

Title—Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century

Author—Marc Matera

Year—2015

Categories: Decolonization, British Empire, Race

Place: London

Time: 1900-1950

Argument Synopsis:

Marc Matera's *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* attempts to tell the story of the intellectual, cultural and social worlds of black London during the three decades following the First World War. Matera examines the efforts of people of African descent in London to organize across colonial boundaries against racism and empire. London in the interwar period became a center of resistance to empire. Matera demonstrates that the imperial metropolis was a site of African diasporic formation, intellectual production, and political organizing during the interwar period. His analysis challenges the prevailing notion of black nationalism as a moment of national self-determination. Matera seeks to change the gender profile of studies of black internationalism through his examination of black women's intellectual production and organizing activities.

To analyze the experience of the black population of London, Matera focuses especially on the creation and mobilization of black organizations during the interwar period. For many peoples of African descent in London, the rise of fascism was linked to other instances of racial oppression and imperial aggression. The Italian Invasion of Ethiopia served to further unite the diasporic population of African descent in London, with Matera highlighting the formation of the International African Friends of Ethiopia. He argues that encounters in the metropolis encouraged African and Caribbean people to think in terms of their shared circumstances and challenges. For the black community in London, antifascism became inseparable from anti-imperialism. Thus, black intellectuals couched their antifascism in terms of more general critiques of empire, linking British colonialism to the growing fascist threat in Europe and the Jim Crow-era United States. With the agreement that British colonialism was only slightly better than fascism, London's black intellectuals increasingly focused their efforts on organizing people of African descent outside European institutions and to create an international African movement.

Matera explores the role of black intellectuals as critical intermediaries in the development of anthropology and imperial studies. He claims that black intellectuals used the professional protocols of the disciplines to criticize prominent academics on political and intellectual grounds. This commitment to intellectual culture and education served to link the first generation of postcolonial political leaders in Africa and the Caribbean. The thought and politics of black Londoners, intellectually, socially, culturally, developed within networks of exchange and debate connecting diasporic movements.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Increased creation and mobilization of black organizations from 1935-45 to combat combined forces of imperialism and global color bar
- Landscape of Black London reveals transformative effects of the intimate spaces of sociality