RED LION IN WINTER:

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CLAUDE M. LIGHTFOOT

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

RED LION IN WINTER
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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Introduction

In August 1985, a 75-year-old man in South Chicago saw an eviction in progress at 8051 South Yates Boulevard. Movers carried the family's goods and possessions out to the street, as police watched nearby. For the old man watching on Yates Boulevard, this was an intolerable reminder of the cruelties of the economic system. It brought back memories of a similar experience on a long-ago afternoon, not unlike this one, fifty years and more in the past. The old man, suffering from heart trouble and emphysema, at times struggling to breathe, had come a long way since then. Then, he was a nervous, frightened young man protesting an eviction, confronted with crowds of people and a phalanx of police. There, in the depths of the Great Depression, he was awakened. The nervous, frightened young man found his courage. He stepped up boldly and ordered the crowd to take the furniture from the street and put it back in the house. He dared the police to stop them. The crowd restored the family to its home and marched away, to nearby Washington Park, singing "We'll hang Herbert Hoover to a sour apple tree, when the Revolution comes!"[1]

The old man took in the scene on Yates Boulevard and reflected. He had had a long and active career as an activist and as a thinker. He had been through trials and ordeals that would cause many people to buckle irretrievably under the pressure. He took in the scene and recalled the summer of 1931. "Old men for council, young men for war," an elderly man had admonished him in those bygone days. He remembered being dismayed by this advice, thinking all hands, no matter the age, should be on deck in a

[1] Claude M. Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics: Autobiography of Claude M. Lightfoot* (New York: New Outlook, 1980), 39.

time of war. The old man decided that illness and infirmity be damned, he needed to enter the fray one last time. Claude Mack Lightfoot, ex-leader of the Illinois Communist Party, ex-vice chair of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), traveler, thinker, activist, intellectual, engaging in his last act of protest, joined the crowd and helped restore the James and Barbara Noble family to their home.[2]

This thesis examines the long life, trials, travels, and activism of Claude Lightfoot, who was born in Arkansas in 1910 and died in Gary, Indiana at the age of 81 in 1991. This is a biographical and analytical discussion of Lightfoot's life and career and seeks to place him in conversation with other Black Communists and Black radicals of his time. This paper argues that Lightfoot, as one of the few party leaders left standing after the persecutions of the anticommunist McCarthy era, served as a link between the high tide of American communism in the 1930s and 1940s and the party's struggles in the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, as the CPUSA struggled toward relevance once more. It will examine Lightfoot's path to radicalization, early political involvement, his struggles during the years of the Second Red Scare, and his journeys throughout the world in the last quarter-century of his life. It will portray Lightfoot as an advocate, spokesman, and defender of the party on the international stage, as he traveled throughout the world in the 1960s and 1970s, conferring with and learning from party leaders and members in communist countries.

[2] Clipping from the *Daily Calumet*, "2 Arrested in Eviction of South Chicago Family," 29 August 1985, File 1-7, Box 1, Claude M. Lightfoot Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois; clipping from the *Chicago Metro News*, "$10,000 Behind, Family Set on Street," 31 August 1985, File 1-7, Box 1, Claude M. Lightfoot Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

This thesis will argue that Claude Mack Lightfoot was a critical figure in the history of Black communism, serving in a multitude of roles for the CPUSA, political activist, roving ambassador, teacher, intellectual, spokesman, and propagandist. Perhaps most importantly, Lightfoot was one of the few leaders in the McCarthy era left to guide the party through the wilderness, helping to lead it, if not to a resurgent revival, at least to a state of relevance, more than mere survival. By the late 1960s and into the 1970s, Lightfoot had found a role as a traveling spokesman and advocate, and it was this role, if not his not particularly original Marxist-Leninist contributions to radical thought, that gave the Communist Party a voice in the late civil rights era and the Black Power era and allowed it to compete among other ideologies in search of Black liberation. However, this thesis will also show that Lightfoot held a rigid, unquestioning adherence to Marxism-Leninism which mirrored the post-McCarthy era CPUSA in its refusal to deviate from policies and ideologies developed in the Soviet Union and adapt them to fit the needs of African Americans in the 1960s and 1970s. While an able and in many ways effective advocate, Lightfoot was not an original or critical thinker. He proved correct the critique of the scholar Harold Cruse, who wrote in 1967 that "Negro intellectuals" had failed to add "a single original conception to American Marxism."[3]

The history of Black radicalism in the twentieth century is a long and eclectic one, and Black communism is just one variant of that radical tradition. From the turn of the century onward, many Black Americans rejected traditional American notions of politics and democracy and turned to radical ideology as a means of combating the racial, social,

[3] Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership*. (New York: NYRB Classics, 2005) 231.

and economic injustice they faced every day of their lives. Initially, many Black Americans were drawn to the Socialist Party, but, as scholar Michael C. Dawson noted, the "toleration and to some degree promotion of racism" within the party caused much disillusionment.[4] Others were drawn to Black nationalist organizations and movements like Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association.[5] A significant number of Black Americans turned to the Communist Party USA as the solution to the problems affecting their community. The reasons for this are unique and varied. What is clear from the field of research is that the relationship of Black Americans with radical politics was and remains complex and that the field is growing with increased time and attention devoted to it.

Lightfoot was one of many Black Americans drawn to the Communist Party in the first half of the twentieth century. Each came to their radical beliefs differently. Harry Haywood, Hosea Hudson, Benjamin Davis, Thyra Edwards, and Claudia Jones are a few individuals whose paths toward radicalization have been covered by historians in recent years. Scholars have written in-depth biographies of these Black radicals and others in an effort to discover the roots of Black left-wing activism. An examination of Claude Lightfoot's life and career may be useful in finding what motivated him and other Black Americans to embrace the Communist Party.

With the major exceptions of the Democratic Party under Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman, neither of the two major political parties worked to advance Black issues in the first half of the century, and many Black Americans were disillusioned with

[4] Michael C. Dawson, *Blacks In and Out of the Left* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 13.
[5] *Ibid*., 37.

a political system that inhibited their full participation and did not treat them as full citizens. Even as the liberal Roosevelt/Truman New Deal coalition included urban Black voters in the North, their feeble half-measures in favor of Black issues of importance achieved little concrete progress, and often Black issues were sacrificed to those of other constituencies in the New Deal coalition. In Chicago, Lightfoot initially engaged with both major political parties, and worked for Black candidates of both, but soon saw the limitations of the two-party system. Black politicians who embraced one of the two major parties, particularly the Democratic Party, would only have the possibility of being a machine sub-boss in charge of delivering Black votes in exchange for patronage. For Lightfoot, following a different path, the path that led to the Communist Party, offered distinction in a rising political movement, the only political movement courageous enough to speak and advocate for Black civil rights.

This thesis is organized chronologically. Of necessity, as few sources cover Lightfoot in any great detail, the thesis is based largely on his own autobiography, *Chicago Slums to World Politics: Autobiography of Claude M. Lightfoot*, released in three editions, in 1970, 1980, and most recently in 1985. The autobiography is written in narrative style and is mostly chronological in format, with a few exceptions. It is a forthright, clearly-written account of his life and work and places him in the middle of several important events such as the National Negro Congress, the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, and the Red Scare persecutions of the 1940s and 1950s.

In addition, the papers of Claude M. Lightfoot, housed in the Chicago History Museum in Chicago, Illinois, form the basis of some of the later sections of the thesis.

The collection consists of photographs, letters, book and newspaper column manuscripts, newspaper clippings, translated versions of Lightfoot's published books, and other assorted memorabilia such as certificates, awards, invitations, and event programs. The Lightfoot papers and his autobiography are highly important primary sources that provide an insight into Lightfoot's thoughts and actions throughout his life. While important, there are some notable limitations to the use of such sources.

First, the autobiography provides us with Lightfoot's own perspective, always helpful when writing about a historical figure, but also reminds us that he is a political figure with an agenda of his own, and his recollection of events and people could be tinged with his own personal biases. Second, the autobiography makes little mention of Lightfoot's personal life. There is little information about his family, his parents, his first and second wives, and his adopted son. Third, the bulk of Lightfoot's papers date from after 1961, with the vast majority dating from the 1970s. There is precious little in the archive from prior to 1961 and after 1980. This lack of primary source material forces us to lean heavily on the autobiography to tell the story of Lightfoot's first fifty years. Nevertheless, there is enough in both the autobiography and the Lightfoot papers for a thorough study of his life and career.

Chapter Outline

Lightfoot's formative years are critical to his later political development and set the stage for his becoming a member of the Communist Party at a young age. The first chapter follows Lightfoot as he left his birthplace in Arkansas with his family as they emigrated to Chicago. There Lightfoot's parents raised him, and there he first became politically active. At first attracted to Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro

Improvement Association, Lightfoot drifted away from the Black nationalist ideals of the "New Negro" movement and became active in mainstream Chicago politics. Bouncing between the Republican Party, the traditional political home of Black Chicagoans, and the Democratic Party, which had begun to make overtures to African Americans in Chicago, Lightfoot worked on a number of political campaigns and seemed to have a bright political future. His activism led him in a more militant and radical direction, and he soon realized his future was no longer in the Democratic or Republican parties, but as a Communist.

As Lightfoot entered his twenties and thirties, his understanding of and attachment to communist ideology deepened, and he began to involve himself in electoral politics as well as in participation in movement politics. His experiences during the Depression and the Second World War are important to understanding Lightfoot's resilience in later years. The second chapter examines Lightfoot's development as a young Communist leader, his first trips overseas, his experiences in the Second World War, and his political activities in the early postwar years to show how they prepared him for ordeals and persecutions to come. Lightfoot spent much of the 1930s learning about communism in party training schools and in organizing the poor in Chicago. The party regarded him highly enough to send him to Moscow for the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern, where Lightfoot had a front-row seat as the historic "Popular Front" policy against fascism was initiated. This chapter covers Lightfoot's service in the United States Army during the Second World War behind the front lines, isolated in a non-combat position both due to his race and to his politics. It concludes with a discussion of Lightfoot's political activities in the postwar era, as he attempted to renew a Popular

Front-type alliance among leftists and liberals in the face of increasing hysteria over anticommunism.

This anticommunist hysteria had a profound impact on Lightfoot, and indirectly contributed to his rise to the upper echelons of the CPUSA. The third chapter covers Lightfoot's life and career from 1949 to 1971, a "period of persecutions," as he described it.[6] In 1954, the federal government indicted Lightfoot for violating the Smith Act, which criminalized advocating the overthrow of the United States government by force or violence, and critically for Lightfoot, membership in the Communist Party. For the next seven years, Lightfoot fought the charges in federal court. During this period, the leadership and many high-profile members of the CPUSA had been scattered by government repression; fellow Chicago Communist Gil Green was underground, one-time Harlem councilman Benjamin Davis was in prison, Claudia Jones deported to the United Kingdom, Thyra Edwards was dead, Harry Haywood expelled from the party. There were few left who were free to lead the party through the wilderness, and consequently, Lightfoot rose quickly in the ranks, joining the national party committee as vice-chair in 1958. After the ordeal of federal prosecution, the chapter follows Lightfoot on his renewed travels around the communist world as he sought a solution to the problems of racism and capitalist exploitation. From India to the Soviet Union to East Germany to Ghana to Cuba, Lightfoot traveled the world to see a socialist system in action and looked for ways in which socialism could solve the problem of racism in his own country.

[6] Lightfoot, 110.

Lightfoot, now a seasoned world traveler and thinker, used his experiences overseas to educate and guide him as he sought a solution to the American racial problem. The fourth and final chapter covers the last twenty years of Lightfoot's life, particularly the 1970s, the years of his most prolific intellectual output. Lightfoot wrote three books and an autobiography. *Ghetto Rebellion to Black Liberation*, published in 1968, is an analysis of contemporary rebellions and of the exploitation Black Americans faced in urban America. *Racism and Human Survival: Lessons of Nazi Germany for Today's World*, published in 1972, analyzes the historical economic roots of racism, and discusses contemporary East Germany's efforts to eradicate racial prejudice in the decades after the fall of Nazi Germany. Lightfoot's final book, *Human Rights U. S. Style*, is a historical expose of human and resource exploitation throughout American history, from the landing of Christopher Columbus in 1492 to the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt as president in 1933. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of Lightfoot's life after 1980.

Claude Lightfoot lived 81 years. Born in rural Arkansas, he would end up traveling the nation and the world in defense of a cause seemingly doomed to failure or irrelevancy. Yet his life and career show that, while his dream of a socialist America never came to pass, his dogged defense of the CPUSA, in which he believed so strongly, helped the organization to remain relevant, earning continued support from other communist parties and nations and continued access to public forums throughout the country. He helped advocate for a Marxist-Leninist approach to solving the problem of racism in America, even though many Black communists and radicals had moved in

nationalist, Maoist, or other directions entirely. Though time had passed him by, Lightfoot remained a solid, steady relic of a bygone era of radicalism.

Chapter 1

From Pine Bluff to Washington Park, 1910-1932

From Arkansas to Chicago: Claude M. Lightfoot in the Great Migration

Claude Lightfoot's early years in rural Arkansas and Chicago were years of poverty and privation, but also were critical in shaping the way in which he looked at the world around him. From an insecure early childhood near his birthplace and later in Little Rock, to his inauspicious welcome to Chicago as a nine-year-old child caught up in the worst race riots the city had ever seen, to the beginnings of his political awareness, Lightfoot's early years could certainly not be described as average or conventional. Over the first twenty-one years of his life, Claude Lightfoot would begin his lifelong search for a solution to the problems of capitalism and racism. He would engage in politics, first interested in the Black nationalism of Marcus Garvey, then bounce between the two major political parties, and finally become radicalized during the worst of the Great Depression and join the Communist Party, setting him on a path he would follow for better or worse for the rest of his life.

Claude Mack Lightfoot was born January 19, 1910 in Lake Village, Arkansas. Nearly immediately after his birth, his parents left him in the care of his formidable grandmother, Frances Henderson Lightfoot. Claude remembered his grandmother as an "extraordinary" woman, a former slave who managed to accumulate a large cotton farm near Lake Village, which, while never exceedingly profitable, allowed Frances to support a large extended family and live in relative comfort in her later life. Claude resided with his grandmother for the first six years of his life, a period of his life upon which he would look back with fondness. It was during this time and from his grandmother and great-grandmother that he learned about the horrors of slavery and racism for the first time. He displayed great admiration for Frances, about whom he declared that he wished he had

known more about, so that he could record her remarkable life in a book.[7] Perhaps as a consequence of this living arrangement, Lightfoot says relatively little about his parents and their background in his memoirs; he does not even identify them by name, only by their relation to him. It is unclear who they were, when and if they were married, and whether they had any children besides Claude or not.

In any event, Lightfoot, age six, joined his parents in Little Rock in 1916, where they had established a home after Claude's birth, and it was in Little Rock where he experienced the first hints of life under Jim Crow, though he did not really associate it as such.[8] Lightfoot's aunt worked as a domestic in a white household, and oftentimes Claude would go to the house and play with the white children, until he fell afoul of the white children, who threatened to beat him up, for one reason or another, and never returned to play with them.[9] Aside from that, Lightfoot's memories of Jim Crow came from the whispered conversations between adults and children's attempts to understand the situation. The racial violence that was prevalent throughout much of the South was not present in Little Rock during Lightfoot's brief time living there. Lightfoot certainly understood that it existed in Little Rock but would claim that "it was in the North, when I was older, that the truth came through fully" about the racism, bigotry, and discrimination Black men and women suffered in Jim Crow America. What left a deeper impression on the young Lightfoot was the colorism pervasive through the Black community of Little Rock. As was the case in much of Black America, those with lighter skin tones often

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[7] Claude M. Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics: Autobiography of Claude M. Lightfoot* (New York: New Outlook, 1980).
[8] *Ibid*., 3.
[9] Lightfoot, writing nearly seventy years after the fact, is unclear as to the reasons for his banishment from his aunt's employer's household.

enjoyed privileges not afforded to darker skinned members of the community. Lightfoot's own family background provided examples of this phenomenon. His mother had a lighter complexion than his father, who was, in his son's words, "completely black." She would explain to young Claude that this difference was due to the presence of Native American ancestry in her family, though, as Lightfoot noted in his memoirs, more likely the noticeable difference in skin tone resulted from a white man sexually assaulting Lightfoot's maternal grandmother.[10]

Lightfoot recalls that the family's existence in Little Rock was always precarious, a contrast from the relatively comfortable and carefree life he had enjoyed on his grandmother's farm in Lake Village. Rarely was there meat on the table, only on weekends, if that, and that was a primary factor in the Lightfoot family seeking out more promising locales.[11] The story of the family's migration is reminiscent of most immigrant stories; one member of the family leaves first, to plant roots in the new community, gain employment, earn money, and then send for his relatives, one after the other. In Lightfoot's case, his uncle Gerosee, or Jerry, served as the pioneer. Jerry arrived in Chicago mid-decade and sent for his family, and by the end of 1918, Lightfoot's entire nuclear family had made the move to Uncle Jerry's home in the South Side Chicago neighborhood of Englewood.

Growing up Black in Chicago

No sooner than Lightfoot and his family had arrived in a place they prayed was the "Promised Land," they had to contend with some of the worst that Jim Crow America

[10] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 3-4.
[11] *Ibid.*, 4.

had to throw at them. Black Americans found that racial violence and strife followed them wherever they went in the United States, and in the last years of the 1910s and the early 1920s, race riots erupted on a regular basis. In the Red Summer of 1919, perhaps the most notorious of these riots broke out on the South Side of Chicago. Much "propaganda," as Lightfoot put it, had been disseminated in the American South to African Americans, advertising the "better life" that awaited them in the North. Among many outlets, the *Chicago Defender* was most prolific in "getting the South told," advertising for migrants to the North.[12] However, Lightfoot recalled that no matter where a Black person went in America, Jim Crow would follow, and he never forgot the day the violence erupted in his neighborhood.

"I recall one day," Lightfoot wrote in his memoirs, "my mother and I were sitting in front of our house when the cars came into the area to shoot at us."[13] Roving gangs of white men, inspired, Lightfoot claimed, by hateful racist propaganda in the local press, tore through what is now the Fuller Park neighborhood of Chicago in search of Black citizens to terrorize. He recalled his mother's terror at what was going on around her, wishing she had never left Arkansas.[14] This comment summed up, for Lightfoot and for many other Black Chicagoans, this sense of "disillusionment" that many of them felt at having been promised freedom from racism and bigotry, and the chance at a new life in the North, only to have their dreams cruelly shattered by angry and resentful whites.

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[12] Ethan Michaeli, *The Defender - How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America: From the Age of the Pullman Porters to the Age of Obama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016) 70-1.
[13] The Lightfoot home was located at the intersection of West 44th and South State Streets.
[14] Lightfoot, 11.

