical activity in America." James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 3.

⁶²Scholars have long argued that Black Caribbean immigrants were particularly active in radical political organizing in the interwar period. James, for instance, argues that "one of the most intriguing ... facts about American radicalism in the twentieth century has been the prominence and often pre-eminence of Caribbean migrants." James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 1. On Caribbean radicalism during the interwar period, see also Joyce Moore Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Urbana, IL, 2005); Jeffrey Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Struggle for Equality, 1918–1927* (New York, 2020); Tammy Brown, *City of Islands: Caribbean Intellectuals in New York* (Jackson, MS, 2015); and Irma Watkins-Owen, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900–1930* (Bloomington, IN, 1996). Recent scholars such as Mikah Makalani have sometimes pushed back against the "notion of Caribbean prominence or preeminence in ... Black radical discourses." Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011), 16.

⁶³"Stay Is Granted Charles Romney: United States Delays Deportation," *New York Amsterdam News*, Mar. 7, 1936, 2; "Deport Harlem Labor Agitator to West Indies," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Feb. 24, 1938, 2.

⁶⁴"Harlem Agitator Deported," *New York Amsterdam News*, Feb. 19, 1938, 1.

⁶⁵Enver Casimir, "A Variable of Unwavering Significance: Latinos, African Americans, and the Racial Identity of Kid Chocolate," in *More Than Just Peloteros: Sport and U.S. Latino Communities*, ed. Jorge Iber (Lubbock, TX, 2014), 45. In contrast to the extensive coverage in the Black press, mainstream white newspapers such as the *New York Times* covered his removal only briefly and without reference to any perceived racial politics at play. "Chocolate Deported for Lack of Permit," *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1933, 23.

⁶⁶"Kid Chocolate Must Go Back, U.S. Rules," *New York Amsterdam News*, Dec. 9, 1931, 1; "Kid Chocolate in Toils of Law," *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 12, 1931, 20; "Randy Says," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Dec. 17, 1931, 11. The *Amsterdam News* noted that while Sardinias had offered to return voluntarily to marry the woman, officials ruled that he must remain in detention until he could "return in the care of two Cuban policemen."

⁶⁷"Hint Kid Chocolate Plot," *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 28, 1933, 8.

A Belt-A Wife-But No Permit



Boasting a championship medal, which was presented by James J. Johnson, of Madison Square Garden, as Johnny Dundee, left, and Billy Petrolle, right look on, and a wife, the former Rosaria Moro, insert, Kid Chocolate failed to get a labor permit to return to the states and was deported from Florida, last week.

Figure 1. A Belt, A Wife, But No Permit.

Source: *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, January 28, 1933, A13.

American movement spread to the cauliflower industry, combined with something of the stench of race prejudice,” wrote one author, who claimed immigration officials “were acting under specific instructions from Washington.”⁶⁸ The *Journal and Guide* reported that the NAACP had offered its support, since he had been barred “based on color.”⁶⁹ Although Chocolate was readmitted a few months later for his delayed bout, the Black press critiqued his deportation as just another tactic to keep a Black athlete from being able to demonstrate his prowess (Figure 1).⁷⁰

Kid Chocolate’s multiple removals made the greatest splash, but numerous other Black immigrant athletes became subjects of deportation stories, including boxer Kenneth Herbert (aka Jackie Moore), champion bantamweight boxer “Panama Al” Brown, and professional golfer Louis Rafael Corbin.⁷¹ Performers of various sorts also appeared in Black newspapers when they faced deportation. Evelyn Dove, for instance, a Black British singer, made the news when she was deported in August 1936.⁷² One of the more unusual (and flippantly

⁶⁸“Big Purses May Be a Memory to Chocolate,” *Chicago Defender*, Feb. 11, 1933, 9. This quip referenced the nickname for a common boxing injury—“cauliflower ear.”

⁶⁹“NAACP Investigates Deportation of Kid Chocolate,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, Jan. 28, 1933, 12. Walter White himself was said to have cabled the boxer and written to officials on his behalf.

⁷⁰In an interesting counterpoint, the deportation of Argentinian fighter Luis Angel Firpo was said to be motivated by the same desire. The *Cleveland Gazette* declared that the deportation order against Firpo (who was to face African American Harry Wills) showed “to what extent prejudiced Americans will go ... to prevent a black man from whipping a white one.” “The Harry Wills-Luis Firpo Echo,” *Cleveland Gazette*, Oct. 25, 1924, 2.

⁷¹“Gets K.O. and Gets Canned,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, Jan. 3, 1931, 6; “Faces Deportation,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Nov. 18, 1939, 12; “Corbin, Louis’ Golf Tutor, Fights Deportation,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Nov. 25, 1939, 18.

