

Trinidad's African West Indians' Response to the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine principally the response of Trinidad's African West Indian community to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. The conflict commenced in the mid-1930s, a dynamic, revolutionary and turbulent period in Trinidad's history. While the African-descended working class engaged in activism to improve their socio-economic circumstances; they kept abreast of regional and international developments, especially those impacting diasporic and continental Africans. African West Indians' concerns for their diasporic and continental kin and their quest to enhance their general circumstances were pivotal to their embrace of Pan-Africanism, Garveyism and Marxism. These ideologies were construed as paramount in the African-descended's struggle for emancipation from colonialism, imperialism and all their associated appendages which stifled their aspirations as well as that of others. In fact, their preoccupation with the conflict exemplified the fraternal bond and ideological orientations of those individuals who displayed solidarity with the Ethiopians. It should come as no surprise, for example, that Pan-African and Marxist ideals flourished among the membership of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA), given the influence of, for example, George Padmore and CLR James' writings on them. Notably, several members of the TWA were Garveyites. Exposure to such ideological viewpoints would have served to develop a sense of race consciousness and activism which was witnessed conflict. Trinidad African West Indians undertook efforts to challenge and expose the notion of Mussolini's "civilising mission" and European powers' complicity in the affair.

Keywords: African-descended, Civilising, Garveyism, Italo-Ethiopian, Pan-Africanism