As Lightfoot grew to maturity, he was exposed to different currents of opinion on how to solve the racial problem of the United States. One of those currents was the "back-to-Africa" movement of Marcus Garvey in the 1920s. Lightfoot recalled in his memoirs the indignities to which Black Americans were subjected and how they laid the foundation for "Garveyism." Among the factors Lightfoot cited were the race riots of the late 1910s and early 1920s[15] and the poor treatment of Black soldiers overseas and at home after they returned from duty in the First World War.[16] As a child, Lightfoot was drawn into the Garvey orbit by several of his family members, who were attracted to the "New Negro" movement. He was as much enthralled by the spectacle that Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association put forward, such as the gaudy uniforms its members wore and the parades they would stage, as he was by the oratory he heard.[17]

Garvey's philosophy, like the later iterations of Black nationalism which came along in the following decades, relied, to a degree, upon the development of a Black capitalism, separate from the white economy from which Black Americans were excluded, or included on terms dictated by whites. Black Americans, Garvey would claim, needed to own their own companies, buy goods only from Black-owned businesses, conduct commerce among themselves primarily. It is debatable just how much of Garvey's philosophy Lightfoot understood as a young child, but there is no doubt that the militantly Black organization left a deep and lasting impression upon him. Though initially inclined to agree, Lightfoot would reject this concept; as he noted, even as Black Americans owned their own businesses, they did not enjoy control over the

[15] Among these were riots in East St. Louis (1917), Chicago, Omaha (1919), Tulsa (1921), and Rosewood, Florida (1923).
[16] Lightfoot, 18
[17] *Ibid*., 20.

entire system of production.[18] In other words, Black-owned businesses relied on white-owned suppliers for their livelihoods, and whites would thus continue to enjoy the fruits of Black labor. Lightfoot would attribute this as the reason he gave up his original ambitions of attending Tuskegee Institute to learn the shoemaking trade.[19] As Lightfoot's political philosophy developed further, he would come to identify capitalism itself as the abiding source of racism against people of color throughout the world.

A Political Awakening

Lightfoot spent much of the 1920s involving himself in youth sports and politics. Initially, like others in his family, he was attracted to the Republican party, a continuing, but steadily diminishing legacy of Abraham Lincoln. Most Black Chicagoans remained loyal to the Republican party due to the active courting of the flamboyant mayor William Hale "Big Bill" Thompson.[20] Lightfoot remembered well Thompson's appeals to the Black community. He gave liberally of city jobs to African Americans and pledged to get the Chicago Police Department off the community's back, especially those who sold liquor illegally under the restrictions of the Eighteenth Amendment in order to make ends meet. Lightfoot, whose father was one of those who did so, appreciated Thompson's embrace of the Black community, despite Thompson's blatant corruption and overt self-enrichment. For the time being at least, Black Chicago remained faithful to the "party of Lincoln." In a time when dependable political allies for African Americans were few and far between, Black Chicagoans largely tolerated the negative qualities of "Big Bill," seeing their alliance with him as preferable to the outright hostility of the Cook County

[18] *Ibid*., 29.
[19] *Ibid*., 30.
[20] Mayor of Chicago, 1915-23, 1927-31.

Democratic Party, controlled by allies of Mayor William Dever.[21] Most Black elected officials in Chicago were Republicans, such as Oscar De Priest, who had served as alderman for the Second Ward during Thompson's first mayoral term, and later was elected three times to the United States House of Representatives.[22] Despite his radical shift in politics, Lightfoot would later praise De Priest as a fighter for "Black people in a period of disenchantment."[23] One could not be blamed for assuming that Lightfoot, precociously political as a teenager, would remain in the Republican party and follow in the footsteps of De Priest as an activist and perhaps an officeholder. This, of course, was not in the cards, as Lightfoot, with prodding from his uncle Jerry, continued with his education, which would eventually turn Claude in a drastically different direction.[24]

Circumstances, however, would dictate that Claude Lightfoot would not complete his high school degree. His family needed his labor and his wages far too much for Lightfoot to stay in school long enough to gain his diploma. With the exception of one year at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, this marked the effective end of Lightfoot's formal education.[25] Nevertheless, Lightfoot embarked on a lifelong journey of self-education. Autodidactic by nature and inspired by courses he had taken at Virginia Union with Rayford Logan, the eminent Black historian, he compensated for his lack of formal education by reading voraciously and constantly seeking out information, especially about history. Even long after he had accepted Marxism-Leninism as his guiding philosophy, Lightfoot remained devoted to this project of self-improvement. He

[21] Mayor of Chicago, 1923-27; Lightfoot, 26-27
[22] Representing Illinois' First Congressional District, 1929-35.
[23] Lightfoot, 27.
[24] Lightfoot, 28.
[25] *Ibid*.

did not always apply his inquisitive nature to all things; Marxist-Leninist dogma remained curiously unquestioned throughout his life. It was this instinct that served Lightfoot well as he went forward in life, especially later as he began to write well-informed, effective articles and books presenting the communist view of American history and Black liberation in the 1960s and 1970s.

Becoming a Communist: The Radical Awakening of Claude Lightfoot

Lightfoot's path from Garveyism to communism was not a neat and linear progression. As late as 1930, despite the deprivation of the Great Depression, he was supportive of the Republican party of "Big Bill" Thompson and Oscar De Priest. While the national party waned in their commitment to Black liberation, in Chicago at least, African Americans felt they had a friend in the GOP establishment. For thousands in Chicago, and hundreds of thousands throughout the urban North, that began to change in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as Black Americans, Lightfoot among them, started to look toward the Democratic party as the bright new political hope.

In his memoirs, Lightfoot recalled a series of events in 1930 which set him on the path to radicalization. The Chicago *Whip*, a local Black-owned newspaper, had initiated the first "Don't buy where you can't work" campaign, an economic boycott of white-owned businesses who refused to hire Black employees, and unleashed it against three Woolworth stores located on the South Side in 1929. The campaign was largely directed against Woolworth but, as Lightfoot noted, there were other businesses in the Black Belt of the South Side that declined to hire African Americans in anything but service positions. The *Whip*'s campaign bore fruit, as Woolworth's revenue dropped precipitously, the company gave in and began hiring African Americans in much greater

numbers and across different positions than they had previously.[26] Lightfoot received a valuable lesson in the efficacy of direct action that would soon spread throughout the urban North, as similar campaigns spread.

Lightfoot noticed a change around the beginning of the Depression. He saw it in the faces of people gathered at Washington Park, a public park which functioned similarly to London's Hyde Park. It was "a forum where people gathered to discuss the events of the day. Militants, atheists, and people of varied viewpoints could be found" in Washington Park on any given day. Lightfoot noted that prior to the Depression, relatively few availed themselves of the open forum, those who did, did so in small groups. After the onset of the Depression, thousands of unemployed Black Chicagoans descended upon the park, partly because there were "hardly any other place[s] for them to go." In his memoirs, Lightfoot identified three major reasons for the increased interest of African Americans in changing their conditions.[27]

First, "a mass jobs takeover" at what is now West 51st Street and King Drive in Chicago, where the city had authorized an extension of the streetcar lines from that intersection to South Cottage Grove Avenue, traversing the north side of Washington Park. However, the transit company had hired an exclusively white, mostly immigrant workforce to construct the extension. This inflamed passions at the Washington Park open forum, where now thousands of Black Chicagoans gathered on a regular basis to seek work, speak, socialize, and sleep. The Washington Park forum was a place where radicals of many stripes spoke, debated, and persuaded many people that direct action

[26] *Ibid*., 31-3.
[27] *Ibid*., 33.

was a viable option in creating economic opportunities for Black people. Lightfoot recalled the anger of many Washington Park denizens. He was careful to note that the crowd of angry people did not resort to violence but did succeed in pressuring the white workers to "lay down their work tools," inducing Mayor Thompson and Oscar De Priest to come to Washington Park to calm the situation before it got out of hand. The longtime political leader of the Black community, joined by the community's most powerful political ally, were booed and hissed by the Washington Park crowd, and city leaders realized concessions would have to be made, lest there be a repeat of the racialized violence of the summer of 1919. From that day, Lightfoot recalled, resistance to discrimination in Chicago took on a more militant and aggressive posture, favored by the young, than the tradition-minded, conservative approach favored by older religious leaders, and Lightfoot himself gained more self-confidence and began to speak more in the forums of Washington Park.[28]

Secondly, part of this more militant approach involved migrating to the previously hostile Democratic Party. Lightfoot rationalized the switch this way: "Blacks should join the Democratic Party in large numbers in order to bargain better with both parties." In other words, make the two major parties compete for the favor of Chicago's increasingly influential Black vote. Whichever party was prepared to do more for the Black community should be rewarded come election time with Black votes. No longer did the party of Lincoln deserve the unanimous and unquestioning loyalty of African Americans where they could vote, not after Republicans had abandoned southern Blacks "'to the tender mercies of the Ku Klux Klan and the lynch mobs.'" Lightfoot and his fellow

[28] *Ibid*., 34.

Washington Park orator and friend Charles M. Skyles were enticed by the promises of Bryant A. Hammond, Chicago's foremost Black Democratic politician. Hammond promised them patronage jobs in city government and, in Lightfoot's case, a scholarship to Loyola University. They joined with the Democrats and worked for them in the 1930 midterm elections, which saw a massive Democratic wave reverse a decade of Republican control of Congress.[29] However, Hammond's promises of jobs and scholarships did not materialize, and, as Lightfoot felt he was a political free agent, he and Skyles went back to the Republican party to work for William L. Dawson, future Democratic congressman, in the 1931 municipal primary election. Lightfoot switched again to the Democrats once the primary was over to work for the mayoral campaign of Anton J. Cermak, for whom he spoke at a major rally, with Cermak himself on the main stage. There he denounced a Black 4th Ward aldermanic candidate, Edgar Brown, who had been discovered to be a plant of the incumbent white alderman, Bert Cronson. The presence of the Black candidate, who, before he had withdrawn from the race, had himself denounced potential Black rivals as "Uncle Toms," on the platform was too much hypocrisy for the inflamed Lightfoot. He denounced Brown as an ultimate Uncle Tom, a tool of Cronson and Big Bill Thompson, and, forgetting the presence of Cermak, used harsh invective and vitriol in his attack on Brown. Lightfoot stirred the crowd to its feet, but almost certainly left a negative impression on Anton Cermak and other leading Chicago Democrats.[30]

[29] *Ibid*., 34-5.
[30] *Ibid*., 37-8.

Last of all is what Lightfoot attributed as the defining factor which made him a communist; the struggle against evictions in the depths of the Depression. Lightfoot had steadily evolved from a youthful initiate into Garveyism, to an aspiring Black capitalist, to a political ingenue of uncertain affiliation. By the summer of 1931, militant communists had "take[n] over" Washington Park, speaking to crowds numbering "between two and five thousand" a day and many Washington Park forum participants came away from the experience as converts. Many were now embracing direct action against the evictions. By this point, Lightfoot was one of them, ready to take a more active role against what he now saw as the depredations of capitalism on the poor and working class. He was disgusted by the timid stand of older people from Washington Park and fell in with and was inspired by new young leaders to take a more courageous stand.[31] One of those leaders, a charismatic member of the Communist Party named David Poindexter whom Lightfoot regarded as a good friend, urged him to attend an eviction and make a speech. Poindexter had the personality of a "frustrated preacher," and Lightfoot remembered that he could persuade just about anyone to do anything. "[W]hen he got through preachin' everybody'd be ready to go on into the lake with him. That's how much power he had over people."[32]

Lightfoot recounted that fear was "almost paralyzing my body" as he arrived on the scene. He remembered "at least a thousand people" in the street where the police were in the process of evicting a resident from a home. Lightfoot recalled his words:

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[31] *Ibid*., 39; Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at Its Grassroots, 1928-35* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007) 111-12.
[32] Storch, 53-54.

> "I fear no gods in the skies, no devil in hell, and no man on earth, and I assure you that I don't fear these flat feet cops of Mayor Cermak! Pick up that furniture and put it back in the house!"

Lightfoot, in reality, was scared to death of the situation and of the police who were standing by. The police did not put up a struggle when the crowd moved the resident's furniture off the street and back into the house, a lack of action Lightfoot attributed to fear of instigating a riot. Thrilled by this experience, he continued his anti-eviction activism with groups known as the "Unemployed Councils." The Councils restored evicted people to their homes, "turned on gas, electric, and water in apartments where unemployment prevented their occupants from paying the bills." Lightfoot's activism with the Councils led to several arrests, and, influenced by Poindexter and other communists, refused efforts to bail him out of jail. Mayor Cermak soon called a moratorium on evictions, after police shot and killed three Black anti-eviction activists in August 1931. For Lightfoot and the Unemployed Councils, this was a major victory. Lightfoot cut his remaining ties to the Democratic Party and joined the Communist Party USA that summer of 1931.[33]

It is worth noting that Lightfoot was inspired to join the Communist Party USA so soon after his rousing speech against Edgar Brown in front of the soon-to-be mayor of Chicago, Anton J. Cermak. While Lightfoot never claimed this, it can reasonably be assumed that Lightfoot, by his inflammatory remarks, had talked himself out of a future in mainstream Democratic politics. It would be of little wonder, then, that Lightfoot would be looking for a new political home. No doubt his subsequent faith in Marxism-Leninism was deep and genuine. However, a certain amount of cold logic and political

[33] Lightfoot, 39-41; Storch, 112-13, 115.

expediency might have factored into Lightfoot's decision to enter the Communist party in the summer of 1931.

The Attraction of Communism in Depression-Era Black America

Claude Lightfoot was far from the only example of an African American who increasingly saw in communism the solution to American problems. Lightfoot was motivated to join the Communist Party by the failures of the existing political establishment to adequately address the problems and needs of Black Americans, in Chicago and around the country. The Communist Party offered a home to disillusioned African Americans and sought to capitalize on the failures of the capitalist, bourgeois parties. Two notable examples of African Americans who were attracted to the party in the 1920s and 1930s, and who later became lifelong activists in the party are Harry Haywood and Hosea Hudson.

A collective analysis of these three individuals provides insight into the many paths toward radicalization for African American communists and the variety of reasons and motivations for joining a radical political organization. All three arrived into the Communist Party from different backgrounds and perspectives, different lives and careers. All three ended up in different roles for the party; Lightfoot initially as an activist and a political candidate, later a high-ranking party leader and spokesman, Haywood as a theorist, and Hudson primarily as an organizer and an activist in the South. While they are not Lightfoot's exact contemporaries, both Haywood and Hudson being his senior by a dozen years, Lightfoot's political engagement at an early age makes a comparison between the three more viable.

Harry Haywood was born in 1898, twelve years before Claude Lightfoot, in South Omaha, Nebraska, the son and grandson of ex-slaves.[34] Haywood's upbringing was markedly different from Lightfoot's, yet they ended up on similar paths. Haywood's early life was almost bourgeois, or at least as bourgeois as white society permitted Black Americans to be in the early twentieth century. He recalled fondly his father's library full of books and his riveting stories from history, as well as his mother's activities in the church.[35] A gang of Irish toughs beat his father and forced the family to leave Omaha, and the family ended up in Minneapolis, where Haywood became increasingly aware of his outsider status as an African American.[36] Haywood soon left school to work, relocated to Chicago, and then joined the Army as much for adventure as anything else.[37] He became radicalized by the treatment of Black soldiers in the Army, and particularly became radicalized by the Chicago race riots which so terrified Lightfoot in 1919. Haywood defined the riots as "a pivotal point in my life."[38] Eventually Haywood, like Lightfoot, would find salvation in the Communist Party USA. Haywood became an activist for the party in Chicago, where he would cross paths and work with Claude Lightfoot.[39]

Like Lightfoot, Haywood was a strident and unapologetic defender of the Soviet Union and the communist approach to race relations. Haywood made it clear that he believed in self-determination for Black Americans in the South, on the basis of the

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[34] Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist*. (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978) 5.
[35] *Ibid*., 22, 27.
[36] *Ibid*., 35.
[37] *Ibid*., 42.
[38] *Ibid*., 83.
[39] *Ibid*., 444-5.

decision of the Comintern[40] in 1928 to embrace that concept. But Haywood saw the struggle very clearly as class-based, not race-based, where Lightfoot's vision seemed to combine the two. Race only served to enrich the elite capitalists, by dividing the white working class from the Black working class. Both were oppressed, but the ruling class set whites against Blacks to prevent class unity from occurring. Combating racial discrimination was simply a "reduc[tion] [of] the Black liberation struggle to [one] against racial ideology," not the overarching problems of class, capitalism, and imperialism. This rendered it a "feeble bourgeois liberal protest," rather than a powerful and revolutionary struggle for liberation.[41] Haywood embraced self-determination for Black Americans, whereas Lightfoot had already rejected all forms of Black nationalism as an insufficient solution to the problem of racism.

The experiences of Hosea Hudson show a different path toward radicalization. Almost an exact contemporary of Haywood's, Hudson was a steelworker and union organizer, who became active in the Alabama Communist Party. Born in Wilkes County, Georgia, Hudson's upbringing differed much from Haywood's, and saw parallels to that of Lightfoot.[42] However, while Lightfoot left the South with his family as a young boy, Hudson's formative years and early adulthood were spent entirely in the rural South. Hudson does not leave his home until the age of 25, to seek industrial work in Atlanta and Birmingham.[43] It is through his industrial work in Birmingham that Hudson is introduced to the Communist Party, and the party's advocacy on behalf of the Scottsboro

[40] The Communist International, the international organization of communist parties.
[41] Haywood, 324-5.
[42] Nell Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979) 2-3.
[43] *Ibid*., 13.

Boys already predisposed Hudson to be sympathetic. Organizer Al Murphy persuaded Hudson to join the party in 1931, that same summer that Claude Lightfoot joins in Chicago.[44] Hudson and Lightfoot, though differing in background and in their work (Lightfoot focusing on politics, Hudson on making a living in industry), have similar views. No less convinced of the economic basis of the oppression of Black Americans than Haywood, Hudson differed somewhat in that he, like Lightfoot, saw racial prejudice and economic exploitation more or less hand-in-hand, rather than one preceding the other. Hudson, like Lightfoot, was not persuaded that self-determination for the Black Belt of the southern United States was likely to be successful, or even desirable. Hudson felt that Black Americans would simply replicate the economic and political system of the United States, from which they sought autonomy. He, like Lightfoot, feared the establishment of a "Negro capitalism...[which] would be exploiting the Negro masses just like" the white capitalists did the working class of all races.[45] Hudson's goal was integration of the African American into the fabric of national life at every level, rather than a separate Black nation within the United States.