⁷²Allan McMillan, “Hi Hattin’ in Harlem,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 8, 1936, 19.

covered) cases was that of the so-called “Mardi Gras King” or “Zulu King” of New Orleans, Panamanian performer Allen Leon, who, the *Courier* declared, “finds himself about to go back in person to his jungle.”⁷³ In more somber coverage, the *Amsterdam News* reported that actor Frank Watson had been detained at Ellis Island for fourteen weeks before being deported to British West Africa. Notably, the article highlighted the fact that while Watson was formally deported for illegal entry, he was a member of the International Labor Defense and Project Workers’ Union in New York.⁷⁴

Perhaps even more sensational were the cases of two alleged “African Prince[s]” targeted for deportation, whose cases were written about in dramatic (and often exoticizing) language in the Black press. The first, Farger Comara, reported to be the “son of the Chief of the Timni Tribe in Sierra Leone,” had been attending the Detroit Institute of Technology.⁷⁵ After his arrest for illegal entry in 1928, the *Courier* reported, he was held as a “non-paying guest of Uncle Sam at the Gloucester Detention House” near Philadelphia.⁷⁶ Notably, Comara claimed that “difficulties between his father’s tribesmen and American missionaries” in Sierra Leone might “be behind sending him home.”⁷⁷ Several years later, John Williams, “aka Jimmy Green, stowaway, traveler, deportee, and self-styled prince of a central African tribe,” was likewise deported on the basis of illegal entry.⁷⁸ “Green claimed to be the son of the chief of the Udinga Tribe of Central Africa” and “while confined in the local jail, he ... very often could be heard telling of the customs and traditions of his tribe,” reported the *Journal and Guide*. The article also reflected awareness of the discriminatory immigration restrictions in place, noting Green might find it impossible to re-enter, due to the extremely low quotas for African nations.⁷⁹

While many high-profile Black deportations were treated as evidence of governmental racism, occasionally the narrative took a different form, and deportation was depicted as a beneficial opportunity to eliminate an infamous Black immigrant who was proving to be a “discredit” to the race. Some Black commentators exhibited a form of respectability politics by supporting the removal of individuals who had defied the boundaries of normative behavior. Such stories often reveled in the sensational, fitting with Kim Gallon’s claims that sexual coverage regularly coexisted with “news that exemplified the uplift and racial advocacy mission of the black press.”⁸⁰ Perhaps surprisingly, despite Cuban officials’ accusations of impropriety, Kid Chocolate’s actions were not generally criticized in the Black press. Instead, authors noted he had displayed “excellent” behavior while in the United States and dismissed his troubles as merely “a bad year in love.”⁸¹

⁷³“Mardi Gras King May Be Deported,” *Chicago Defender*, Apr. 15, 1933, 13; “Deportation to Take Zulu King Back to Real Jungle,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Apr. 15, 1933, A1.

⁷⁴“African WPA Actor Quits Ellis Island,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug. 8, 1936, 2.

⁷⁵“Deported African Prince Wants to Go Home in Style,” *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 13, 1928.

⁷⁶“Indignities Piled on African ‘Prince,’” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Dec. 1, 1928, 9.

⁷⁷“Young African Student Illegally Enters U.S.,” *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 6, 1928, 4.

⁷⁸“Dr. Lyon’s Investigation Sends Stowaway ‘Prince’ Back to Africa,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 8, 1933, 13.

⁷⁹“Prince of African Tribe Finds Fates Unkind to Him; Loss of Arm Leads to Deportation,” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, July 1, 1933, 2. As Mae Ngai points out, by eliminating African Americans from the equation determining national origins allotments, the United States kept the number of visas for Black Africans to a mere two hundred. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 26–7.

⁸⁰Kim Gallon, *Pleasure in the News: African American Readership and Sexuality in the Black Press* (Urbana, IL, 2020), 5. On respectability politics, including in the Black press, see Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001); Haywood, *Let Us Make Men*; Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996); and Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004).

⁸¹Randy Dixon, “Chocolate Marries the Girl,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Dec. 24, 1931, 11; “Kid Chocolate Loses in Love,” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Jan. 2, 1932.

In marked contrast however, Black journalists writing about the planned deportation of Louis Fall (a Senegalese boxer known as “Battling Siki”) often supported his removal.⁸² After reports in 1924 that Siki was facing deportation for alleged bigamy, numerous articles in the Black press openly advocated for his deportation (despite the fact that the charges were never sustained in court).⁸³ As Peter Benson describes it, the federal immigration commissioner was “back[ing] up the boxing board” by threatening deportation, although Siki was ultimately allowed to leave voluntarily.⁸⁴ “Universal opinion seems to be favorable toward the deportation of Battling Siki,” the *Journal and Guide* explained, as “his actions have simply hurt other boxers of the race and cast a reflection not pleasant to contemplate.”⁸⁵ However, as Theresa Runstedtler notes, Siki had also, at earlier moments, “sparked public conversations about the transnational reach of the color line,” including when he was banned from Britain in 1923.⁸⁶ But even the hostile coverage of Siki made it clear that his case was an outlier. “Here is one instance,” the *Courier* declared, “in which no charge has been made of race persecution or race prejudice. Some of the harshest in their criticism of the Senegalese were race people.”⁸⁷