Haywood published his autobiography, *Black Bolshevik*, in 1978, and Nell Irvin Painter published *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson* in 1979. The two books form part of a trio of memoirs by Black communist activists, which Lightfoot joins when he published new editions of his own memoirs in 1980 and 1985. Though there are common threads, Lightfoot, Haywood, and Hudson each approached the radical role in the Black freedom struggle differently. Haywood's memoir, dense with communist political vocabulary,

[44] *Ibid*., 83-7.
[45] *Ibid*., 102-3.

defenses and denunciations of other communist factions, in addition to valuable information about his own role as a foot-soldier in the struggle, is most similar to Lightfoot's autobiography. Haywood explores the history of the movement but does it in a baffling, polemic style, confusing the reader with ideological jargon. Haywood, like Lightfoot, has an agenda to promote, and strongly believes that he is right and has a monopoly on the truth, or the best way to achieve Black liberation. Haywood is far more concerned with being right, or following the prescribed "right" communist ideology, so much so that he is incapable of modifying his to accommodate the peculiar aspects of the Black freedom struggle; he is unwilling to admit that race, and not class, may indeed be the motivating factor behind the oppression of African Americans in the United States.

Hudson is far less dogmatic, and far more practical. His goals are not weighed down by intra-party squabbling over this tendency and that. He is emphatically not a theorist. Hudson never got far enough to put a theory forward even if he wanted to. He has more immediate concerns and goals in mind than theoretical conflicts. Hudson sees communism as a means to an end, which for him, is an end to racial discrimination and economic exploitation at the hands of the capitalist bourgeoisie. Hudson is far more willing than Haywood and Lightfoot, to a lesser degree, to admit that race is the motivating factor behind the oppression of the African American in the United States, rather than class conflict. However, Hudson agrees with Lightfoot in rejecting self-determination in a Black republic outside the United States, preferring to claim the rights to which Black Americans are already entitled. Additionally, Hudson's recollections of his life as a working-class Black man in Alabama at mid-century is as valuable to the

historian as his contributions to the role of communism in the South and in the Black freedom struggle.

The fact that Hudson is based in the South, where Jim Crow is at its most powerful, may also account for his greater pragmatism than that of Lightfoot and Haywood. Hudson, more than Lightfoot or Haywood, is concerned with how communism will make life for African Americans in the South better. This is not to say that Lightfoot and Haywood are not concerned with the plight of Black Americans in the South, but the lack of immediacy to the worst of Jim Crow may account for why the two Northern-based activists are more embroiled than Hudson in abstract discussion and debates over Marxism-Leninism and in political struggles.

Conclusion

Lightfoot's first two decades were pivotal to understanding him as a historical figure. As a child growing up with his grandmother, and later with his parents, the problem of racism did not have a major effect on him. Later, when his family moved to Chicago, Lightfoot became more aware of the disadvantages that came along with his race and color. Though a child, Lightfoot was precocious, and he sought out the best possible opportunities for himself. Initially attracted to Garveyism and the idea of becoming a Black capitalist in his own right, he came to realize the futility of such an idea in a world where he could never be truly autonomous or free from economic conditions set by whites. Politically minded from a young age, Lightfoot looked for a home in either of the two major political parties. The Republican Party appealed due to the legacy of Abraham Lincoln, and initially offered more opportunities to Black Chicagoans. The Democratic Party, historically hostile to African Americans but

becoming more interested in their votes in the urban North, offered Lightfoot the chance to be a rising star. However, the Great Depression made those options unpalatable for Lightfoot. He saw the failures of the two parties to address both the problems of racism and the problems of capitalism and decided their attempts at finding solutions were feeble, half-hearted, and unlikely to succeed in eradicating racial hatred and poverty. Only the Communist Party seemed to be ready to confront those issues head-on. Lightfoot was ready to commit himself to the cause.

Chapter 2

In the Thick of Things, 1932-1949

Development of a Young Black Communist – Lightfoot in the 1930s

Once Lightfoot had committed to the cause of communism, he was fully immersed in the struggle for its success in the United States. He was convinced by his friends in the party that such success was only a matter of time. "This system," capitalism, "cannot last more than five years," David Poindexter told Lightfoot in 1931. Fully appreciating the inaccuracy of Poindexter's prediction, Lightfoot noted in his autobiography that circumstances as they existed in 1931 made such success appear likely. The Great Depression had exposed the flaws of capitalism in the United States and efforts to reform had yet to come. Lightfoot recalled that it seemed probable that the Communist parties in France and Germany would soon win power in Western Europe, and the apparent success of communism in the Soviet Union signified an ideology on the march.[46] Increasing numbers of Americans were attracted to the doctrines of communism as well as other radical ideologies. These facts combined with Poindexter's charismatic certainty convinced Lightfoot that the "socialist revolution was imminent."[47]

As an up and coming member of the party, Claude Lightfoot was assigned the responsibility of coordinating local party efforts to support the movement to free the Scottsboro Boys of Alabama and Angelo Herndon, an African American member of and organizer for the Communist Party USA, held prisoner in a Georgia jail on charges of "insurrection." The Communist Party had taken upon itself the responsibility of liberating the Scottsboro Nine, and was obviously deeply interested in the outcome of Herndon's case. Through its previous efforts in the South, "the [Communist Party] had already built

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[46] Lightfoot, 41-2.
[47] Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at Its Grassroots, 1928-35* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007) 52-3.

a strong base of support" among Black people there, gaining a reputation as "a 'race' organization."[48] In Chicago, party leaders directed its members to focus their energies, for the moment, on Scottsboro.[49] While the party organized in South Side churches on behalf of the accused, Lightfoot's major role was to facilitate the public appearances and travel for the mother of Olin Montgomery, one of the boys falsely accused of raping two white women in the Scottsboro case.[50] Lightfoot's role in these momentous events for the party, added to his already demonstrated abilities as a political campaigner, led to the party steering him toward running for local and state office.[51]

The Communist Party saw an opportunity in the political conditions caused by the Great Depression and decided that 1932 was a good opportunity to run more candidates for office on the federal, state, and local level, and Lightfoot would appear on a general election ballot for the first time. Lightfoot reflected in his memoirs on that political year, as the Communist Party National Convention met in Chicago, Lightfoot had a front-row seat for all the action. The party nominated William Z. Foster and James Ford for president and vice president respectively. Lightfoot was especially delighted with Ford's nomination; Ford was the first Black man to be nominated for one of the nation's two highest offices since Frederick Douglass was nominated for vice president by the marginal Equal Rights Party in 1872.[52] Ford's nomination was not without contest, as Lightfoot recalled a southern delegate loudly proclaiming he would rather die than nominate a Black man for one of the two highest offices in the land. This was perhaps a

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[48] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) 80.
[49] Storch, 77.
[50] *Ibid*., 96; Lightfoot, 44-5.
[51] Lightfoot, 45.
[52] *Ibid*.

preview of things to come, especially for Black Communists in the South, as scholar Michael Dawson noted that the party, seeking to bring more white southerners into the fold, started to abandon interracial organizing on a wide scale as the decade wore on.[53] Yet in 1932, Lightfoot seemed unconcerned by this momentary setback, as the year marked the beginning of Lightfoot's own career as a seeker of public office. The party slated him as the Communist nominee for State Representative in the 3rd Senatorial District.[54] Lightfoot received approximately 33,000 votes, far surpassing the presidential ticket performance in the district.[55] Nationally, 1932 saw the end of a forty-year period of Republican dominance of the presidency and the Congress, in favor of the rise of the New Deal coalition. Lightfoot, as well as many other observers, noted the shift of African American voters from the party of Lincoln to the party of FDR, as a result of the Republicans having abandoned their commitment to the civil rights of Black Americans and of having mismanaged the country's economy into the worst financial crisis yet seen in the United States.[56]

Lightfoot's development as a communist took him to New York where he trained in a series of party training schools. There he learned the "science of Marxism-Leninism," a doctrine Lightfoot would follow and espouse for the rest of his life. Marxism-Leninism was the official party doctrine of the Soviet Union. As in orthodox Marxism, the doctrine called for a classless society, common ownership of land and the

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[53] Michael C. Dawson, *Blacks In and Out of the Left* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013) 56-7.
[54] Located in the South Side of Chicago. From 1870 to 1980, Illinois elected members of its lower house by multi-member senatorial districts, through a process of cumulative voting. Three representatives would be elected by cumulative vote within each senatorial district; voters could choose to spread their votes for multiple candidates or vote up to three times for one candidate.
[55] Lightfoot, 46.
[56] *Ibid*., 45.

means of production, but also called for a vanguard party of professional revolutionaries to lead the way into a socialist state, which was an addition to Marxist thought by Vladimir Lenin. Party officials taught Lightfoot and others about the "social laws governing society" since the dawn of civilization, how to understand and make sense of history, and dialectical materialism, "the heart of the science" of Marxism-Leninism. Lightfoot credited this training with giving him the insight necessary to adjust to rapid change and more importantly, deal with the endless number of setbacks he would endure as a communist living in the leading nation of the capitalist world, the United States. In his autobiography, Lightfoot takes pains to inform his reader that the school did not teach students how to violently overthrow the government of the United States. Rather, Lightfoot makes clear, the young Communists were victims of state violence inflicted upon them.[57] Later, in 1934, the party directed Lightfoot into the Young Communist League to continue his development as a member of the party. Lightfoot met some of his closest lifelong comrades in the League, including Ishmael Flory, later a prominent state party leader, and most importantly for Lightfoot, his future wife, Geraldyne Gray, sister of a new recruit, John Gray. These people and others formed what would become the nucleus of the Illinois Communist Party in the years and decades to come, surviving war, cold war, McCarthyism, and seeming irrelevance as time went on. But in the mid-1930s, all of that was in the future, and Lightfoot, as much as any of his other comrades, remained convinced that a change in the system was as close and as inevitable as ever.[58]

[57] *Ibid*., 48.
[58] *Ibid*., 50

"Black and white, unite and fight!" was the defiant motto of Communists in Chicago in the 1930s, and Claude Lightfoot was at the center of many direct actions emphasizing the unity of the working class in defiance of pre-existing racial and cultural norms.[59] After the 1932 campaign, Lightfoot became one of three thousand delegates who participated in one of the protests, a march on Washington in December 1932, objecting to conditions of hunger and poverty throughout the Depression-stricken country. The aim, Lightfoot recalled in his memoirs, was to compel the federal government to pass unemployment and social insurance legislation. Although the protestors were watched closely by federal law enforcement and the military, the soon-to-be Vice President of the United States, John Nance Garner (D-TX) [60] agreed to an audience with Lightfoot and other leaders of the march. Garner was polite to the group but was non-committal to the protestors' demands. The incoming administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt would prove to be receptive to such ideas, as both unemployment insurance and social security would pass through Congress during Roosevelt's first term as president.[61] Lightfoot and others led two other notable direct actions on behalf of Chicago's poor in 1933 and 1934; a march on Springfield in pursuit of cash relief from the state government, and a demonstration against racist hiring practices at the DuSable High School construction site. The state agreed to change over to cash payments from vouchers. The DuSable incident was notable for the police brutality Lightfoot endured, but also for the first meeting between Lightfoot and Jack Kling, a young white

[59] *Ibid*., 54
[60] Garner was vice president-elect but was then serving out his final term as the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and thus in a position to move legislation along in the lame-duck session of the 72nd Congress.
[61] Lightfoot, 46.

Communist who attempted to protect Lightfoot and whom the police arrested along with Lightfoot.[62] Kling, a Jewish New Yorker who had joined the party in 1928 and became a party organizer, was the first white man Lightfoot could recall intervening to protect him, a Black man, from the police.[63] For this act of heroism, Lightfoot was grateful and amazed. He and Kling became comrades and lifelong friends, sharing in the post-World War II struggles of the party, and eventually serving consecutively as the leader of the Illinois Communist Party in the 1960s and 1970s.[64]

Young Lightfoot in Moscow: Seventh World Congress of the Comintern

Such was the regard local Communist Party leaders had for this brash young activist, that Lightfoot was named one of twenty delegates to the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in Moscow in 1935.[65] For a young Black man who had never been outside the country, such an opportunity must have thrilled him. This opportunity, and what he would see in Europe and in the Soviet Union, would further prove to the young novice what he was inclined to believe the entire time; that the Marxist-Leninist variety of communism was the only system under which people of color could overcome racism, and under which the poor could overcome their poverty and deprivation at the hands of the capitalist class. The Democratic and Republican Parties offered him the racial and economic *status quo*. The Communist Party offered him the chance to see the world.

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[62] *Ibid*., 49-50.
[63] *Ibid*., 50; Storch, *Red Chicago*, 62.
[64] Michael Hirsley, "REDS: Chicago's Communists: Nothing to Lose but Their Chains," *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File); Chicago, Ill.*, May 23, 1982, sec. Section 9.
[65] Lightfoot, 56.

Upon arriving in Europe, Lightfoot and his fellow delegates to the Seventh Congress were feted by local communist parties, particularly in London. There the British Communist Party treated the American representatives as honored guests and provided a chauffeur and escort for their sightseeing excursions. In Hyde Park, London, Lightfoot reveled in the familiar experience of the open-air forum, reminding him of his days spent in Washington Park. He was awed as he stood in Highgate Cemetery, at the graveside of the venerable Karl Marx, and disappointed as he listened to his onetime boyhood hero Marcus Garvey, declining in both influence and in health, hold forth in a public forum. Continuing his journey to Moscow, Lightfoot was unable to appreciate the aesthetic architecture of Copenhagen without thinking of the poor on whose backs the beautiful buildings had been constructed and maintained.[66]

When Lightfoot arrived in the Soviet Union for the first time, it was almost as though he had found his utopia. This first visit to the Soviet Union made a profound impression on him, from the moment he and his American comrades arrived in Leningrad, formerly Saint Petersburg, and were whisked to their hotel from the customs checkpoint, personally escorted by party officials. Leningrad impressed Lightfoot more than London or Copenhagen, despite the exploitative opulence of the old Tsarist capital. He saw parallels in the simple lifestyles of Vladimir Lenin and the founder of Saint Petersburg, Tsar Peter the Great. An unlikely comparison, but one that Lightfoot thought apt. Though surrounded by opulence, Lenin and Peter the Great lived simply and performed great work on behalf of the people. Even though Peter the Great had been an emperor born to rule, Lightfoot admired his accomplishments for the people. But

[66] *Ibid*., 57.

Lightfoot was most thrilled to see where history had been made in the days of the Bolshevik Revolution. He toured the Winter Palace, home of the Provisional Government, the battleship *Aurora*, whose crew mutinied against the Provisional Government and fired the first shot in the assault against the Winter Palace, the Smolny Institute, Bolshevik headquarters in 1917, all places that were important in the events of the October Revolution. From this heady experience, Lightfoot and his American comrades embarked for Moscow.[67]

The Seventh World Congress of the Comintern would be best remembered for the "Popular Front" strategy to combat fascist aggression in the world. Lightfoot's attendance at the Congress gave him a front-row seat to this momentous shift in Communist policy. Prior to this point, the Soviet-led communist movement held a confrontational attitude toward the West and especially other non-communist states and movements. They eschewed cooperation with socialists, liberals, and other leftists, whom the Soviets had declared bourgeois abettors of fascism who mouthed socialist principles but did not really believe in them.[68] Lightfoot was present in the audience as Bulgarian communist Georgi Dimitrov[69] proclaimed the need for leftists and liberals to unite against the Nazi threat, establishing what would be called the "Popular Front" against fascism. Later, after the closing of the Seventh World Congress, the Sixth Congress of the Youth Communist International began in Moscow, to which Lightfoot was also a delegate. There he read a speech written by a committee of young communists from the United States and the

[67] *Ibid*., 58-9.
[68] Storch, 82.
[69] Head of the Communist International, 1935-43; later prime minister of Bulgaria, 1946-49.

Soviet Union regarding a speech Lenin had given to a similar gathering of young communists in 1921, and Lightfoot's speech was broadcast on Soviet radio.[70]

One notable characteristic of Lightfoot's approach to the Soviet Union, and later to other communist countries, was his lack of willingness to seriously question what local party officials told him or showed him on his visits. Lightfoot first demonstrated this characteristic on this visit to the Soviet Union. In his memoirs, Lightfoot recalled his tour of a Soviet prison, and marveled how un-prisonlike the place seemed to be. Indeed, Lightfoot said, it was more "like confinement in school in preparation for a career." Prison officials showed Lightfoot the classes in communist ideology and told him about the rehabilitative measures they took when releasing convicts upon the completion of their sentences, such as sending them far away from the places where their crimes had been committed, and not informing the local populace of the convict's criminal past.[71] To be sure, as Lightfoot pointed out, this approach sounded more humane and more inclined toward making a productive citizen out of a former criminal. However, Lightfoot didn't interrogate the policies very closely. For instance, it may have been good that the released convict was sent far from the place where he committed his crimes. But Lightfoot says nothing about the dislocation of the released prisoner from his home and family, not to mention very little on what skills beyond mastery of Marxism-Leninism the prisoner had been taught which he could take with him to the new location which would keep him out of trouble. Again, this approach sounded more humane and more in keeping with the concept of rehabilitation than the American model with which Lightfoot was familiar,

[70] Lightfoot, 63-66.
[71] *Ibid*., 60-61.

and this very fact is likely one reason the Soviet approach made such an impression on Lightfoot.