Coverage of notorious figures took on other surprising dimensions. In two different highly covered 1930s cases, Black men who had been posing as immigrants were exposed as native-born African Americans after being investigated for deportation. Sufi Abdul Hamid, a political organizer described by one paper as “Harlem’s chief agitator,” was held at Ellis Island in 1935.⁸⁸ Hamid, the Black press reported, had claimed to be a native of (depending on which paper you followed) Turkey, Egypt, or Sudan. But his deportation proceedings fell apart after it was revealed that he was in fact (again depending on the paper) a native of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, or Georgia. A strange tale to be sure, but not an isolated one. In 1939, Herfe Tashara, an alleged cult leader in Los Angeles, was investigated by immigration authorities after a Mann Act indictment for bringing three female followers into California.⁸⁹ Tashara, who had variously claimed to be from Egypt or Abyssinia, was revealed to be William Jackson, originally of Georgia.⁹⁰ Although he was additionally charged with “conspiracy to defraud the government of free passage to Abyssinia” by lying in order to be deported, he was acquitted on that count.⁹¹ These cases bring to mind the scholarship of Robert A. Hill and Brandon Byrd on the “figure of the imposter” whose foreign performance (generally of

⁸²On Siki’s career and press representation, see Peter Benson, *Battling Siki: A Tale of Ring Fixes, Race, and Murder in the 1920s* (Fayetteville, AR, 2006); Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* (Berkeley, CA, 2013); Gerald Early, “Battling Siki: The Boxer as Natural Man,” *Massachusetts Review* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 451–72; Timothee Jobert et al., “The Athletic Exception: Black Champions and Colonial Culture (1900–1939),” in *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, ed. Pascal Blanchard et al (Bloomington, IN, 2013), 189–99.

⁸³“Battling Siki May Be Deported,” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Aug. 9, 1924, 4.

⁸⁴Benson, *Battling Siki*, 224.

⁸⁵“Public and Press Favor Battling Siki’s Deportation,” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Aug. 22, 1925, 4.

⁸⁶Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson*, 249–51.

⁸⁷“Deportation of Siki Upheld by New Yorkers,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Sept. 5, 1925, 12.

⁸⁸“Harlem’s ‘Hitler’ Hoodwinks ‘G’ Men in Deportation,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 29, 1935, 3. Hamid, who married the famous Harlem “numbers queen” Stephanie Saint Clair, had been branded the “Black Hitler,” due to accusations of anti-Semitism, according to several articles. “U.S. Agents Arrest, Free Sufi,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 22, 1935, 1. The *Baltimore Afro-American* article claimed that the attempt at his deportation was carried out by “Jewish merchants throughout the section” who had “resorted to every ruse to be rid of him.” On Hamid, see Winston McDowell, “Race and Ethnicity During the Harlem Jobs Campaign, 1932–1935,” *Journal of Negro History* 69, nos. 3–4 (Summer–Autumn, 1984): 134–46; and LaShawn Harris, “Playing the Numbers: Madame Stephanie St. Clair and African American Policy Culture in Harlem,” *Black Women, Gender and Families* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 53–76.

⁸⁹“Cult Leader Is Held on Mann Act Charge,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 14, 1939, 5.

⁹⁰Ibid. See also “‘All-Seeing Prophet’ Is Now Up a Blind Alley,” *Chicago Defender*, July 22, 1939, 3; and “Baby Moses Causes Stir in Courtroom,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Aug. 9, 1939, 1.

⁹¹“Acquitted of One Charge, Prophet Faces Another,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 12, 1939, 4.

Ethiopianness) was part of a particular political positioning.⁹² As with Siki, the Black press expressed little sympathy for Hamid's or Tashara's encounters with the immigration bureaucracy.

Sometimes distasteful political identifications (rather than disgraceful personal behavior) led Black journalists to support the removal of certain Black immigrants. Press coverage of the "astounding saga of Col. Hubert Julian" was even more complex.⁹³ "Colonel" Julian, a Trinidadian-born aviator known as the "Black Eagle of Harlem," featured in two sets of deportation stories—first about his expulsion from Ethiopia in 1930 and then about his rumored deportation from the United States in 1936.⁹⁴ Various authors across the Black press reported that African Americans had in fact instigated the 1936 proceedings against Julian because of the harm caused by his public support for Mussolini. "Hubert Julian," wrote the publisher of the Wichita, Kansas, *Negro Star* in 1936, "... is a menace and should be deported from the U.S. is the contention of certain organizations of Negroes in Harlem who are now circulating a petition to have the State Department take such action."⁹⁵ Numerous other papers reported on efforts to prevent Julian's planned pro-Italian lecture tour by securing his deportation.⁹⁶ "Julian, having renounced his British allegiance in favor of Ethiopian citizenship," another columnist wrote, "may be deported from Ellis Island to Ethiopia... I hope they do send him back. He will make a nice meal for the Emperor's lions—that is, if they like dark meat (Figure 2)."⁹⁷ Despite widespread reports of his upcoming deportation, Julian, the *Afro-American* eventually explained, never actually faced removal proceedings.⁹⁸ But the Black press continued to insist that his voluntary departure was "undoubtedly hastened," as Frank Marshall Davis explained, by having "won for himself the unenviable title of the nation's most hated black man."⁹⁹

Non-Black Immigrants and Deportation as Punishment for Racial Transgression

Alongside stories of Black deportees, the Black press also regularly critiqued deportations of non-Black immigrants as evidence of anti-Black agendas. Deportation officials were often depicted as targeting groups or individuals who allied themselves with African Americans or otherwise flouted the racial boundaries of their adopted country. Black authors most frequently demonstrated this through coverage of non-Black deportees' support for racial justice efforts, but also featured stories of immigrants who were connected to African Americans through

⁹²Robert A. Hill, "King Menelik's Nephew: Prince Thomas Mackarooroo, aka Prince Ludwig Menelek of Abyssinia," *Small Axe* 12, no 2 (June 2008): 16. Brandon Byrd explores how Wizzard Solomon Jeremiah Challoughlczilczise, like Hamid and Tashara, was targeted for deportation by officials who struggled to disentangle his "subversive black reinvention." Brandon Byrd, "The Abyssinian Prince: A History of Imposture and the Interwar United States," *Journal of African American History* 104, no. 3 (Summer 2019): 357–8.

⁹³"An Abyssinian Tragedy," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, Nov. 15, 1930, 10.

⁹⁴Julian, a Garvey supporter, had become widely known as a pioneering Black aviator. Haile Selassie invited him to serve in Ethiopia, before expelling him, reportedly after Julian crashed his favorite plane. See Shane White et al., "The Black Eagle of Harlem," in *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890–1930*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011), 291–314; and Robert G. Weisbord, "Black America and the Italian-Ethiopian Crisis: An Episode in Pan-Negroism," *The Historian* 34, no. 2 (Feb. 1972): 230–41.

⁹⁵H. T. Sims, "World's Flashlight," *Negro Star*, Jan. 3, 1936, 4.

⁹⁶"Harlem Organizations Plot to Deport Julian from America," *Kansas City Plaindealer*, Jan. 3, 1936, 2.

⁹⁷Arthur Davis, "Cross Currents: Jottings," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Feb. 8, 1936, 8.

⁹⁸The article reports that the government denied plans for his removal, stating that he had entered the country legally and was free to exercise his speech "as he liked." "Was Julian Deported? Department of State Didn't Bar Julian," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 11, 1936, 1.

⁹⁹Frank Marshall Davis, "Behind the Headlines: Julian Sails Away," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Jan. 25, 1936, 8. Davis, an executive editor and columnist for the ANP, Carroll notes, was one of many contributors pushed out of "commercial black journalism" due to rising anticommunism in the post-WWII period. Carroll, *Race News*, 7.

Garvey Mission

An exclusive story in last week's AFRO telling of the return of one member of the Marcus Garvey Mission to Ethiopia, and the statement that three others remain for the third year occasioned some surprise.

While most people couldn't see beyond their own firesides, Garvey (now deported) projected missions and colonies in Liberia and Ethiopia.

Today we realize how far ahead of his times he was and is.

Julian Quits U. S.

Finding New York as cold to his pro-Italian utterances and fancy suits as was Addis Ababa, Colonel Hubert Julian took a steamer, last week, back to Paris.

Reported petitions of some New York organizations to the State Department urging his deportation as an alien may have caused the colonel's hasty departure.

Maybe he will also seek a position with the Italian air force. An Ethiopian traitor, Ras Gugsa, is fighting with Il Duce.

Figure 2. Julian Quits U.S.

Source: *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 11, 1936, 6.

interracial romantic relationships. When discussing other immigrants of color, Black commentators also repeatedly noted that they were being targeted in ways that resembled the treatment of African Americans and being punished due to their perceived proximity to Blackness.