Popular Front

The CPUSA took the opportunity to refashion itself publicly into a relatable American organization and began changing its language to appeal to the political mainstream.[72] With the first meeting of the National Negro Congress scheduled for February 1936 came a perfect opportunity for Lightfoot and CP leaders to put the Popular Front idea into actual practice, as opposed to theory. The Congress aimed at being a broad-based coalition of divergent political and social organizations united "with other New Deal reform and labor groups to fight for the rights of African Americans and expand American democracy."[73] CP leaders hoped that the National Negro Congress "would become a 'Negro's Popular Front,' an auxiliary to the Popular Front" uniting divergent left-wing and liberal groups under one banner to focus on Black issues with racism and capitalism while also combating fascist influences.[74] Lightfoot recalled being in some of the meetings which organized the National Negro Congress and the Southern Negro Youth Congress, an "independent youth affiliate" of the NNC whose mission it was to organize young Black workers.[75] He praised the new approach of the Comintern, calling for a broad anti-fascist front which allowed Communists to "participate *as Communists* in the struggle."[76] Lightfoot exalted the meeting as an opportunity for

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[72] Mark Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983) 170.
[73] Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012) 15.
[74] Bill V. Mullen, Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999) 4.
[75] Gellman, 2.
[76] Italics mine.

leaders of Black America from all walks of life to unite against oppression "in a way not seen since…the Reconstruction period," and organize Black workers into the trade union movement to advocate for their rights.[77] Other Black leaders were leery of a meeting seemingly dominated by radical forces and saw the event as potentially damaging to the cause of Black liberation, notably Congressman Arthur Mitchell (D-IL),[78] whom Lightfoot noted as having given a "red-baiting" speech denouncing the National Negro Congress on the floor of the United States House of Representatives. Lightfoot believed that the major contribution of the NNC was "adding a class content to the struggle for Black liberation…helping to unionize the South, organizing Black and white workers together." He viewed the organization as a momentous step toward future successes in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.[79]

The defining event of the Popular Front era was the Spanish Civil War. For many communists, it was "the next logical step" in the fight against fascism, and for Black communists in particular, participation in the war was a next logical step from the anti-racist, anti-fascist National Negro Congress and the Southern Negro Youth Congress.[80] Many Black Communists went to Spain to fight for the Loyalist Republican government against the fascist forces led by Generalissimo Francisco Franco.[81] A true Popular Front government, the Spanish Republic was led by a coalition of left-wing, progressive political groups, including communists and socialists. A number of Black Chicago communists went to Spain to fight, among them Harry Haywood and Lightfoot's

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[77] Lightfoot, 70-71.
[78] Mitchell had defeated Oscar De Priest (R) in 1934 in Illinois' 1st Congressional District. He was the first African American elected to the United States House of Representatives as a Democrat.
[79] Lightfoot, 71-72.
[80] Haywood, 467-68.
[81] Caudillo (leader) of Spain, 1939-75. Still dead.

stepfather, Oliver Law, who would die in combat. Lightfoot wanted to go, but the party wanted him to remain in Chicago as an organizer to marshal support for the Loyalist cause and assist others who wanted to circumvent American neutrality to go to Spain and fight.[82]

The Popular Front period officially ended with the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939. The policy of a popular, anti-fascist front went by the wayside as communist parties around the world quickly followed the new directives from Moscow. The CPUSA was among these parties. Many party members followed along with the cynical, self-serving decision of the Soviet Union. Harry Haywood, who fought against fascism in Spain, defended the pact in his memoirs as a "brilliant and necessary diplomatic move" in response to Soviet isolation by the "imperialist" powers of the West.[83] Haywood was candid and open in his following the Kremlin line, but Lightfoot, in his memoirs, was conveniently silent regarding the end of the Popular Front era. He offered neither a condemnation nor a defense of the Soviet Union's actions, although it can be assumed that he supported the pact, given his loyalty to the party and his demonstrated lack of willingness to seriously challenge Soviet policy. This would continue to be a pattern throughout Lightfoot's political life; the Soviet Union would always be in the right, even when it was in the wrong.

Claude Lightfoot's War: Black Communist in Old England

One reason Lightfoot may have had for not participating in the Spanish Civil War was the fact that he had met a woman, Geraldyne Gray, sister of his comrade from his

[82] Lightfoot, 80-81.
[83] Haywood, 495.

Washington Park days, John Gray. Lightfoot had been running the Toussaint L'Overture Club[84] of the Young Communist League which met near Geraldyne's hand-knit shop at 43rd Street and South Park in Chicago. He had already known her through her brother, but in 1936 he began to pay more attention to her, frequently visiting her shop on his way to club meetings. He recruited her into the Toussaint L'Overture Club and their romance blossomed. Lightfoot noted Geraldyne's strong character as one of the things that most attracted him to her. Romantic feeling was not the only reason he wanted to marry her, as Lightfoot put it in his memoirs, they both felt "that each of us would be good for the total development of the other." Sharing common interests and goals, Claude and Geraldyne acted on their mutual attraction and married in 1937. They remained married despite hardship and separations until Geraldyne's untimely death in 1962.[85]

The Lightfoots had been married about four years by the time the United States entered World War II. Lightfoot enlisted, hoping to "open the door wider to challenge" racism, discrimination, and oppression at home by defeating Germany and its allies overseas. In this, he echoed the words of J. Finley Wilson, head of the Elks[86] fraternal organization:

> "Bilbo of Mississippi and Talmadge of Georgia,[87] both of you want to fight Hitler and I want to fight Hitler, too; so we will join hands and fight him. But all the time we are fighting, I'll be whispering in their ears, 'You racist bigots, just wait until this war is over – you have not seen any fighting yet.'"[88]

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[84] Lightfoot had started a South Side Club of the Young Communist League and, inspired by reading about the Haitian Revolution, named his club after the famous revolutionary Toussaint L'Overture.
[85] Lightfoot, 79.
[86] Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World, a Black fraternal organization. Not affiliated with the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, which at this time, was whites-only.
[87] Theodore Bilbo, United States Senator from Mississippi; Eugene Talmadge, Governor of Georgia.
[88] Lightfoot, 84-85.

Lightfoot and Wilson both evoked what would be known as the "Double V" campaign, victory over fascism abroad and victory over racist oppression at home in the United States. It was in this spirit that Lightfoot joined the United States Army in 1941. He was ready to "strike a blow for freedom," but his experience in the Army would disappoint him.

The Army sent Lightfoot to Camp Custer, Michigan for initial basic training, then onward to Fort McClellan, near Anniston, Alabama for additional infantry training, despite the fact that Lightfoot and other Black soldiers were assigned to non-combat roles. There he encountered the Jim Crow South for the first time in his adult life, as he experienced the full brunt of white Southern racism in the town of Anniston. Outraged, he wrote to President Roosevelt, but the letter never arrived, and it is doubtful Lightfoot would have received a reply at all, much less a satisfactory one, had the letter been delivered to the White House. His fellow soldiers in his unit were a mixed bag as far as intellect and politics were concerned. Lightfoot took the opportunity to educate these men, whom he thought "exceptionally sharp…but often…wrong" in their views. The "brothers" tired of Lightfoot's didactic political talk and he soon learned to "put politics in the background and have some fun" whenever and wherever he could find it.[89] It was perhaps just as well that Lightfoot's efforts at educating and organizing fellow soldiers were for naught, as Lightfoot was about to feel for the first time the power of the federal government applied against him as a communist.

[89] *Ibid*., 85-86.

Lightfoot ended up in Monroe, North Carolina, where he worked in a quartermaster unit, and soon discovered that this assignment had been made with a purpose in mind. The War Department ordered all soldiers identified as members of the Communist Party to be taken out of combat units and put into non-combat positions. Further, Lightfoot recalled, "all Communists were to be taken into protective custody" in case of an emergency, "in other words, concentration camps." For Lightfoot, life in the Army had lost whatever charm it had left. The one bright spot in Monroe was a Christmas visit from his wife in 1942; they spent the holiday in a room in town, during which, Lightfoot later found out, they had been spied upon by the Army. "This was my first experience with the government intelligence system," Lightfoot remembered in his memoirs, the first of many such tangles. By this point, he was thoroughly disgusted with the United States Army and the government. He could not get out of the country fast enough. 1943 saw Lightfoot sailing across the Atlantic with thousands of other American soldiers to take part in opening up the long-awaited second front against Hitler in western Europe.[90]

Claude Lightfoot's war took place almost entirely in the United Kingdom. As a Black soldier, and even more than that, as a Black communist soldier, the United States Army had no interest in giving him a front-line combat assignment. Lightfoot therefore had plenty of leisure time and made the most of it in "merry old England." His commanding officer may have had an ironic sense of humor, as he assigned Lightfoot to take charge of the command's PX, or post exchange, where Lightfoot admitted to "deviating somewhat" from his communist principles by selling black market cigarettes

[90] *Ibid.*

to the troops. “I made enough money” from these transactions “to have fun in the pubs” around the army base.[91] It was in the local pubs that Lightfoot was exposed to English hospitality and was made aware just how differently people of color were treated outside of the United States. He lauded the British people for their lack of prejudice and fondly recalled the locals taking sides with Black soldiers against racist white American soldiers and officers. “I never encountered a manifestation of racism” in any of the English pubs, Lightfoot remembered.[92] Yet he was reminded of the inferiority white Americans imposed upon him when he fell into a frank discussion of American race relations with a white lieutenant from the South. The lieutenant politely received Lightfoot’s criticism, but humiliated him the following day with disproportionate punishment for a minor infraction.[93]

Lightfoot’s comrades-in-arms may have been less than receptive to his political talk, but he soon found local communists with whom he could engage in dialogue and find common ground. Perhaps stricken by the novelty of a Black American communist in their midst, local communists asked Lightfoot to teach a course on Marxism for them after one of them had heard him offer his political opinions in a local pub. Lightfoot found new purpose in his life as a result of the connections he had made with the local Communist Party. He felt so at home with his British comrades that he contemplated staying in the United Kingdom after the war. Only “nostalgic memories” of home and his wife Geraldyne prevented Lightfoot from relocating to Britain permanently.[94] Lightfoot’s experiences in England during the war tested his beliefs and prepared him to take on a

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[91] *Ibid.*, 88.
[92] *Ibid.*, 92.
[93] *Ibid.*, 90.
[94] *Ibid.*, 91-92.

leadership role in the Communist Party once he returned home. The political conditions of the postwar world would demand much of Lightfoot and other communists, both in terms of personal and political sacrifice.

A Brief Political Interlude

When Claude Lightfoot returned home from England in fall 1945, he joined thousands, if not millions, of other African Americans in reacclimating themselves to a home country where they could not enjoy the rights of citizenship to which they were entitled. On Lightfoot's return to Chicago, the party chose him to lead the South Side members. In the brief interlude between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, Lightfoot saw an opportunity to revive the sort of coalition-building that the Popular Front had made possible between 1935 and 1939.[95] Lightfoot needed to look no further than New York City to see that this was possible. In November 1943, Black New York lawyer Benjamin J. Davis had been elected to the New York City Council on the Communist Party ticket, and had won reelection in November 1945, thanks in part to New York City's use of a ranked-choice voting system and the support of Black Democratic voters.[96] A wave of violence against Black veterans swept through the South as they returned from the war, and Davis teamed with Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D)[97] in a "crusade against lynching" in 1946, for the "only time" Lightfoot could recall that "two public officials – one Communist and one a Democrat – joined together as equals to advance the cause of Blacks against racial

[95] *Ibid.*, 97.
[96] Gerald Horne, Black Liberation/Red Scare: Ben Davis and the Communist Party (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994) 116-17.
[97] Member of the United States House of Representatives from New York, 1945-71.

persecution."[98] Lightfoot joined in these cross-party activities, perhaps with a mind of building a popular political coalition which would advocate for Black liberation while potentially electing him to public office.[99] To such an end, Lightfoot began appearing on platforms at mass meetings organized by the NAACP, including one event headlined by Isaac Woodard, a Black army veteran who had been blinded as a result of a police assault shortly after returning from the war. Lightfoot seemed to be of the opinion that only direct participation in the political system could ensure that issues important to Black Americans would be addressed by a predominantly white, predominantly hostile power structure.[100]

Following the example of Benjamin Davis in New York, Lightfoot decided to run for the Illinois Senate in the Fifth Senatorial District.[101] Leading his campaign were his wife Geraldyne and his friend and comrade Ishmael Flory. Their first order of business was securing the five thousand signatures necessary for an independent or third-party candidate to appear on the ballot, which they did with ease.[102] Lightfoot recalled that the local Democratic organization, threatened by the widespread support Lightfoot received as he sought signatures, tried to induce him to withdraw from the race, for fear that Lightfoot's candidacy would result in a loss to the Republicans. The Democrats offered him the chance to run at more propitious time in the future, but Lightfoot declined.[103] In

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[98] *Ibid.*, 171-72; Lightfoot, 97-98.
[99] Lightfoot, 100-101.
[100] *Ibid.*, 99.
[101] Located in the South Side of Chicago. See Footnote 8 for more information on the voting system in place in the 1946 election.
[102] Lightfoot, 100.
[103] In his memoirs, Lightfoot is not clear whether the Democratic organization meant that they would stand aside and not field a candidate against Lightfoot in their hypothetical electoral scenario, thus allowing him to be elected as an independent or on the Communist Party ticket, or whether they wanted him to join the Democratic Party and run under their banner, as a Democrat. Given the political climate at the time, one can reasonably assume that the Democratic Party would not be inclined to take on a soon-to-be ex-

response, the Democrats, in a time-honored Chicago political tradition, challenged Lightfoot's petition signatures, and predictably, the Democratic-controlled elections board ruled against Lightfoot, despite the legal aid of Chicago's leading Black attorney, Richard Westbrook. The Illinois branch of the Communist Party USA met and decided against supporting Lightfoot in a write-in campaign, but Lightfoot pressed on. The "enthusiastic" support "in the streets and in homes" failed to translate into votes on Election Day 1946, as Lightfoot recorded only about a thousand votes. Lightfoot believed several thousand more votes had been "stolen," no doubt a possibility, given the well-known practices of the Cook County Democratic machine, but offered no proof of the accusation in his memoirs.[104]

For Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party

Lightfoot was discouraged by his loss, but nonetheless determined to revive a united popular front against racism and oppression. He and others, Communists as well as non-Communists, put pressure on the Democratic Party to slate Black candidates in the off-year elections of 1947, but the Democrats would not do so.[105] This setback caused Lightfoot and the Chicago Communists to redirect their efforts from pressuring the Democrats to running their own slate in the 1947 elections. The united left forces slated prominent Black leaders to run on a Progressive Party ticket, including Lightfoot's one-time attorney, Richard Westbrook. They then assigned Lightfoot the responsibility of organizing the South Side, Lightfoot's home bailiwick with which he was popular.[106]

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communist with such a high profile as Lightfoot enjoyed on the South Side of Chicago. One would assume that, if Lightfoot's recollection is correct, the first of the two possibilities is the more likely one.

[104] Lightfoot, 101.

[105] *Ibid.*, 102.

[106] *Ibid.*, 103.

After procuring the necessary number of signatures, this time uncontested by the Cook County Democratic organization, Lightfoot's main job was organizing labor to turn out in force for the Progressive slate. The campaign became something of a family affair for Lightfoot, as Geraldyne, her brother John Gray, and her sister Edmonia Swanson, assisted him in running the campaign out of the Cook County Bar Association offices on the South Side. In his memoirs, Lightfoot recalled that on the South Side there was tremendous energy in and around the Progressive campaign, and this time, the energy translated to electoral success; while the Progressive slate did not win, the ticket did carry "most of the Black wards on the South Side" and demonstrated political support and viability for the 1948 elections. Lightfoot saw the Progressive success in 1947, along with similar triumphs in New York and California as laying the foundations for a Progressive presidential campaign.[107]

Distrustful of President Harry S. Truman, his belatedly partial commitment to Black civil rights, and his hostility to the Soviet Union, Communists like Lightfoot in Chicago and Benjamin Davis in New York united with leftists of other stripes in supporting Henry A. Wallace[108] as the Progressive Party's presidential candidate in 1948.[109] Wallace, though not a communist, did not reject communist support, and parted with President Truman's vigorously anti-communist, anti-Soviet rhetoric and policies. His appeal to Lightfoot and other Black Americans was substantial in that, of the major

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[107] *Ibid.*, 104-05.
[108] United States Secretary of Agriculture (1933-41), 33rd Vice President of the United States (1941-45), United States Secretary of Commerce (1945-46). Wallace had lost re-nomination as Vice President at the 1944 Democratic National Convention in Chicago to Truman, then United States Senator from Missouri, and repeatedly clashed with Truman over foreign policy after the latter's ascension to the presidency following the April 1945 death of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Such clashes led to Wallace's expulsion from the Truman cabinet in 1946.
[109] Lightfoot, 103; Horne, 208.

presidential candidates in 1948,[110] Wallace alone was unambiguous in his opposition to Jim Crow racial discrimination, and he alone refused to speak to segregated audiences in the South.[111] Lightfoot put his organization into action for Wallace and the Progressive Party on the South Side of Chicago, and he had reason to be optimistic. He noted that Black support for Wallace was strong and enthusiastic. Black Chicagoans responded positively to a presidential candidate courageous enough to beard the lion in his den, facing down Jim Crow throughout the South. But, as with Lightfoot's write-in campaign of 1946, enthusiasm for Wallace did not translate into votes, and Lightfoot knew the reason why. The Democrats, at their national convention in Philadelphia, endorsed a strong civil rights plank, famously defended by the mayor of Minneapolis, Hubert H. Humphrey. While President Truman reluctantly accepted the civil rights plank, Black voters now felt that Truman had come out strongly for their rights, and now they could safely vote for him. Wallace was now seen as a nonviable spoiler. Truman shocked the political world, winning a close race against Thomas E. Dewey with the help of Black votes, but he would prove reluctant to act on their behalf once he had been elected to a full term as president in his own right.[112]

Conclusion

Claude Lightfoot's early life in the Communist Party exposed him to new experiences and molded him as a political leader. As he approached his fortieth birthday, Lightfoot could claim to have been on the front lines at a momentous time in history,

[110] The other major presidential candidates in 1948 were President Harry S. Truman (D), New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey (R), and South Carolina Governor J. Strom Thurmond (Dixiecrat).
[111] Lightfoot, 107.
[112] *Ibid.*, 108-09.

notably his presence at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International. He had reason to be hopeful for the future, personally and politically. His marriage to Geraldyne was strong, based on mutual compatibility and interests. His political future marked him as a future party leader, if not a holder of public office. His education as a communist was thorough through this period, and Lightfoot gained valuable experience as an organizer and as a spokesman for the cause. He utilized his World War II service in the United States Army to learn how to win people over to his argument without alienating them, and to develop contacts with communists overseas, which would prove to be useful in his later life.

All of Lightfoot's experiences prepared him for the difficult life of a communist in a capitalist stronghold. He knew better than most how outnumbered he was. Yet none of what he experienced to this point prepared him for what was to come in the late 1940s and into the 1950s. Anticommunist "red-baiting" had always been an issue with which Lightfoot had to contend, but the intensity of the Red Scare McCarthyist period to come was like nothing he had ever anticipated. It would take every bit of fortitude he possessed to make it through.

Chapter 3

"Period of Persecutions" and a New Hope, 1949-1971

Introduction

The period between 1949 and 1961 would prove to encompass "one of the worst periods of frustration" in the long life of Claude Lightfoot.[113] His freedom would be at constant risk, his name dragged through the mud in the mainstream media. He would be indicted by the federal government for conspiring in its overthrow, but ultimately be vindicated when the federal government dropped charges against him. He would lose his wife and comrade, Geraldyne, to cancer, and be forced to reshape his life in her absence. Yet between 1961 and 1971 would see Lightfoot emerge from the cloud of government oppression and mingle once more with communists on the international stage, as he once had in his youth, and he would set upon a journey in search of a communist solution to the problems of racism and poverty in America.

In the immediate postwar period, there had been a window of opportunity for rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the United States. Leaders like Henry Wallace advocated for an understanding with the Soviet Union and a realistic foreign policy which deemphasized confrontation between the two superpowers. However, it was only a matter of time before the two great ideological powers emerged in conflict with each other. Any hope of postwar cooperation was dashed in early 1946 when Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill exchanged their famous and inflammatory speeches on the incompatibility of capitalism and communism, the first shots of the forty-five year-long Cold War. Fear, hysteria, and paranoia gripped the Western capitalist nations, especially the United States. A previously unknown junior senator from Wisconsin would soon

[113] Lightfoot, 120.

catapult to prominence as the premier communist-hunter of the day. Congress would pass legislation to combat the threat of communism. Caught up in the Cold War hysteria was the leadership of the Communist Party USA, and as a rising star in the party, Lightfoot would soon find himself within the crosshairs of the federal government.

After the abortive presidential campaign of Henry Wallace in 1948, Claude Lightfoot became more involved in the leadership of the CPUSA. In 1949, as he and his family were relocating to the West Side Chicago neighborhood of Lawndale to take over a family apartment building, Lightfoot was elected Organizational Secretary of the Illinois Communist Party. Gil Green, the leader of the Illinois party, was then under federal indictment under the provisions of the Smith Act, a federal law criminalizing the advocacy of the overthrow of the federal government by force or violence.[114] Green would soon be forced to give up the leadership of the party in Illinois after his conviction, along with ten other defendants, by a federal court in New York. While Green went underground to avoid imprisonment, Lightfoot took over the state party as executive secretary.[115] As leader of the state Communist Party, Lightfoot was faced with legal threats to the very existence of the organization, the most immediate being a bill pending in the Illinois General Assembly. Sponsored by Senator Paul Broyles (R-Mount Vernon), the bill would have effectively outlawed the Communist Party in the state of Illinois. On March 14, 1951, Lightfoot went to the Capitol in Springfield to testify against the measure.[116] In a contentious exchange with Illinois State Senator Clyde C. Trager (R-

[114] The Smith Act, named after its author and sponsor, Representative Howard W. Smith (D-Virginia), was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in June 1940. Originally designed to penalize fascist supporters of Nazi Germany, the law was primarily used after the Second World War against left-wing radicals, especially against leaders of the Communist Party USA.
[115] Lightfoot, 110-11.
[116] *Ibid*., 111.

Peoria), Lightfoot denounced the Broyles bill and demurred when asked by Senator Trager whether or not he (Lightfoot) would take up arms to defend the United States in a potential conflict with the Soviet Union. Lightfoot shot back, "Would you bear arms for my people who were lynched in the south?", at which point the majority leader, Senator Wallace Thompson (R-Galesburg) charged Lightfoot with contempt of the Senate and ordered him taken away by the Senate sergeant-at-arms. He was held for all of ten minutes before he returned to the hearing and apologized to the Senate. The *Chicago Tribune*, in its coverage of the hearing, depicted Lightfoot as an angry Black man "shouting" at the senators and characterized Lightfoot's apology as insincere.[117] In his memoirs, Lightfoot makes no mention of the contempt incident in his recollection of the hearing but noted that he effectively blackmailed one state senator, C. C. Wimbish, into opposing the Broyles bill under consideration. Reminding Wimbish that they had once shared a platform and attended Communist meetings and events, Lightfoot told the senator that if the Broyles bill passed, Wimbish would be subject to its penalties too. This "sobered him up" and Wimbish opposed the bill, which ended up not becoming law.[118] Perhaps because of Lightfoot's efforts to ensure the failure of the bill, its sponsor, Senator Broyles, demanded that Governor Adlai E. Stevenson II and state Attorney General Ivan A. Elliott arrest Lightfoot under existing state anti-subversive laws.[119] Stevenson and

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[117] Thomas Morrow, "Eludes Custody By Apology to Illinois Senate: Secretary of Red Party Held in Contempt," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, March 15, 1951, sec. Part 1.
[118] Lightfoot, 111-12.
[119] There is some confusion over whether or not the bill Lightfoot opposed in March 1951 passed the General Assembly. Lightfoot recalls that the Broyles bill "was eventually defeated," implying that the bill failed in the General Assembly. News articles from August 1951 mention a veto by Governor Stevenson of a Broyles-Young bill, but this may be regarding a separate bill. This paper, for lack of better information, will assume that the contemporary news articles and Lightfoot's memoirs refer to the same bill.

Elliott did not act on Broyles' demands,[120] and Lightfoot remained free, for the moment.[121]

Lightfoot's victory against the Broyles bill notwithstanding, the climate remained, to put it mildly, hostile for communists. The Truman Administration was determined not to be seen as "soft" on communism and began concerted efforts to destroy the CPUSA.[122] The Smith Act trial which ensnared Gil Green, Lightfoot's predecessor as leader of the Illinois Communist Party also took down New York City Councilman Benjamin Davis, perhaps the most well-known Communist elected official in the United States, and certainly the best-known Black Communist. Arrested in July 1948, Davis and ten other leading Communists stood trial in the federal court at New York.[123] "The indictment and trial of the top party leadership was a classic frame-up based on a statute ultimately viewed as unconstitutional," wrote historian Gerald Horne in his biography of Davis.[124] The trial lasted from January to October 1949, resulting in the conviction of all eleven defendants, despite questions regarding the fairness of the trial and spurring popular reaction against the verdict, especially from Harlem, the area of New York City represented by Davis on the City Council.[125] Davis ended up losing his bid for reelection to the Council, and the Council decided not to wait for the swearing-in of his successor.

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[120] It is perhaps worth noting that, in the hysterically anticommunist frenzy of the early 1950s, the next time Stevenson and Elliott faced the electorate (Stevenson nationally when running for president in 1952, Elliott in Illinois when running for reelection as attorney general), both men lost to more staunchly anticommunist Republican opponents.
[121] Johnson Kanady, "Broyles Calls on Governor to Drive Out Reds: Cites Claim of Ample Powers to Act," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, August 15, 1951, sec. Part 1.; "Haven't Power to Arrest Reds, Elliott Says," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.,* August 25, 1951, sec. Part 2.
[122] Horne, 211-12.
[123] *Ibid*., 208.
[124] *Ibid*., 210.
[125] *Ibid*., 225-26.

The New York City Council, barring Davis from voting on the matter, unanimously voted to expel him from the Council.[126]

The conviction of Davis, a high-profile Black Communist, sent a message to other Black Communists that they too were under the watchful eye of federal law enforcement, which was prepared to go to any lengths to destroy communism in the United States. The CPUSA, which had advocated on behalf of Black America, had a significant Black presence, and which boasted African American leaders, had been decimated by the federal government in the name of "freedom" and anticommunism and scattered to the four winds. The persecution of the party sent a chilling message to Black Americans contemplating joining its cause. Claude Lightfoot understood the perils now concomitant with the role of leadership within the remnants of the CPUSA, and in 1951 began to make preparations to go underground, as Gil Green had done after his October 1949 conviction.[127] After settling remaining business in Chicago, Lightfoot, with a loan and money earned from selling his interest in the West Side six-flat apartment building, bought a secluded farm some fifteen miles from the coast of Lake Michigan, near Grand Junction, Michigan. To allay suspicions, Geraldyne did not join him, and the Lightfoots were involuntarily separated for a year as he hid out in Michigan and she went to New York to go underground.[128] For about three years, Claude Lightfoot remained underground before the law finally caught up with him.

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[126] *Ibid*., 240.
[127] Lightfoot, 112.
[128] *Ibid*., 112-13.

Lightfoot Under the Gun

Lightfoot's life on the run from federal authorities ended on June 26, 1954. After he enjoyed a meal at a barbeque restaurant on Chicago's South Side, federal agents took him into custody and had him arraigned by Federal District Court Judge Philip L. Sullivan on charges of "conspiring to overthrow the Government by force and violence." Sullivan ordered Lightfoot held on a $50,000 bond.[129] Unlike previous Smith Act prosecutions, federal authorities intended to prosecute Lightfoot on the basis of the "membership clause" of the Act.[130] Previous prosecutions had followed the charge of "conspiring to teach the overthrow of the government by force and violence." Now the mere fact of membership in the Communist Party was to be a prosecutable offense.[131] "This was the first time in U. S. history that a jury and judge were called upon to examine the content of people's minds to determine if they were guilty or not guilty," Lightfoot noted. He knew why he had been selected to be the federal government's test case in this new approach. As perhaps the most high-profile Black Communist remaining free in the country, he was extremely valuable to federal law enforcement. "Attorney General [Herbert] Brownell decided to make me a scapegoat," Lightfoot contended, "to send a message to Black Americans," spurred on by recent civil rights victories like the *Brown*

[129] *Ibid*., 114; "Key Red Seized by F. B. I.," *New York Times*, June 28, 1954.; "$50,000 Bail Set for Red," *New York Times*, June 29, 1954.
[130] The "membership clause" is found in Title I, Section 2, Clause 3 and reads as follows: "It shall be unlawful for any person to organize or help to organize any society, group, or assembly of persons who teach, advocate, or encourage the overthrow or destruction of any government in the United States by force or violence; or to be or become a member of, or affiliate with, any such society, group, or assembly of persons, knowing the purposes thereof."
[131] Lightfoot, 114.

v. Board of Education case, "to beware of joining the Communists" in hopes of effecting more radical and abrupt change.[132]

Judge Sullivan, at Lightfoot's arraignment, imposed a bond of $50,000, an incredibly high amount for a case of this type. Typically, the bond was set around $5,000.[133] Judge Joseph Sam Perry reduced the bail to $30,000, still a very large amount of money for a case of this type, but not before showing his bias against the defendant, calling Lightfoot's testimony in court "a revelation of fraud and deceit…an insult to the intelligence of the court."[134] The outrageously high bond showed the seriousness of the federal government in prosecuting Lightfoot, and how dangerously they viewed him and his leadership activities in the CPUSA. This sense of urgency on the part of the government is questionable, given the thoroughness with which it had pursued previous CPUSA leaders. However, it is likely that federal authorities wanted to take no chances, fearing that a free Lightfoot, the most high-profile Black Communist not yet imprisoned or exiled, was more dangerous than an imprisoned Lightfoot. Somehow, after a few months, Geraldyne managed to come up with the bail money and he was released pending trial. The trial was set for January 1955.[135]

Lightfoot's friends in the party rallied around him in support. Singer and activist Paul Robeson headlined a Washington Park rally to advocate for Lightfoot's defense. Lightfoot's legal team was well-versed in matters relating to Smith Act prosecutions. John Abt, longtime defender of American communists, George Crockett, lead defense

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[132] *Ibid*., 114-15.
[133] "Reduces Bond of Communist Party Leader: Judge Orders $30,000 Bail for Lightfoot," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, July 18, 1954, sec. Part 1.
[134] *Ibid*.
[135] Lightfoot, 117.

attorney for Benjamin Davis, Gil Green, and the nine other Smith Act defendants in the 1949 New York trial, joined by Chicago attorneys Irving Steinberg and Pearl Hart "planned and executed" Lightfoot's defense.[136] Opposing Abt, Crockett, Steinberg, and Hart was the lead prosecutor, assistant United States Attorney James B. Parsons. Parsons, who was also Black, was almost certainly chosen by the Justice Department to blunt any accusations of racial prejudice on the part of the government. As the trial began on January 11, 1955, an almost hagiographical profile of Parsons in the *Chicago Defender* portrayed him as an expert in "anti-subversion," a dispassionate defender of freedom, "carrying the ball for American democracy," patiently explaining the aims and history of the Communist Party, making it clear that the CPUSA wanted to destroy the government of the United States by force and violence, and that Claude Lightfoot supported that aim.[137] Several witnesses testified against Lightfoot, claiming that he had taught at party training schools, and that one of the main tenets Lightfoot taught was the necessity for violent revolution.[138]

The defense maintained that Communist Party doctrine was in favor of establishing "American socialism thru gradual and peaceful processes," first and foremost, and that Lightfoot never advocated for a violent overthrow of the government unless violence was forced by the government. Rather, George Crockett invoked precedents in American history, noting that "changes desired by a majority of people in

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[136] *Ibid*.
[137] Alfred Duckett, "Uncle Sam's Jim Parsons Tackles Toughest Case: Claude Lightfoot Key In Legal Test," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967); Chicago, Ill.*, January 22, 1955.
[138] Percy Wood, "Two Tell Jury of Lightfoot's Red Activities: Former FBI Informant on Witness Stand," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, January 13, 1955, sec. Part 3.; Percy Wood, "FBI Spy Tells Lightfoot Vow To 'Spill Blood,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, January 20, 1955, sec. Part 4.

one country at one period in history and under one set of circumstances, may be achieved peaceably," while at other times and in other places, such changes desired by the majority could be achieved only through violence, "as was true of our own civil war…as was true of our own Revolutionary war."[139] This, the defense argued, was entirely consistent with Lightfoot's argument that Communists would seek to avoid bloodshed and preferred to effect change peacefully, but would spill blood "*if forced to do so*"[140] by the existing power structure.[141]

Such nuances were lost on Judge Sullivan and the jury. Parsons successfully persuaded the court that Lightfoot was a danger to American freedom, democracy, and society in general. The mere fact of membership in the Communist Party was a dangerous enough act and had to be dealt with harshly. On January 26, after a two-week trial and on the seventh ballot of deliberations, the jury found Claude Lightfoot guilty of violating the membership clause of the Smith Act. Lead defense attorney John Abt immediately announced his intention to move for a new trial, and failing that, his intention to appeal the verdict.[142] The *Chicago Tribune* was delighted with Lightfoot's conviction and his sentence of five years imprisonment and a $10,000 fine. The arch-conservative daily editorialized, "If the Lightfoot conviction is sustained, as we believe it ought to be, there is nothing to prevent the government from sending every Communist in America to the penitentiary. We think that would be a good idea."[143] However, Lightfoot

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[139] Percy Wood, "Red Aim Known to Lightfoot, U. S. Tells Jury: Plan for Violent Revolt Figures in Trial," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, January 12, 1955, sec. Section One.
[140] Italics original.
[141] Lightfoot, 118.
[142] Percy Wood, "Jury Finds Red Lightfoot Guilty: Communist Aid to Appeal Verdict," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, January 27, 1955, sec. One.
[143] "Lightfoot Convicted," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, January 30, 1955.

noted in his memoirs encouraging signs in the media that the extreme anticommunism of the McCarthy era was no longer as palatable to Americans as it once was. People were beginning to grow weary of the paranoia and hysteria regarding communism.[144] But three months later, as Lightfoot was appealing his own conviction to the United States Court of Appeals, a federal jury in Greensboro, North Carolina convicted Junius Scales, a native North Carolinian and Communist Party organizer, of the same violation of the Smith Act.[145] The government clearly was not through with the persecution and prosecution of the Communist Party.

While his case was under appeal, Lightfoot's life was beginning to change in new ways as he reached middle age. Politically, he was more prominent than ever. With many Communist Party leaders either imprisoned, exiled, underground, or disillusioned, the decimated party would elect Lightfoot, still Illinois party leader, to the national executive committee of the CPUSA in July 1958, beginning a period of service to the national party which would last the rest of his life.[146] Personally, Lightfoot gained new responsibilities as a father, when Geraldyne adopted a son named Earl, and, though previously indifferent to children and under incredible strain due to his legal troubles, Lightfoot quickly became a doting parent to the infant boy.[147] How Geraldyne came to adopt Earl is not known; Lightfoot does not address this event in his memoirs other than to say that it happened.

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[144] Lightfoot, 118-19.
[145] "Red Convicted in South: Second Found Guilty Under Untested Clause of Law," *New York Times,* 1955.
[146] Lightfoot, 119; Harry Schwartz, "U. S. Reds Uphold Nagy's Execution: National Committee Rejects Criticism -- Two Leaders Reported to Have Quit," *New York Times*, 1958.
[147] Lightfoot, 120.

The U. S. Court of Appeals denied Lightfoot's appeal on January 20, 1956. He immediately announced his intention for a rehearing in the lower court and if the second hearing yielded the same result, he would appeal to the United States Supreme Court.[148] Two months later, the high Court agreed to hear Lightfoot's appeal in its term beginning the following October, along with that of Junius Scales.[149] The Court held Lightfoot's case over to the October 1957 term, to hear further arguments, and on October 15, the Court reversed Lightfoot's conviction on the basis that his defense team lacked access to FBI reports that were used as prosecution evidence. The Court did not, however, rule on the constitutionality of the membership clause of the Smith Act itself.[150] The Court granted Lightfoot a retrial, which, due to other similar cases winding their way through the appeals process, was continually delayed. Finally, on November 15, 1961, nearly seven years after the end of the trial, due to new standards of proof and rules on evidence, the federal government dropped the charges against Lightfoot, admitting that their evidence did not show that Lightfoot either had "knowledge of the party's advocacy of the violent overthrow of the Government, or personally advocated it." For the first time in half a dozen years, the immediate threat of imprisonment no longer loomed over Claude

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[148] "Appeals Court Upholds Term For Lightfoot," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967); Chicago, Ill.*, January 21, 1956.
[149] Philip Dodd, "Supreme Court Agrees to Test of Smith Anti-Red Act: Also Backs Curb on Immunity," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, March 27, 1956, sec. SECTION ONE.; John Fisher, "Highest Court to Scrutinize Anti-Red Laws: Agrees to Review New Attacks on Legality," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, October 9, 1956, sec. Part 3.
[150] "Orders More Arguments in Lightfoot Case: High Court Questions Smith Act Legality," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, June 4, 1957, sec. Part 2.; Philip Dodd, "Court Bars Jailing of 2 More Reds: Lightfoot May Be Tried Again," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, October 15, 1957, sec. Part 1.

Lightfoot's head.[151] Lightfoot's troubles were by no means over, but the immediate threat at least was gone.

Still Under Siege: Claude Lightfoot in the Early 1960s

The decade of the 1960s would see one phase of Claude Lightfoot's life and activism come to a close, and another phase begin. His status as a local and state party leader would yield to a more national and international focus as he began to travel and become widely known in the communist world. During the decade, Lightfoot's personal life would see unwelcome and sudden change as he tried to cope with life under the microscope of the federal government. As he reassembled his life, Lightfoot would transform himself into a global spokesman for communism based in "the belly of the beast," and in the process, seek solutions for the problems of American racism abroad. His search would take him throughout the communist world. The travels and trials of Claude Lightfoot in the 1960s would set the stage for his most productive time as an intellectual, historian, and an observer of and commentator on foreign and domestic current events.

As Lightfoot's ordeal with the Justice Department over the Smith Act case finally came to an end, he found himself still within the crosshairs of the federal government. The six-year struggle ended positively for Lightfoot, as the Department declined to prosecute him further, but at the same time, the Justice Department reserved the right to order him to register as a communist and, as such, an "arm of the Soviet Union," as

[151] Austin C. Wehrwein, "Illinois Red Wins His Freedom As U.S. Drops Smith Act Trial: Motion to Dismiss Lightfoot Case Based on High Court Rulings Last Year," *New York Times*, 1961.; "Drop Red Case Tho Lightfoot Got Five Years: New Rulings on Proof Prevent Retrial," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, November 16, 1961, sec. Part 1.

required by law.[152] Lightfoot had previously declared his intention to defy the McCarran Act, a federal law requiring members of communist organizations to register as communists with the federal government,[153] if he was ordered to comply. This defiance was in spite of a possible sentence of five years in prison per day if he failed to register.[154] In November 1961, shortly after Lightfoot's charges had been dropped, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy rejected the right of communists to invoke the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination, citing the Supreme Court's opinion that the CPUSA was "controlled and directed by the Soviet Union."[155] Lightfoot's defenses of the Soviet Union would reinforce the Court's opinion. But at the moment, Lightfoot had other things than Kennedy on his mind. His wife was dying.