Notably, the Black press contained relatively little coverage of deportation efforts during the so-called "First Red Scare" in 1919–1920. However, by the 1930s, Black authors covered anti-radical deportations extensively, perhaps because of the expanded participation of African Americans and Black immigrants in a range of radical organizations and the Communist Party's increased emphasis on racial equality. During the Depression era, radical organizations, and the Communist Party (CP) in particular, devoted considerable effort to attracting Black members and made racial justice an explicit component of their agenda.¹⁰⁰ These efforts drew the (often-divided) attention of a broader array of Black observers, including in stories about deportation. As Robin D. G. Kelley explains, "For most African Americans ... the [Communist] Party was best known for its defense of the Scottsboro Nine and the International Labor Defense's (ILD) unremitting challenge to a racist criminal justice system."¹⁰¹ Fred Carroll argues that the *Afro-American* "offered readers friendly coverage of the Community Party," while the *Amsterdam News* "employed a radicalized editorial staff," and even papers with more conservative editors, such as the *Defender*, regularly featured

¹⁰⁰On African American involvement in and relations with the Communist Party in the interwar period, see Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana, IL, 2005); Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*; Gerald Horne, *Black Revolutionary: William Patterson and the Globalization of the African American Freedom Struggle* (Urbana, IL, 2013); and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015).

¹⁰¹Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, xx–xxi.

leftist voices.¹⁰² Throughout the decade, much of the Black press' coverage of white deportees focused on radical activists, and commentators repeatedly argued that it was their organizing on behalf of African American rights that made these activists vulnerable to removal.¹⁰³

One such case involved Stephen Graham, a CP member who took a job at a manufacturing plant in Virginia with the goal of organizing its mostly Black female workforce. After holding an interracial meeting of roughly 150 workers in 1929, Graham was arrested and charged with "conspiracy to incite the colored population to insurrection against the white population." Though acquitted, he was ordered deported to his native Yugoslavia in 1930.¹⁰⁴ His case attracted coverage in several Black newspapers, which focused on Graham's racial solidarity as the underlying cause of his persecution. The *Afro-American* argued he had been targeted because he addressed a "a race group in the so-called Black Belt," while the *Courier* asserted that he had posed a threat to the "position of privilege" of the local white elite.¹⁰⁵

In 1932, multiple Black newspapers provided conflicting but sympathetic reports on the case of George Stalker, a white Communist organizer who was detained in Omaha for deportation to Scotland. While agreeing he had been targeted in connection to racial advocacy, the *Defender* claimed he had been part of a round up by police at "an open air Scottsboro-Mooney demonstration," while the *Journal and Guide* reported that Stalker had been apprehended for defending a Black worker at an interracial dance held by the League of Struggle for Negro Rights.¹⁰⁶ Related coverage continued throughout the 1930s, with stories of deportation being used to castigate racial solidarity in the cases of an ILD attorney in Tampa, Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) organizers in New Orleans, and others.¹⁰⁷ In some of these cases, Black authors also noted the international dimensions of deportation. According to the *Defender*, Carl Ohm was ordered deported to Germany because he "dared participate in the fight for Race rights." Ohm's situation was particularly precarious, organizers claimed, because if deported, he would "undoubtedly face persecution and death at the hands of the Hitler storm troops."¹⁰⁸

In the well-known deportation case of Finnish immigrant August Yokinen, the racial politics were murkier. Yokinen first attracted the national spotlight when he was expelled by the CP in a highly publicized show trial after barring Black workers from the Finnish Workers' Club where he worked as a janitor. The initial incident would hardly suggest Yokinen as a "race sympathizer," but in the aftermath, Yokinen publicly pledged to make amends by organizing for racial justice. Yokinen's dramatic trial and subsequent deportation case, scholars have argued, became a major inflection point for the CP's positioning on race. Mark Naison asserts that the Yokinen case "impressed upon white Communists ... that it was their duty as Communists 'to march at the head of the struggle for Negro rights.'"¹⁰⁹

It was precisely Yokinen's about-face on racial discrimination, many commentators in the Black press argued, that made him a target of the state. One author in the *Negro Star* contended that Yokinen was being deported because he had pledged himself to the "struggle for Negro

¹⁰²Carroll, *Race News*, 70.

¹⁰³Such claims fit with Burden-Stelly's assertion that "the state was able to use anxieties about the Black to codify the dangers of the foreigner and radical...." Burden-Stelly, "Constructing Deportable Subjectivity," 345.

¹⁰⁴Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 141.

¹⁰⁵"Seek to Deport Communist," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 25, 1930, 5; "Labor Defense Asks Help in Fight for Virginia Worker," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug. 2, 1930, 5.

¹⁰⁶"Police Get Rough," *Chicago Defender*, Apr. 29, 1933, 12; "Defends Negro, Ordered Deported," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, July 25, 1932, 2.

¹⁰⁷"Expect Hard Fight When Case Is Called," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Aug. 27, 1932, 11; "C.I.O. Barred for Helping Race Workers," *Chicago Defender*, July 9, 1938, 1; "New Orleans Bars CIO for Negro Policy," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 9, 1938, 2A; "Hint Political Significance Behind Strife in New Orleans," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, July 16, 1938, 20.

¹⁰⁸"May Deport German Race Sympathizer," *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 28, 1935, 3.