Geraldyne Lightfoot had returned from a trip to Europe and the Soviet Union in late 1960 in a weakened state. The diagnosis was lung cancer. Lightfoot recalled what happened when his wife sought treatment. "The doctor who was assigned to perform the operation asked her if she was related to Claude Lightfoot," who by that time was the *bête noire* of the *Chicago Tribune* and still appealing his Smith Act conviction. Geraldyne confirmed that she was his wife, and according to Lightfoot, the doctor flatly refused to treat her upon learning this fact.[156] Claude threatened to take Geraldyne to the Soviet Union for treatment and threatened the hospital with a lawsuit unless another doctor was assigned to her case. Not wanting to create an embarrassing public scene, and

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[152] Peter Kihss, "Communist Party Cuts Leaders to 3 on Registration Deadline," *New York Times*, 1961.
[153] Officially known as the Internal Security Act of 1950, or the Subversive Activities Control Act of 1950. The law required Communist organizations to register with the Attorney General and instituted the Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB) as an investigatory body.
[154] Lightfoot, 122.
[155] William Anderson, "Bars '5th' Plea to Escape Red Registration: Kennedy Warns Party of Quick Prosecution," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, November 19, 1961, sec. Part 1.
[156] Lightfoot, 133.

with a communist of all people, the hospital found another doctor to operate on Geraldyne.[157] It is debatable, however, just how true this account is, as we have no contemporary sources to corroborate Lightfoot's story. It is very possible that Lightfoot exaggerated the account to emphasize his unwarranted persecution. In any event, medical intervention was for naught, as she succumbed to the cancer which had spread to her brain on May 13, 1962.

In keeping with the gendered conventions of the time, Geraldyne's brief *Chicago Tribune* obituary described her as the wife of "one of the leaders of the Illinois Communist party and a national spokesman for the party," rather than as an activist in and out of the party in her own right.[158] The obituary silently implied that Mrs. Lightfoot couldn't possibly have agency of her own and reduced her to an auxiliary of and to her husband. Her more extensive obituary in the *Chicago Defender* noted her role in her church[159] as "a member of the social action group" and participation in women's clubs, but minimized her status as Claude Lightfoot's wife, with all which that entailed.[160] Clearly, the *Defender* was less interested than the more strident *Tribune* in reducing Geraldyne Lightfoot to a mere lackey, although this was probably not due to any progressive reevaluation of gender roles. Rather, this was probably due to the *Defender* wanting to emphasize Geraldyne's civic-mindedness in preference to her radicalism, the former being more palatable to the politics of respectability than the latter. For Claude Lightfoot, however, none of this took the sting out of this profound loss. The impact of

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[157] *Ibid.*
[158] "Obituaries - Mrs. Geraldyne Lightfoot," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, May 16, 1962, sec. Part 5.
[159] Mount Hebron Baptist Church.
[160] "Rites Saturday for Wife of C. Lightfoot," *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973); Chicago, Ill.*, May 16, 1962.

Geraldyne's death, combined with the death of his father the previous month, the increasing mental instability of his mother, and the stress of raising his son Earl, not to mention the long ordeal in the courts, bore heavily on Lightfoot as he sought to rebuild his life. Circumstances would not make this rebuilding project easy, however. On December 6, 1962, seven months after his wife's death, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy directed the Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB) to order Lightfoot and three other Chicagoans to register as members of the CPUSA.[161]

The hearings of the SACB, the investigatory body established by the McCarran Act, lambasted by Lightfoot as a "legal monstrosity," were open to the public and covered by the *Tribune* and the *Defender*. Over a two-day period in late January 1963, Lightfoot sat and listened to former comrades denounce him as a communist and support ordering him to register as such.[162] One such comrade, Lucius Armstrong, had joined the CP at the same time as Lightfoot, and the latter considered the former to be like a "brother" to him. Upon Armstrong's appearance, the *Defender* noted, Lightfoot dissolved into tears and declared that he never would have suspected Armstrong of such treachery and duplicity.[163] Another government spy, Lola Belle Holmes, informed on Lightfoot's activities in the CP for five years at the behest of the FBI, and commented to the *Tribune* that she expected insults and ill treatment at the hands of the communists in the hearing room, but, the paper approvingly quoted, Holmes believed such insults were "the price of

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[161] "Orders Four Registered as Reds in U. S.," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, December 10, 1962, sec. Part 2.
[162] "2 FBI Spies Pin Red Tag on Lightfoot: Link Chicagoan to Party Leaders," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, January 24, 1963, sec. S.
[163] "Lightfoot Hears 'Brother' Rip Him As 'Very Devout Communist,'" *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967); Chicago, Ill.*, January 26, 1963.

freedom."[164] Weeks after the hearings, the SACB ordered Lightfoot to register as a communist.[165] Lightfoot declined and planned to appeal the board's ruling to the United States Court of Appeals, predicting that the Supreme Court would eventually find "this whole thing [the McCarran Act] unconstitutional.

Even non-communists were caught up in the government's manic desire to control radicals and radicalism. Black journalist William Worthy, foreign correspondent for the *Baltimore Afro-American*, evaded the State Department's ban on travel to communist countries in 1956-1957, as he reported on happenings in China, the Soviet Union, and Hungary. The State Department then refused to issue Worthy a passport. Five years later, Worthy, a member of a pro-Castro group known as the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, violated the State Department ban on travel to Cuba.[166] The federal government indicted Worthy months later for violating the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, a law meant in part to control communists by barring them from leaving or entering the United States.[167] Federal judge Emmett Choate found Worthy guilty of violating the act in August 1962, and Worthy immediately appealed the ruling.[168] Worthy's was one of several court cases challenging communist control measures. In 1964, the Court found unconstitutional the Act's provision barring members of the CP from obtaining a passport,[169] and the following year, the Court overturned the registration

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[164] "Woman Tells of Spying on Lightfoot for the FBI," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, January 25, 1963, sec. Section One.
[165] "Lightfoot Told To Register As Red," *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973); Chicago, Ill.*, March 7, 1963.
[166] H. Timothy Lovelace Jr, "William Worthy's Passport: Travel Restrictions and the Cold War Struggle for Civil and Human Rights," Journal of American History 103, no. 1 (June 2016): 108, https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jaw009.
[167] *Ibid*., 114-16.
[168] *Ibid*., 121.
[169] Aptheker v. Secretary of State, 378 U.S. 500 (1964).

provision.[170] These two Court decisions would have a direct impact on Lightfoot's future activities with the CPUSA.

As is common after a series of traumatic events, Lightfoot sought an escape from his troubles. With a friend, Lawrence Davis, he began to frequent bars and clubs where, as Lightfoot put it, he would "[mingle] socially with most of the Black leaders of the West Side."[171] Despite the withdrawal of the Smith and McCarran Act charges, he was still under intense scrutiny. Lightfoot's every move was surveilled, and anything that could be used to discredit him among fellow communists and among Black people in general was used by the press. The *Tribune* in particular caught wind of Lightfoot's new sociability, and the intensely conservative daily pounced. To the city's paper of record, Lightfoot's "social mingling" looked a whole lot like hypocritical abandonment of his principles. The *Tribune* noted, with the thinly concealed disdain of a neighborhood gossip, that Lightfoot "had serious-minded Communists in a tizzy" as he "twisted down the primrose path" in nightclubs throughout the city.[172] Calling Lightfoot "the first Communist playboy," the *Tribune* barely managed to hide its appeals to racism, informing its readers that at least one of the girls their source observed with Lightfoot was a "20-year-old, red headed model named Liz."[173] The paper gleefully lambasted Lightfoot as a "devoted student of the twist," a dance "ridiculed in Moscow as decadent."[174]

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[170] Albertson v. Subversive Activities Control Board, 382 U.S. 70 (1965)
[171] Lightfoot, 133.
[172] Sandy Smith, "Communist Lives Up to Name--as Dancer," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, October 15, 1962, sec. Section One.
[173] *Ibid.*
[174] "New Court Battle Faced by Illinois Red," *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File); Chicago, Ill.*, March 11, 1963, sec. Section 2.

Lightfoot was hardly surprised by the *Tribune* story, noting nearly twenty years later that he knew the paper collaborated in efforts to discredit radicals and communists, but didn't know exactly from whom the *Tribune* got its information.[175] At a time of emotional distress and hardship, however, it was like kicking a man while he was down. Lightfoot was wounded, personally and politically, but not defeated. Speaking to the *Chicago Reader* in 1978, Lightfoot was philosophical. Based on his continued good relations with his old friends and colleagues, he could rightly say that "they never really succeeded" in "[driving] a wedge" between himself and the Black community.[176] It was the risk one carried in espousing radical beliefs.

The effort to discredit Lightfoot was not confined to gossip about his personal and social life. In May 1966, an anonymous source tipped off the *Tribune* to Lightfoot's contested ownership of a block of flats at 3443 West 12th Place in on Chicago's West Side. Lightfoot had inherited the building from his mother upon her death. The *Tribune* screamed the news that the "Red" "slum lord" kept a rat-infested, unsanitary building in noncompliance with Cook County health codes.[177] The *Defender* picked up on the story as well, providing more detail regarding a CPUSA meeting in New York in which Lightfoot was allegedly "bawled out" for owning the derelict property.[178] Lightfoot strenuously denied the allegations of being a slumlord and sought to prove that he did not unduly profit from property ownership.[179] The charges were nothing more than a

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[175] Hirsley, "REDS."
[176] Lightfoot, 210.
[177] "Red is Probed as Slum Lord: Lightfoot Denies He Owns Rundown 6-Flat Red's Interest in Dilapidated Six-Flat Probed," *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File); Chicago, Ill.*, May 3, 1966.
[178] "U. S. Communists Angry About Lightfoot's 'Slum': Illinois Party Boss Gets Bawled Out In N.Y. Meet," *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973); Chicago, Ill.*, May 3, 1966.
[179] "Lightfoot To Prove He Doesn't Own Slum Flat," *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973); Chicago, Ill.*, May 4, 1966.

"political smear," Lightfoot claimed, and he denounced Mayor Richard J. Daley, whom he held responsible for the accusation, at a press conference, with CPUSA chairman Gus Hall at his side.[180] Twelve years later, in 1978, the *Reader* obtained records under the Freedom of Information Act which revealed the truth about who was behind efforts to discredit and defame Claude Lightfoot and other Black leaders. Daley, as it turned out, was only part of the effort. The primary directives came from Washington. The FBI, still under the unquestioned, iron-fisted control of J. Edgar Hoover, tipped off the *Tribune*, the *Defender*, the *Chicago Daily News*, and other media outlets to Lightfoot's social habits and ownership interest in his parents' block of flats. They further sought to undermine Lightfoot's position in the CPUSA by commissioning leaflets and pamphlets, ostensibly from "dissident Communists," lambasting Lightfoot for his capitalist tendencies.[181]

Such efforts showed the lengths to which the government was prepared to go to destroy radicals. The fact that a Black man had become a high-ranking CPUSA official made Lightfoot all the more dangerous in the minds of law enforcement. The government could not convict Lightfoot of anything in a court of law, so it sought to convict him in the court of public opinion, whose standards of proof were much less strict. But this effort by Hoover and his allies in government was about more than just discrediting and destroying communists. These elements sought not only to discredit and destroy Lightfoot, they sought to discredit and destroy the Black freedom movement by association. These efforts came to naught, as Lightfoot retained his CPUSA position and regard in the community, and the civil rights movement resisted the false label of

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[180] "Red is Probed as Slum Lord."; William Kling, "Angry Commie Boss of State Raps Daley," *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File); Chicago, Ill.*, May 8, 1966; *Chicago Reader*, June 2, 1978, as quoted in Lightfoot, 205-11.
[181] *Ibid*., 208.

"communist-inspired" by appealing to old American traditions of democracy. Lightfoot's loyalty to the party and its doctrines counted for more than anything the FBI or hostile newspapers could dig up on him. Had the party taken the allegations seriously, Lightfoot assuredly would have lost his positions as vice-chairman of the national organization and leader of the Illinois party.

Travels Through the Communist World

The lifting of the ban on travel by American communists had a direct influence on Lightfoot. Once the Supreme Court had ruled the McCarran Act and other communist control laws unconstitutional, Lightfoot took the opportunity to travel abroad. He would end up spending much of the next two decades overseas. One of his first engagements abroad was the seventh Congress of the Communist Party of India, in December 1964.[182] His responsibility at the Congress was to convey the "warmest of revolutionary greetings" from the Communist Party of the United States, and to let the communists of India know that the American party had not strayed from the Marxist-Leninist principles they held so dear, now under threat from the People's Republic of China.[183] Lightfoot stayed true to the line pronounced by the Soviet Union, that Mao Zedong had left Communist orthodoxy and become a revisionist, pointing to the PRC view of the American presidential election. In turn, Mao claimed it was the Soviet Union that had turned revisionist in rejecting the legacy of Stalin, which opened a rift between the two major communist nations.

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[182] *Ibid*., 144

[183] *Proceedings of the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of India, Bombay, 13-23 December 1964., vol. Two-Greetings* (New Delhi: Communist Party Publications, 1964) 32.

Black radicals began looking toward the People's Republic of China for inspiration during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Robeson Taj Frazier discusses the complex interplay between the Black Freedom Movement and Maoist China in his 2015 book, *The East is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination*. Frazier chronicles the experiences of Black American radicals as they visited, lived, and worked in the PRC. Among them were W. E. B. Du Bois and his wife Shirley Graham, journalist William Worthy, Robert F. Williams and his wife Mabel, and activist Vicki Garvin. Frazier discusses their travels and experiences of life in the PRC, carefully stage-managed by Communist Party officials. Frazier also discusses the propagandistic way in which the leaders of the PRC sought to identify themselves with the cause of Black liberation throughout the world, not just in the United States. One example is especially striking; a propaganda poster "celebrat[ing] U. S. Black militancy," captioned "Resolutely support the just struggle of Black Americans!"[184] The poster featured two Black Americans in a pose of resistance to white brutality, along with a supportive quote from the ever-present Mao Zedong.[185] Frazier notes that the poster, along with other pieces of propagandistic art, is firmly masculine in its depiction of the struggle against Jim Crow.[186] The chapters on the Williamses are also especially interesting. One passage that is striking regards spreading the gospel of Mao. Through the Williamses' "personal correspondence and other forms of media," they helped to broaden "Mao's appeal among their radical colleagues and comrades," signifying to those who may have been

[184] "Jianjue zhichi Meiguo heirende Zhengyi douzheng!" in the original poster.
[185] Robeson Taj Frazier, *The East Is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015).
[186] *Ibid.*, 132.

disillusioned with the Soviet Union or Cuba, as the Williamses had been, that there was another path.[187]

Mao's China saw President Lyndon B. Johnson (D-Texas) and Senator Barry M. Goldwater (R-Arizona) as virtually the same fascist threat. Lightfoot denounced the Chinese for this heretical view of the American situation. Both of the candidates were imperialists and capitalists, Lightfoot agreed. However, he stressed that Goldwater was the greater threat to the world, given his "image of trigger-happiness" that would potentially embroil the world in a nuclear conflict.[188] China's "one's as bad as the other" attitude was "hollow and superficial," Lightfoot argued, and potentially dangerous.[189] This conformed with the official CPUSA line, as argued on the eve of the 1964 election in the *Tribune*. Jack Kling, one of Lightfoot's colleagues and speaking for Sam Davis, a Midwest representative of the *Worker*, the CP newspaper, confirmed that they both would vote for President Johnson and his running mate, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota, even if the party did not support Johnson's entire program.[190] Lightfoot remained in India for a few days after his address to the Congress, and was surprised by his embrace by the Indian party and other foreign communists. He recounted in his memoirs his curiosity as to why he was given special treatment and that he asked those around him to explain. "[You come] out of the belly of the beast," Lightfoot recalls being told. No doubt aware of his political struggles against the United States government,

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[187] *Ibid.*, 183.
[188] *Proceedings*, 33.
[189] *Ibid.*
[190] "Commie Paper Aids to Give Johnson Vote: Predict Victory Today for Democrats," *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File); Chicago, Ill.*, November 3, 1964, sec. 1.

Lightfoot's fellow communists meant to reward his loyalty, persistence, and daring to oppose the world's leading capitalist power.[191]

Lightfoot continued on his overseas journey, as he made the first of two trips during the decade to the Soviet Union, where he was disappointed to see public housing in poor conditions in Moscow. Being a loyal communist, Lightfoot accepted at face value explanations given him by a party official. He ascribed this deficiency to the noble reason that the Soviets had taken on the "tremendous burden" of aiding "colonial world peoples" in casting off their imperialist shackles at the expense of their own people.[192] He did not ask inconvenient questions about the status of Moscow's poor, and persisted in his desire to see only the best in the Soviet Union and its system. Lightfoot seemed to have felt that any deficiencies, any problems that came up, were not inherent problems with the Soviet system, but were only aberrations which would be overcome in due time and with due attention paid them. The attitude that emanates from his writings seems to be that there is nothing inherently wrong with the system, only with its implementation. In all likelihood, Lightfoot probably saw the failure of Moscow's public housing as something that would not have happened had the Soviet Union not been otherwise engaged, first with the struggle for national survival in the Second World War, and then with the Cold War competition with the capitalist United States for dominance among the newly-independent nations of the developing world.

When communist activist William L. Patterson was taken ill prior to a fact-finding trip to Africa, Lightfoot took his place, going to Mali and Kwame Nkrumah's

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[191] Lightfoot, 146.
[192] *Ibid.*

Ghana in January 1965 and reporting to the CPUSA on conditions in those newly independent African republics. Lightfoot was inspired by the charismatic Nkrumah but knew that Nkrumah faced challenges innumerable in implementing his version of "scientific" or "African socialism." In his memoirs published nearly two decades after his trip, Lightfoot drew parallels between the Bolshevik revolution and the early years of the Ghanaian republic under Nkrumah. In both cases, the bureaucracy of each country was politically unreliable. Lightfoot approvingly noted that Lenin allowed the old guard to remain in place, but closely watched by large numbers of loyal, politically reliable apparatchiks. Nkrumah either could not or would not implement such a plan, which Lightfoot identified as a lost opportunity. When Nkrumah's government was ousted in a military coup not long after Lightfoot's visit, the American communist reached out to the African socialist in a laudatory letter of commiseration, to which Nkrumah responded with appreciation.[193] Lightfoot's analysis of Nkrumah's fall was that, despite being a Black-led republic, Ghana was still vulnerable to the caprices of the world market; when it took actions hostile to the West, the capitalist powers retaliated, creating instability. In this way, the West would always have an advantage over developing nations and continue to have a disproportionate influence in their development.

Upon returning to the United States from his travels, Lightfoot once again found himself under fire from the *Chicago Tribune*, but compared to its other salvos against him, the conservative paper mostly withheld its more potent ammunition. The *Tribune* called attention to Lightfoot's reluctance to disclose the funding source for his two-month trip to the East, despite the obvious inference drawn by Lightfoot himself. At a press

[193] *Ibid*., 148-50.

conference he called upon his return on 2 February 1965, Lightfoot noted that depending upon where he was, he functioned either as an official representative of the CPUSA or as a private citizen.[194] Though Lightfoot never directly addressed the issue, it can be assumed that the CPUSA, heavily financed by Moscow, paid at least part of his way.

Since Geraldyne's death, Lightfoot had admittedly been less than abstemious as far as his social life was concerned. For three years after her death, Lightfoot spent much of his free time in West and South Side bars and taverns, indulging in what he called "social mingling." During this time, he met Joyce Pope. An activist in her own right, she and Claude shared common interests and philosophies and generally got along well together. They married in March 1965 and a few months later, Lightfoot embarked on a trip with his new wife to Czechoslovakia, where he was to attend the 30th anniversary observances of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International[195] and, for the second time in as many years, the Soviet Union. This trip was both official and unofficial, similar to his last European jaunt which caused the *Tribune* such consternation, with the added bonus of being a honeymoon for the newlywed couple.[196] Lightfoot spent his time in the Soviet Union conferring with officials and made an excursion to the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, now Uzbekistan, where he reveled in the industrial and educational achievements Soviet officials showed him.[197] As he relates in his memoirs, Lightfoot felt that the Soviet Union had solved the problem of managing a multinational state, and that the Soviet model had useful lessons to teach the rest of the

[194] Robert Wiedrich, "Red Ends Tour But Won't Say Who Paid For It: Lightfoot Admits He Couldn't Foot Bill," *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File); Chicago, Ill.*, February 3, 1965, sec. 1.
[195] To which Lightfoot had attended as an American delegate in 1935.
[196] Lightfoot, 152.
[197] *Ibid*., 155-56.

world, particularly the United States. He felt that only the communist system, as developed in the USSR, could help Black Americans overcome racism, propel them forward in progress, and achieve real social and economic equality, not just legal equality on paper. Lightfoot's travels would soon bring him to a nation where he could see the Soviet system in practice with people of color.

Black Radical in Castro's Cuba

The problem of racism, naturally, concerned Lightfoot. As a Black man in white America, how could it not concern him on a daily basis? His experiences taught him that American capitalism did not have the answer to the problem of racism, indeed, it seemed to thrive on racism. Through his travels through the Communist world, Lightfoot looked for a solution. He saw hope in the Cuba of Fidel Castro. An ethnically and racially heterogenous nation with a history of racial tension and exploitation, Cuba offered Lightfoot evidence that a socialist revolution could wipe out racism and provide a fulfilling and meaningful future for Black people. Defying the State Department, Lightfoot went to Cuba in 1967 to see for himself the progress of the Cuban Revolution.[198] Unsurprisingly, Lightfoot was thrilled by what he saw. Lightfoot quotes Castro as admitting that the Revolution was incomplete and that there were still problems that needed to be fixed.[199] To the credit of the Cuban government and of Lightfoot, the problems are not glossed over, and Lightfoot was shown the worst of Cuban society as well as the urban, more "modern" side of Cuba that he saw in Havana. Perhaps influenced by the problems in American public housing in places such as Chicago's

[198] *Ibid*., 159.
[199] Claude M. Lightfoot, *Ghetto Rebellion to Black Liberation* (New York: International Publishers, 1968).

Cabrini-Green Homes and the Pruitt-Igoe Projects in St. Louis, Lightfoot took a particular interest in housing for Cuba's urban poor.

Lightfoot noted that Cuba had always suffered from a shortage of adequate housing, "both urban and rural."[200] He was particularly impressed with a housing project he observed in East Havana, a "development which almost left [him] breathless."[201] In this housing project, Lightfoot saw a solution to the problems of poverty and homelessness as well as the problems of urban life. Comparing housing projects in the United States and in Cuba, Lightfoot noted that Cuba's urban poor seemed to be much better off than America's. This "paradise on earth" was surrounded by "beautiful parks and playgrounds," with seemingly every human need attended to, from health to education to commerce.[202] How, Lightfoot asked, was it possible that the racially and ethnically diverse residents took such initiative to keep up and maintain their projects, while in the United States, so much seemed to be going wrong? The director of the project acknowledged bumps in the road at the beginning, but described to Lightfoot how the management sought the tenants' buy-in by asking them to "[itemize] all the problems," calling a mass meeting of the 11,000 adult tenants, established tenant committees to seek remedies for the problems, and set up institutions within the projects to help the tenants "learn how to live in these beautiful surroundings" peacefully and healthfully. The residents policed themselves for the most part, organizing "People's Courts" to handle housing code violations, handing down penalties such as "service chores around the project" for a period of time in cases of minor violations. More serious

[200] *Ibid*., 172.
[201] *Ibid*., 173.
[202] *Ibid*.

violations, including criminal activity, could incur forced labor at a local farm. Residents were encouraged to maintain their homes, with the understanding that they would own their homes after five years of continuous residence and timely rent payment.[203]

Lightfoot hailed the heterogenous East Havana housing project as an example of "the advances being made by the black people in Cuba" under the new communist regime.[204] But throughout his account of East Havana, race and racial problems are conspicuous in their absence. Reading Lightfoot, it would appear as though there were no racial tensions at all in this socialist paradise. Lightfoot admits there were problems, but at the time of his writing, the operation of the project was not contentious but harmonious, self-controlled, and self-sustaining. If there were any significant ongoing issues, we would not know it from Lightfoot's narrative. He does not, or even seem to want to, interrogate the claims of the management too closely. Similar to his experiences in the Soviet Union, Lightfoot appears to take the claims at face value and if he asks hard questions of the management of East Havana, he does not include them in his glowing account. It conforms to his view of Fidel Castro as a shining light of the worldwide communist revolution, a devotee of Marxist-Leninism and the Kremlin line, not a deviationist like Trotsky, not a revisionist like Mao, but a true believer, like Lightfoot, leading his nation into the socialist future. This is a recurring theme in Lightfoot's travels in the 1960s, and it continued to recur as he continued his travels through the rest of his life. However, it is only one reason Lightfoot is so willing to believe all he sees and hears about revolutionary Cuba.

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[203] Lightfoot, *Ghetto Rebellion*, 174-5; Rent was assessed at no greater than ten percent of a resident's income.
[204] Lightfoot, *Ghetto Rebellion*, 175.

Lightfoot was not alone in his desire to embrace and see the best in the Cuba of Fidel Castro, but others were more nuanced in their observations. Robert F. Williams, former head of the Monroe, North Carolina NAACP, provides a dissenting view from Lightfoot's rosy depiction of life from Black people in Cuba. The militant Williams, expelled from the NAACP for his views on armed self-defense, initially found much to admire in Castro's Cuba, even commenting after his first visit how much he wished "every American Negro could visit…and see what it really means to be treated as a first-class citizen."[205] Williams met and became friendly with Castro himself, as well as Che Guevara, the revolutionary leader second only to Castro in fame and visibility, and took part in an extensive speaking tour of Black communities on behalf of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee to argue Cuba's case before a popular audience. It was Cuba who offered Williams and his family refuge from racist law enforcement in 1961, and the Cuban government who allowed Williams to broadcast on behalf of the Castro revolution in his program, *Radio Free Dixie*.[206] But eventually, Williams became disillusioned with Black progress in Cuba. Contrary to Lightfoot's positive outlook, Williams noted that "white Cubans remained disproportionately privileged in the workforce, government, military, and the public sphere. In contrast, black Cubans were relegated to harsher living conditions and lower-paying jobs." Williams was disappointed in the tendency of many Cuban communists to avoid discussing racial issues in favor of cross-racial Cuban unity. Contrary to Lightfoot, Williams was increasingly drawn to the People's Republic of China and its vociferous proclamations in favor of Afro-Asian unity.[207] While Williams

[205] Frazier, 125.
[206] *Ibid*., 126-27.
[207] *Ibid*., 141-43.

did not directly address living conditions, he did note that Black participation in government was minimal at best, which contrasts sharply with Lightfoot's view of Cuba as a discrimination-free nation with "Afro-Cubans" in high political and military positions.[208]

A racially and ethnically mixed nation, whose government was dedicated to abolishing all forms of racism and committed to Black liberation, and "a mere 90 miles away from the segregated shores of the United States," thus held a strong appeal to Black Americans, not just radicals, but all who believed in the cause of justice and equality.[209] As a result, Cuba occupies a space in the Black radical imaginary that is hard to shake. Indeed, radicals of many stripes drew inspiration from Cuba and its racial policies, as historian Peniel E. Joseph has noted. Stokely Carmichael, Joseph writes, found validation for "Black Power" in Castro's Cuba, and stoked domestic fears of race war, riots, and Red infiltration.[210] Scholar Jafari Sinclaire Allen has noted that that the Cuban Revolution "inarguably improved the relative position of black Cubans."[211] Predominantly white "exiles" sought to undermine the accomplishments of the Cuban Revolution through support for oppressive American policies toward the island, thereby making "life extremely difficult for Cubans, who are largely of *color*."[212] Lightfoot would likely have agreed with Allen's view, and then gone further. Lightfoot was no proponent of Black nationalism or Black Power; he had decades earlier dismissed Marcus Garvey and made

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[208] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 170.
[209] Jafari Sinclaire Allen, "Looking Black at Revolutionary Cuba," Latin American Perspectives 36, no. 1 (2009): 55.
[210] Peniel E. Joseph, "The Black Power Movement, Democracy, and America in the King Years," The American Historical Review 114, no. 4 (October 2009): 1014.
[211] Allen, 55.
[212] Allen, 54; Italics original.

it clear in his writings that the mere fact of a Black republic was no solution to the problems of racism.[213] A Black republic, Lightfoot claimed, could not be successful under the influence of capitalism and its leading power, the United States. As evidence, he pointed to the experience of Cuba's Caribbean neighbor, Haiti. It makes no difference, Lightfoot stated, "that one [Haiti] is black-led or the other [Cuba] is interracially led." Rather, it is the influence of the United States in the internal affairs of those countries that made the difference.[214] Lightfoot saw capitalism as the root cause of the ills Haiti faced, and concurrently the root cause of the ills Black Americans in the United States faced, and not racism in and of itself. Carmichael and his compatriots were wrong, Lightfoot maintained. Like all other nationalisms, Black nationalism was emphatically not the answer. Until capitalism was overthrown in favor of a socialist system, Black republics would continue to suffer.

Lessons and Struggles in a Divided Germany

The peripatetic Lightfoot, always in search of causes for which to fight and solutions to the problems of Black Americans, ended up in Germany at decade's end, where he encountered both causes and potential solutions. However, this time, Lightfoot's son Earl, now a teenager, accompanied his father on his overseas journey. He brought Earl, whose epileptic seizures were getting worse over time, with him to East Germany, where Lightfoot hoped he would be able to find effective and affordable medical treatment that he could not obtain in the United States.[215]

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[213] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 150.
[214] Lightfoot, *Ghetto Rebellion*, 177-8.
[215] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 175.

As Lightfoot sought treatment for his son, he took the opportunity to take in life in communist East Germany. Still recovering from the ravages of the Second World War, East Germany, and particularly East Berlin, was undergoing a rebuilding effort, not only to repair the physical damage of the war, but to build a socialist economy. Lightfoot took particular note of the rapid urban development in the communist sector of divided Berlin. Always interested in public housing, he proclaimed himself "stunned" by the prefabricated, yet brightly painted and aesthetically pleasing new projects which were being built by the East German government. He simply marveled at the "shopping malls, hotels, [and] recreational activity" he saw. These were not things you would expect to find a dyed-in-the-wool communist marveling over in a socialist state.[216] As was the case in previous trips to the Soviet Union and Cuba, Lightfoot did not ask tough questions of his East German handlers regarding the operations of these projects. However, as he did in Cuba, he asked to see the rest of the country, and how the socialist system was functioning outside of East Berlin. Lightfoot went to Dresden and Leipzig, two cities which were devastated by Allied bombing during the Second World War. In his memoirs, Lightfoot expressed contempt for the "hypocrisy" of the imperialist United States as survivors of the devastation related their stories to him. What right, Lightfoot asked, did the United States have in criticizing "acts of terror" by leaders and organizations like "Col. Kaddafi and the PLO," when they themselves were guilty of even greater atrocities in Dresden and Hiroshima?[217] It was more evidence than Lightfoot needed that the United States was nothing more than a corrupt, hypocritical, imperialistic bully.

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[216] *Ibid*.
[217] *Ibid*., 176.

After a Baltic Sea side vacation in the one-time summer palace of the Hohenzollerns, where he slept in the former bedroom of Emperor Wilhelm II, Lightfoot returned to East Berlin, where he had left his son in the care of medical specialists. He had wanted to bring Earl with him on a speaking tour of West Germany, but doctors advised him to leave Earl in their care while they administered further tests and treatment. Lightfoot agreed after a German Jewish friend, Kurt Gutmann, whom he had known during World War II, offered to look after Earl as if he were his own son.[218] Thus reassured, Lightfoot left on his speaking tour. At its conclusion, he returned to the United States, with Earl still under medical treatment in East Germany. Lightfoot made several trips back to East Germany to visit his son and his fellow comrades. On one of these trips, in 1970, Lightfoot became embroiled in a bitter racial conflict involving American soldiers at the military prison of Mannheim-Blumenau. Accounts of brutal racial violence by white prisoners against their Black counterparts were, according to Lightfoot, hushed up in the American press.[219] Black prisoners were fed rat poison, according to some accounts. White prisoners, said to have links with the Ku Klux Klan and other "Nazi-like cells," were armed by military police with "open razors and axe handles" to use against the Black prisoners. Upon returning to the United States, Lightfoot called a press conference and charged the American government with "pursuing a policy of genocide against black youth in the armed services as they are doing here on the homefront."[220] He accused the American military authorities of withholding information on these "prison

[218] *Ibid*., 179.
[219] *Ibid*., 182.
[220] Toni Anthony, "Lightfoot Explains Slap At U. S.," *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973); Chicago, Ill.*, September 23, 1970.

disturbances" from both the American and the West German public.[221] To Lightfoot, this incident was simply part of a larger pattern of racism and discrimination by Americans and West Germans against Black American troops, showing that the wrong lessons had been learned from the experience of World War II.[222]

Conclusion

Claude Lightfoot endured trials and transition in the twenty-odd years of his middle age. He began those years under dire threat of imprisonment and ruin under Smith Act and McCarran Act charges. Through his determination to fight for his freedom as an American citizen to associate with whomever he pleased, and thus convinced that he was in the right, Lightfoot fought the federal government and won. His victory was tempered by the loss of his beloved wife Geraldyne, a partner in life and a partner in activism. It was further clouded by the persistent efforts of the federal government, which could not convict him of any violation of law, and its allies in the mainstream Chicago press, to discredit his character and ruin him politically and personally.

Lightfoot reinvented himself as a traveling spokesman for the CPUSA, becoming, in the communist world, the living physical symbol of resistance to American capitalism and imperialism. His engagement as a roving ambassador meant that he did not and could not take an active part in the struggle for Black liberation on the ground in Chicago and in the United States.

Was his absence simply an accident of circumstance, or was this by design? Lightfoot does not answer this question directly, but we can infer from his writings that

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[221] *Ibid*.
[222] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 188.

he felt the solution to the problem of racism and discrimination could only be sought outside, in the communist world, that none of the solutions bandied about by civil rights leaders would destroy what Lightfoot felt was the root cause: capitalism. Thus convinced, he went overseas, to the Soviet Union, to Cuba, to Germany, in a long and winding search for solutions. He was looking for a communist solution, and he found it. Unfortunately for Lightfoot, the solution seemed cosmetic, superficial, and prone to fall apart upon further examination. The propagandist could not turn a critical eye upon Marxist-Leninist ideology in practice. Yet he would continue to refine his ideas as the calendar ticked over into the 1970s, his most prolific and productive decade as a writer and thinker.

Chapter 4

The Old Lion Roars, 1971-1991

Introduction

Lightfoot had spent much of the last half of the 1960s traveling throughout the communist world in search of the solution to America's racial problem. He would continue his travels through most of the next decade until his deteriorating health forced him to remain close to his home. In the meantime, Lightfoot traveled as long as he was able, and wrote prodigiously on the topics of Black liberation and American history, publishing three books, an autobiography, and writing a regular newspaper column for a Black newspaper in Chicago. Early in the 1970s, Lightfoot would end a brief sojourn in New York and move to Gary, Indiana, a rapidly declining city with a majority-minority population and a recently-elected Black mayor. Gary would be his home and base of operations for the rest of his life, as he continued to think, write, and agitate in his own way, as he had done all his life.

Lightfoot For Liberation

Lightfoot had long been a top official of the CPUSA, and it was for this reason in part that he relocated to New York City in 1968. He remained based in New York until 1971, but he continued to travel throughout the country on behalf of the party, and never lost his interest in goings-on in Chicago, nor his identity as a Chicagoan.[223] Lightfoot explained his aversion to high-rise living and decided, when he returned from New York, that he wanted to live in a modest house in a neighborhood, not a confining apartment in a tall, "prison-like" building. This desire was one factor in Lightfoot deciding to relocate to Gary, Indiana, rather than return to Chicago. Lightfoot explained his decision thusly:

[223] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 196.

"There were several reasons…[Gary] was one of the first major cities to elect a Black mayor, Mayor Richard Hatcher."[224] Lightfoot chose Gary as much for the novel experience of living under a Black mayor as he did for the comfortable living situation. By the time he came to Gary, it had just barely become a majority-minority city, according to the 1970 United States Census, with 53% of the population identifying as non-white. Upon arriving in Gary, Lightfoot was quick to pick up on the racial tone of the criticism of Mayor Hatcher. Lightfoot admitted that Hatcher should not have been immune to criticism, but the tone of that criticism was beyond the pale. Indeed, such criticism would continue throughout Hatcher's term in office as the city of Gary continued its precipitous decline. The uproar against Hatcher was a "prelude" to the treatment Harold Washington would receive when he was elected mayor of Chicago in 1983.[225]

By 1971, as Lightfoot returned from his most recent trip to Europe, he had determined that he had, at the very least, found the root cause of the racial problems in the United States. That was simple enough. For Lightfoot the root cause for most every societal ill was capitalism. What was difficult to ascertain was the remedy. After his foreign tours of the late 1960s, Lightfoot eventually concluded that East Germany, Cuba, and the Soviet Union offered the only viable solution for racism in the United States. In an effort to prove the correctness of his argument, Lightfoot published a series of three books between 1968 and 1977 describing the relationship between racism and capitalism

[224] Richard G. Hatcher, mayor of Gary, Indiana, 1967-87.
[225] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 196; Jon C. Teaford, "'King Richard' Hatcher: Mayor of Gary," The Journal of Negro History 77, no. 3 (1992): 126–40, https://doi.org/10.2307/2717557.

and providing a historical analysis to provide context to contemporary events in the United States.