¹⁰⁹Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 51.

rights.”¹¹⁰ Other papers joined in this assessment, arguing that Yokinen had been ordered deported “on the basis of this retraction” of “race prejudice.”¹¹¹ Indeed, Mark Solomon argues, after Yokinen’s arrest for deportation, even papers like the *Chicago Defender* argued the need to stand up for some “reds.” While it did not attract masses of new members, Solomon states “the antichauvinism campaign did impress many people, black and white.”¹¹² Thus a case that had originally been a story of prejudice was recrafted in the Black press as a tale in which the U.S. government used deportation to stamp out the development of racial solidarity.

While stories about deportations of foreign-born white Communists were the most common, the Black press commented on other non-Black activists involved in the struggle for Black freedom. Few cases drew more attention than that of Satohata Takahashi, who was deported twice to Japan over the course of the 1930s.¹¹³ Takahashi, often described in the Black press as an “agitator,” had moved to Detroit in the early 1930s and organized the Society for the Development of Our Own to promote the “doctrine of good will and uplift of the dark race.”¹¹⁴ As Keisha Blain explains, Takahashi collaborated with local Black activists as part of a wider wave of “Afro-Asian solidarity.”¹¹⁵ Black journalists reported that, before being branded by police as a racketeer and deported in 1934, Takahashi had been known as a charismatic speaker whose organization had reputedly reached 10,000 members.¹¹⁶ In 1939, after returning from Japan to Canada and then Detroit, Takahashi was apprehended, incarcerated, and deported from the country a second time.¹¹⁷

As with Black deportees seen as threats to racial respectability, some Black Americans cheered on (or even actively assisted in) Takahashi’s removal. Takashi, a polarizing figure accused of living “off the money he collected from large groups of colored people,” was, the Black press noted, turned in to the authorities by Black leaders not once, but twice.¹¹⁸ In 1933, the *Kansas City Plaindealer* reported that Takahashi had been “arrested on the complaint of several Negro leaders who do not believe that his program is best for the community.”¹¹⁹ In the case of his second deportation in 1939, as Ernest Allen explains, it was Takahashi’s own estranged wife, African American activist Pearl Sherrod, who reported him to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). By Takahashi’s second deportation, it appeared that little sympathy remained among Black observers.¹²⁰ But, while Takahashi was condemned by many in the Black press (and his organization dismissed as a “cult”), some continued to suggest his deportation was a government plot to get rid of activists who aligned themselves against white supremacy. Joseph Ward of Connecticut, in a letter to the *Afro-American*,

¹¹⁰“Arrested for Advocating Race Equality,” *Negro Star*, Apr. 10, 1931, 1.

¹¹¹“Deport White Youth Who Repudiated Race Prejudice,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Nov. 19, 1932, 3; “Labor Body to Appeal Deportation Sentence,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Oct. 7, 1932, 13.

¹¹²Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 141.

¹¹³On Takahashi (who also went by Naka Nakane), see Ernest Allen Jr., “When Japan Was ‘Champion of the Darker Races’: Satokata Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism,” *The Black Scholar* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 23–46; Karl Evanzz, “The FBI and the Nation of Islam,” in *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security Before and After 9/11*, eds. Sylvester A. Johnson and Steven Weitzman (Berkeley, CA, 2017), 148–67; Keisha N. Blain, “A Certain Bond Between the Colored Peoples’: Internationalism and the Black Intellectual Tradition,” in *The Black Intellectual Tradition: African American Thought in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Derrick P. Alridge et al. (Urbana, IL, 2021), 235–53.

¹¹⁴“Detroit Seizes Japanese Agitator,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 9, 1933, 1.

¹¹⁵Blain, “A Certain Bond,” 242.

¹¹⁶“Michigan Police Jail Japanese Organizer,” *Kansas City Plaindealer*, Dec. 15, 1933, 2.

¹¹⁷Allen, “When Japan Was Champion of the Darker Races,” 36.

¹¹⁸Russ Cowans, “Jap Dreamer of Dark Empire Held,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 8, 1939, 2.

¹¹⁹“Michigan Police Jail Organizer: May Deprot Satohata Takahashi,” *Kansas City Plaindealer*, Dec. 15, 1933, 2.

¹²⁰“Jap Organizer Gets 3 Years in Federal Pen,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Oct. 7, 1939, 4; “Nab Jap Who Preached Anti-Nordic Creed,” *Chicago Defender*, July 8, 1939, 7; “Cult Claims Thousands of Race Members,” *Michigan Chronicle*, July 1, 1939, 5.

proclaimed his “disgust” that Takahashi was to be deported for “preaching a doctrine of uplift to the darker races,” and compared his treatment to that of Garvey.¹²¹

But it was not always political activism that brought non-Black immigrants to the forefront of Black coverage as victims of racist targeting. Another common trope was non-Black immigrants who were scrutinized by government officials because of their involvement in interracial marriages or sexual relationships. In a number of cases, the interracial relationships prompting deportations were depicted as tawdry affairs that scandalized authorities. This was true in the 1923 case of Margaret McAvoy, a white British woman who was said to be “the paramour of one Gray Evens, Colored, an alleged dope peddler.” When Pittsburgh authorities failed to prove McAvoy was caught up in a “white slave ring,” they deported her instead.¹²² The case of Helen Boyer of Germany was depicted similarly in 1929. Boyer, one paper noted, “may be sent back to Europe as the result of the green-eyed monster jealousy getting the best of her when she saw her dark skinned boyfriend in company with another girl.”¹²³ In the 1939 deportation of Toney Piazza, a “handsome Sicilian,” the *Defender* noted that the judge in his case was particularly horrified by how many of the “witnesses of both races admitted on cross-examination that they were married to or living with persons of the opposite race.”¹²⁴

But the critique of governmental racism came through even more clearly in the more tender representations of loving interracial families who faced the heartbreak of separation due to deportation. In 1939, the Black press reported on multiple stories in which, as one headline explained, “Deportation Hits Mixed Families.” One report from Bristol, Rhode Island, explained that two different local mixed-race families were facing deportations. Both cases involved Black fathers (one a Portuguese man married to a white Portuguese-American woman, Mrs. Pereira, and the other an African American married to a white French-Canadian woman, Mrs. Silva) with young children.¹²⁵ Both families argued that race was at the heart of their persecution. As the *Afro-American* reported, “Mrs. Pereira expressed the view that the inter-racial angle inspired the deportation proceedings,” while “Mrs. Silva said that she was given notice to leave the country while she was in a hospital maternity ward. She said officers voiced surprise when they saw her husband.”¹²⁶

And in a number of articles crafted to tug at the heartstrings, the Black press sympathetically presented the story of “Little Earl Hing,” the son of an African American mother and a Chinese father who faced deportation.¹²⁷ Hing, the six-year-old protagonist of what one article called a “strange story of American life,” had reportedly appealed in vain to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to stop his father’s deportation. As one story put it, in essentializing language, “with the stoicism of an Asiatic, [Henry] Hing has accepted his fate.” However, Earl’s mother, “a woman, deeply in love with the father of her two children, and two tots, unable to understand the intricacies of the law,” was reportedly “continuing the fight to save the man who has made their lives worth living.”¹²⁸ Unlike the deportation of white political activists, which were regularly represented as a method of undermining the struggle for Black political rights,

¹²¹“False Leaders Tricked Zakahashi and Garvey,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 6, 1934, 16.

¹²²“Girl’s Story Puzzles Agents in White Slave Inquiry,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Oct. 27, 1923, 8.

¹²³“To Deport White Girl in Fight over Man,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 18, 1929, 21.

¹²⁴William McCombs, “Vice Lord Ordered Deported, Aide Jailed,” *Chicago Defender*, Feb. 11, 1939, 4.

¹²⁵While the article does not specify, it seems likely that Jose Bernard Pereira, described as “colored,” was Cape Verdean. On the complex racial positioning of Cape Verdean immigrants in early-twentieth-century New England, see Marilyn Halter, *Between Race and Ethnicity: Cape Verdean Immigrants, 1860–1965* (Urbana, IL, 1993).

¹²⁶“Deportation Hits Mixed Families,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 14, 1939, 8.

¹²⁷“Little Son of Chinese-Negro Union Asks Mrs. Roosevelt to Aid Dad,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug. 18, 1934, 1. See also “Asks ‘First Lady’ for Help to Keep Chinese Dad Here,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Aug. 25, 1934, 2; “Asks Mrs. Roosevelt to Stop Dad’s Deportation,” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Aug. 25, 1934, 2.

¹²⁸“Little Son of Chinese-Negro Union.”

deportations of interracial families were seen as more intimate assaults on the rights of Black citizens to conduct their private lives without the intervention of the state.

More broadly, deportation was also presented in the Black press as a way to punish immigrants of color for their general (rather than personal and intimate) proximity to blackness. While newspapers featured extensive coverage of immigrants and public aid during the Great Depression, the Black press was less vocal about the subject of mass Mexican and Mexican American “repatriation” during the 1930s, in which communities of Mexican descent were the targets of a racist crusade to restrict Depression-era welfare to “true Americans.” Scholars have demonstrated that at least a half a million Mexicans and Mexican Americans (and possibly many more) left during the decade under varied levels of pressure or coercion.¹²⁹ The lack of greater coverage of these expulsions may have reflected, in part, the fact that they took place largely in California and throughout the southwest, where Black Americans resided in smaller numbers (and where the Black press had less of a foothold).

While not frequent, however, the occasional articles on these removals often connected their treatment to that of African Americans. Although there is no evidence of widespread African American protest against Mexican “repatriation,” Arnold Shankman’s assertion that “there is no evidence that Blacks voiced any objections to this brutal treatment” seems to be an oversimplification.¹³⁰ A 1929 article in the *Courier*, for instance, entitled “Jumping on the Mexicans,” combined both negative stereotyping of the “low standards of living” of Mexican laborers and a clear critique of the shared economic exploitation they faced. Furthermore, the author claimed, in addition to trying to deport Mexican laborers en masse, white people began “classing them along with the Negroes.”¹³¹ This author was not alone in observing that Mexicans were often targeted in tandem with or on the basis of their contact with African Americans. As a letter writer from Pontiac, Michigan, explained in the *Defender* in 1932, during recent a roundup of Mexican immigrants, one of the first questions detainees were asked was “if they have been associating with Negroes.”¹³²

The Black press also featured discussion of efforts to repatriate Filipinos during the early 1930s, sometimes drawing similar connections to the plight of African Americans.¹³³ Some in the Black press argued that Filipino removal drives would benefit Black workers. In fact, the *Afro-American* noted in 1933 that it was the “lone colored member of the state legislature” in California who introduced a resolution to deport 35,000 Filipinos on public support, blaming them for “inroads upon colored domestic labor.”¹³⁴ Two years later, the *Defender* featured the headline “Deportation of Filipinos Will Aid Race Workers,” reflecting similar sentiments. In contrast, however, other authors argued empathy for Filipinos, who, they suggested, faced all-too familiar racial targeting. After 1932 roundups in Florida, one *Journal and Guide* article argued that “Filipinos ... were penalized for accomplishing too much, just as so many Negroes have had their houses bombed, or their little businesses threatened because they happen to do too well.” Furthermore, the author noted, although they were treated as an “alien race,” “the

¹²⁹On the mass removal of Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the 1930s, see Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque, NM, 2006); Fernando Enciso, *They Should Stay There: The Story of Mexican Migration and Repatriation During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017); and Goodman, *Deportation Machine*. Melita Garza focuses on press coverage of 1930s Mexican deportation efforts, but does not address the Black press. Melita Garza, *They Came to Toil: Newspaper Representations of Mexicans and Immigrants in the Great Depression* (Austin, TX, 2018).

¹³⁰Arnold Shankman, “The Image of Mexico and the Mexican-American in the Black Press, 1890–1935,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies* III (1975): 51.

¹³¹“Jumping on the Mexicans,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 1, 1929, 12.

¹³²Oliver M. Green, “Foreigners and Prejudice,” *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 16, 1932, 15.

¹³³On efforts to repatriate Filipino migrants (who, as U.S. territorial subjects, could not be formally deported), see Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*; and Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898–1946* (New York, 2011).

¹³⁴See “Seeks Deportation of Filipinos,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 27, 1933, 23.

American flag also flies” over their homeland.¹³⁵ Such observations bring to mind Burden-Stelly’s assertion that “the historical repression of the Black because of his embodied threat to the racialized socioeconomic order was deployed against ‘foreigners’ and radicals that likewise threatened the system of capitalist accumulation organized around the U.S. imperialist and hegemonic state,” and suggest that at least some Black commentators were drawing these connections by the interwar era.¹³⁶ In these and other articles, Black authors argued that immigrants of color were made vulnerable to the deportation regime precisely because of either their perceived connections or similarities to African Americans.

Conclusion

In 1927, William N. Jones penned a poignant reflection on the increasingly powerful deportation regime in his *Baltimore Afro-American* column. Commenting on a recent editorial in *The Opportunity* magazine on the twisted state of religion in the modern United States, Jones paraphrased its message: “Christmas of this year 1927 finds Christianity in one of the most civilized countries on the globe in a mess of hypocrisy and wide of the mark which Jesus of Nazareth set.” Notably, he closed the column by concluding in bolded text, “The fact is if the real Jesus Christ should come back to earth this Christmas with his philosophy; his idealism and his burning earnestness, he would not only find surprises, but he would be deported along with Garvey and some of the Russian ‘reds.’”¹³⁷ Like many other authors in the interwar Black press, Jones provided a scathing depiction of a deportation system marked by racial and political repression.

The Black press’s sophisticated critique of racist state repression and antiblackness in particular, however, has been largely absent from scholarship on this formative era of American deportation policy and practice. Not only do these publications provide a useful window into underexamined Black discourses on immigration in the early twentieth century, they also offer an opportunity for rethinking the racial politics of the early deportation regime. While historical scholarship has offered increasingly nuanced analysis of the racial dimensions of the targeting of Asian, Latin American, and European immigrants, we have yet to fully understand the imbrication of anti-Black racism and immigration control during the period. Studying the voices of Black commentators and journalists of the time begins to correct for these missing perspectives.

Emily Pope-Obeda (she/her) is an assistant professor of history at Lehigh University, Pennsylvania, USA.

¹³⁵“South America—Florida,” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Aug. 6, 1932, 6.

¹³⁶Burden-Stelly, “Constructing Deportable Subjectivity,” 345.

¹³⁷William N. Jones, “Day by Day,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 10, 1927, 6.