In these books, Lightfoot uses his experiences as a roving ambassador on behalf of the CPUSA to convey to his reader a glowing, yet authoritative view of the efforts of communist countries to combat and conquer racism, even those countries in which the differences in race are not nearly as stark as in the United States. Lightfoot was convinced that communist nations could still offer valuable lessons to the United States in moving past racial conflict. Lightfoot spent much of the second half of the 1960s traveling throughout the communist world as a spokesman for American communists. As a privileged visitor to these nations, Lightfoot enjoyed guided tours from local party apparatchiks, who extolled the advances and achievements of their economic and political system. These tours formed the basis for his writings, beginning with *Ghetto Rebellion to Black Liberation*, published in April 1968, not long after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ghetto Rebellion begins with an analysis of the contemporary moment. Though written before the assassination of Dr. King, *Ghetto Rebellion* seems to anticipate a future of race relations in which King, or at least his philosophy, is not a factor. “Black America is like a ball of fire,” Lightfoot begins. The Black Power phase of the freedom struggle was in full swing by 1968 and had stricken terror in moderate civil rights leaders and their white allies. The drive to marginalize Black Power was meant to keep Black radicalism in check and preserve political and economic alliances with the white power

structure, Lightfoot claimed.[226] The rise of Black Power, he wrote, was due to the stagnant economic advancement in the African American community, and as Lightfoot further noted, due to the lack of decent housing and educational opportunities afforded to African Americans.[227] Without economic opportunity, the "freedom" won with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was conditional and tenuous.

Here Lightfoot echoed Dr. King. King understood that truth better than perhaps anyone and in 1966 began to publicly turn toward economic justice as the primary goal of his movement. King took his civil rights crusade north to Chicago in 1966 to demand fair housing laws and encountered some of the worst violence of the 1954-1968 civil rights movement, prompting Illinois Governor Otto Kerner (D) to call out the state's National Guard to bring the situation under control. Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, anxious to save face in the wake of racial violence, reached an agreement with King to end his activities in Chicago in exchange for steps toward ending racial discrimination in local housing.[228] The agreement lacked enforcement provisions, but it placed the subject of fair housing on the national political map. It was only after King's death in April 1968 that Congress passed, with strong backing from President Lyndon B. Johnson, a federal fair housing law as a "memorial" to the slain civil rights icon.[229] For Lightfoot, writing just before the events of April 1968, such a law was only the start of a shift he believed necessary for the civil rights movement to achieve economic justice for Black Americans. Traditional approaches like that of the NAACP and SCLC were played out and no longer

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[226] Lightfoot, *Ghetto Rebellion*, 13-14.
[227] *Ibid*., 15.
[228] Joseph, 153; Leonard S. Rubinowitz, "The Chicago Freedom Movement and the Federal Fair Housing Act," in *The Chicago Freedom Movement: Martin Luther King Jr. and Civil Rights Activism in the North*, ed. Mary Lou Finley et al. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 116-17.
[229] Rubinowitz, 123-25.

effective. New leaders with new visions were necessary, and Lightfoot believed Black Power was an opportunity for such to come about.[230] The National Black Political Convention, which took place four years after Lightfoot published *Ghetto Rebellion*, would prove to be the debut of such leaders and visions.

Lightfoot's arrival in Gary coincided with the National Black Political Convention,[231] which took place in Gary from March 10-12, 1972. Regarded as "perhaps the most important political, cultural, and intellectual gathering of the Black Power era," the National Black Political Convention attracted a wide array of participants, from elected officials to organized labor to welfare rights advocates, spanning the ideological spectrum from nationalism to mainstream liberalism to radical leftism.[232] U. S. Representative Charles Diggs,[233] writer Amiri Baraka, Black Panther Party (BPP) co-founder Bobby Seale, BPP Minister of Information Elaine Brown, and Roy Innis of CORE[234] were among the attendees.[235] Contrary to the expectations of some participants and defying Lightfoot's dour assessment of racial tensions in the city, delegates were impressed with Mayor Hatcher and Gary's "welcoming atmosphere," streets bedecked with "the black nationalist colors of red, black, and green." Hatcher brought the delegates to their feet with a rousing keynote address on March 11, invoking the legacies of the slain Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the venerable W. E. B. Du Bois. Activist Jesse Jackson followed with a call for a Black political party, independent of the established

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[230] Lightfoot, 17.
[231] Also known as the National Black Political Assembly.
[232] Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Holt, 2006) 276.
[233] Member of the United States House of Representatives from Michigan's Thirteenth Congressional District, 1955-80.
[234] Congress of Racial Equality.
[235] Joseph, 276-83.

American political duopoly, dedicated to Black liberation and Black aspirations.[236] The convention marked a turn in the Black Power movement from organizing and agitating for progress separately, and toward active participation in the political process, as the Black Panther Party had done in its home base of Oakland, California.[237] Additionally, several delegates concurred with Jackson and were prepared to break from the two major political parties.[238] The time seemed ripe for such a development.

In *Ghetto Rebellion,* Lightfoot lauded the increase in Black political participation throughout the country, especially in the South. As he was writing in 1968, Lightfoot could point to the election of "nearly 150 Negro Americans to office" in the 1966 midterms, plus several mayoral victories in the off-year elections of 1967. Lightfoot interpreted that Black political power now included not just the ability to elect Black legislators and mayors, but the political clout necessary to hold those elected officials to account for their actions in office. He felt, however, that the franchise was only one channel through which Black Americans could advance and defend themselves. Lightfoot cautioned Black Americans to be prepared to use "all means," echoing Malcolm X, to defend their communities from those forces who would seek to undo the tentative, yet consequential advances made to that point. He called for white Americans, particularly labor, to put aside racial differences and unite with Black Americans, for the power structure in place would not hesitate to use its power to subdue anti-war protests and strikes in similar ways to their attempts to subdue the Black freedom struggle.[239]

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[236] *Ibid*., 279-80.
[237] *Ibid*., 278.
[238] *Ibid*., 281.
[239] Lightfoot, *Ghetto Rebellion*, 93-96.

For all of Lightfoot's conviction that new ideas and new leaders were needed to achieve Black liberation, he is remarkably silent when it comes to this particular moment in the Black Power movement. Lightfoot had just arrived in Gary prior to the opening of the National Black Political Convention, and although he never directly mentions it in his memoirs, or indeed, in any of his other writings during this period, one cannot help but assume that Lightfoot attended at least part of the convention. It was not in Lightfoot's nature to have stayed away from a political gathering of that kind of magnitude. So why did he have little, if anything, to say about this momentous gathering? There are a number of possibilities. Perhaps at the time he did not view the National Black Political Convention as being as consequential. Perhaps he disliked many speakers' call for a Black third party to advocate for Black issues. Perhaps Lightfoot felt that the convention was too nationalistic in nature, and not as open as he might have liked to the idea of cross-racial working-class solidarity, as Marxism-Leninism dictated. All of these factors could have been explanations for Lightfoot's silence.

Lightfoot contended towards the beginning of *Ghetto Rebellion* that Black Americans are "super-exploit[ed]," not only as part of the working class, but also due to skin color.[240] Such exploitation, he explains, was long-standing. "Ever since he fled from the plantations of the South during and after World War I, ghettos have been the Negro's lot." Lightfoot argued that Black poverty was unique and different from any other kind of poverty, rooted in a long history of American racism and injustice and quoted from *The*

[240] *Ibid*., 19.

Other America, the pioneering study of American poverty published in 1962 by the noted public intellectual Michael Harrington, to back up his argument.[241]

Advances in civil rights came at a cost, however. Such progress had perversely resulted in the "extension of the ghetto…despite open-occupancy laws and Supreme Court rulings outlawing restrictive covenants" aimed at excluding racial, ethnic, and religious minorities from "white" neighborhoods. In *Ghetto Rebellion,* Lightfoot lays the blame for the "artificial" economic "friction…engendered between Negro and white" at the feet of "unscrupulous real estate agencies." These agencies encouraged what is now known as "white flight" as urban ethnic neighborhoods saw an influx of Black homebuyers and renters, frightening white residents with a potential nightmare scenario should they stay in a rapidly integrating neighborhood; namely unsafe streets and declining property values. Better to sell their homes to an exploited "Negro, who will pay…at least two or three thousand dollars above the prevailing market price," make a handsome profit off of the deal and relocate to a suburban area. Black city-dwellers were exploited further by the inflated pricing of goods and services, not just in their neighborhoods, but anywhere they happened to shop. Exploitation, Lightfoot argued, followed skin color, not necessarily location, and parasitic capitalism was to blame.[242]

The second half of *Ghetto Rebellion* utilizes Lightfoot's travels through the communist and the non-aligned world to show the potential of socialism as a means of solving America's racial problems. He used his travels in Africa in particular to show the way forward for Black liberation. Using Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana as an example,

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[241] *Ibid.,* 20-21.
[242] *Ibid*., 24-27.

Lightfoot noted that despite the recently-won independence of African nations, they were still mired in economic and political instability. Lightfoot tried to show how a true socialist state could transform a Black republic and make it prosper. In the troubled case of Ghana, Lightfoot attributed economic and political interference from the capitalist West as the main cause of Ghana's instability.[243] Lightfoot seemed to have believed that Nkrumah, by embracing a Pan-African rather than a strictly socialist outlook, had left his country open to Western manipulation. The parallel Lightfoot drew for Black Americans was related to Black Power; he warned that, while Black people would of course need to organize amongst themselves for political and economic power, treating all white Americans as though they were a "monolithic" bloc was mistaken. A socialist point of view would unite the races on a class basis, and only then would white supremacy be smashed.[244] Here, perhaps, lies the reason for Lightfoot's reticence regarding the National Black Political Convention four years later; it was proceeding in a direction which he felt emphasized race to the detriment of class.

The rest of *Ghetto Liberation* is, as we saw from Lightfoot's autobiography, somewhat predictable in its analysis. Lightfoot recalls with wonder his 1965 trip to the Soviet Union, and marvels at its progress since the end of the Second World War. He draws distinctions between the foreign aid given by the Soviet Union and by the United States; the former gives aid primarily to build industry and economic self-sufficiency, the latter gives aid primarily for roads, bridges, seaports, airfields in order to "preserve colonial structures in the economy of the developing countries." Lightfoot argues that the

[243] *Ibid*., 126-28.
[244] *Ibid*., 130.

focus on infrastructure tended to "facilitate the export of private capital" rather than build up the developing countries' economies.[245] He lauds the Soviet approach to managing a multi-ethnic, multinational state, emphasizing the equality of the constituent republics under the Soviet Union.[246] Central economic planning, according to Lightfoot's view, ensured that even the most backward members of the Soviet family, among them Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, would be able to catch up to their more advanced neighbors and contribute on an equal footing to Soviet economics and politics. Lightfoot believed that the Soviet system, if transplanted to America, would ensure Black economic, social, and political equality and justice.[247] While Lightfoot noted correctly that ethnic minorities suffered persecution under the Tsarist empire, the comparison between the experience of Uzbeks under the Tsar and Black Americans under slavery and Jim Crow is perhaps too much of a stretch for direct comparison.

Lightfoot concludes *Ghetto Rebellion* with a full-throated defense of the role of the Communist Party USA as a tested "veteran" in the struggle for Black liberation, in a chapter entitled "Black Liberation Impossible Without Communists."[248] He forthrightly claimed for the CPUSA the role of heir apparent to the legacies of "the Abolitionists and Frederick Douglass," noting that the party was advocating racial equality as early as the 1920s, when mainstream political parties had abandoned the Black American to the tender mercies of Jim Crow in the South and ignominious isolation and poverty in the North. Despite the "distortions" of the true motives of the CPUSA, Lightfoot argued that the advances of the contemporary civil rights movement and "Black Power" were

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[245] *Ibid*., 141-42.
[246] *Ibid*., 145-46.
[247] *Ibid*., 147-51.
[248] *Ibid*., 192; *Ibid*., 183.

impossible without the prodding and the sacrifices of the communist movement, in the United States, the Soviet Union, and throughout the world.[249] In this, Lightfoot was correct. Communists stood up to oppression and racism when no other political movement would. They went into the "belly of the beast" in the South to defend the Scottsboro Boys and Angelo Herndon, organize Black workers, and made it possible for the post-World War II cross-racial coalition against Jim Crow to develop.

Racism: East and West

In his autobiography, Lightfoot noted of his numerous trips to Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s that "it now occurred to me that the two German states provided an excellent example of what socialism could do [to solve the problem of racism]."[250] He set to work doing research of how West Germany and East Germany approached the issue of racism, a quarter-century after the fall of the Third Reich. Lightfoot began by recounting a brief history of racism, dating back to ancient Egypt. He noted that while ancient Egyptians disdained and caricatured their darker-skinned Nubian neighbors to the south, they treated the fairer-skinned Libyans to their west "with equal disdain." Other civilizations, Greeks, Romans, and much later the Portuguese early in the Age of Exploration, did not fixate on skin color; in the cases of the Greeks and Romans, the grounds for distinction were cultural, not racial. Lightfoot explained that the distinction on the basis of color came when the African slave trade, pioneered by the Portuguese, became increasingly profitable, and when capitalism began to rise in Europe. Only then

[249] *Ibid*., 183-90.
[250] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 191.

did race become more clearly defined and whites began to defend slavery and discrimination in terms of the difference in skin color.[251]

Lightfoot invokes America's own checkered history with race and genocide when recounting the near-extermination of the Native American from the North American continent, as well as the British conquest of India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, using them as examples for Hitler's program of conquest and genocide against non-Aryans in the German Reich. "…Charges that Hitler departed from Western traditions are false…Hitler learned his racist concepts from Western capitalism and accelerated them."[252] All of these instances of racial subjugation were at least in part in pursuit of capitalistic expansionism; the desire for new markets for imperial powers, and in the case of the United States and Nazi Germany, the desire for new lands for national conquest. Lightfoot warned that new theories espousing the same racist principles that motivated Hitler were recurring in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with somewhat different rationales but no less pernicious. Capitalism, Lightfoot argued, was responsible for the diffusion of such dangerous ideas, and on this and other bases, the destruction and replacement of capitalism with socialism was necessary and vital.[253]

A broad-based coalition against fascism and racism was essential to the establishment of socialism. As evidence, Lightfoot cited the last years of the Weimar Republic. Lightfoot claimed that if the two main anti-fascist parties, the Social Democrats and the Communist Party of Germany had unified their forces, their combined vote total

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[251] Claude M. Lightfoot, *Racism and Human Survival: Lessons of Nazi Germany for Today's World* (New York: International Publishers, 1972). 27-31.
[252] *Ibid*., 33-37.
[253] *Ibid*., 37-41.

in Germany's last free elections before 1933 would have outnumbered the vote total for the Nazis, attracted "millions of vacillating elements," and "a Socialist Germany would have been the order of the day."[254] Instead, the feeble and dying embodiment of the Weimar Republic, German President Paul von Hindenburg[255] appointed Hitler chancellor of Germany, despite a decreasing Nazi vote total and an increasing left-wing vote total, when no other electoral combination proved capable of governing.[256] However, it is highly unlikely that the arch-conservative monarchist Hindenburg would have willingly handed government over to a Socialist-Communist coalition in the first place. Hindenburg, with reluctance, appointed Hitler as chancellor probably with the naïve and futile hope that he would end the unstable Weimar Republic and restore the Hohenzollern monarchy to the throne of Germany, either in the person of the deposed Kaiser Wilhelm II or his eldest son, Crown Prince Wilhelm. Lightfoot's "what-if" scenario would most likely have been achieved by extra-constitutional means.

One of the most notable sections of the book focuses on anti-racist education. The German Democratic Republic[257] educated its children on the dangers of racism, and Lightfoot noted that East Germany used the example of American racism against Black people as a cautionary tale.[258] Among the stories taught to East German children were those revolving around school integration in an unnamed American city, where a Black

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[254] *Ibid*., 50-51.
[255] (1847-1934): Field Marshal of the Imperial German Army during World War I; Chief of the German General Staff under Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1916-19; second and last president of Germany under the Weimar Republic, 1925-34. The venerable old World War I hero was borderline senile and battling cancer by 1932 but was persuaded to run for a second seven-year term on the basis that only he could defeat the increasingly popular Adolf Hitler.
[256] Lightfoot, *Racism and Human Survival*, 51.
[257] Popularly known, and hereafter referred to, as East Germany.
[258] Lightfoot, *Racism and Human Survival*, 137-38.

child named Jack is beaten by an angry white man for trying to enter a white school.[259] Another story stresses the need for cross-racial working class unity in the face of racist and anti-union state oppression.[260] Still another story depicts a group of young East German secondary school students discussing and debating American civil rights struggles as well as the anti-imperialist struggle in the newly-independent Democratic Republic of the Congo.[261] Lightfoot uses these vignettes to show that East Germany is serious about teaching anti-racism, and that its efforts are effective. However, Lightfoot is silent when it comes to East Germany reckoning with its own racist history during the Nazi Third Reich. He applauds the use of American examples as cautionary tales, but he does not discuss parallels to anti-Semitism. One is left wondering whether or not East Germany was avoiding the pain and humiliation of its own racist and genocidal past by focusing instead on American racism. If indeed East Germany educated its youth on the wrongness of its Nazi past, Lightfoot does not mention this very important fact.

The focus of *Racism and Human Survival* then switches to the Federal Republic of Germany.[262] In this part of the book, it is abundantly clear that West Germany's efforts at combating racism are a failure. Lightfoot accuses West Germany of pursuing only half-hearted denazification, noting that "thousands of former Nazis" were employed throughout the West German government, in posts with varying levels of authority.[263] This "betrayal" of the Potsdam Agreement, in which the Big Three powers[264] agreed to completely extirpate all vestiges of Nazism from Germany, led to a West Germany in

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[259] *Ibid*., 140.
[260] *Ibid*., 142-43.
[261] *Ibid*., 144-47.
[262] Popularly known, and hereafter referred to, as West Germany.
[263] Lightfoot, *Racism and Human Survival*, 188-89.
[264] The United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom.

which "anti-Semitism still flourishes," all in the name of "transform[ing] [America's] former enemy into a close ally." Presumably this was also done in the name of creating a capitalist bulwark and trading partner right in the middle of Europe.[265] Lightfoot recounts anti-Semitic incidents in West Germany on the rise during the late 1950s and 1960s as former Nazis remained in government and education, and the attitudes of the West German people appeared to show little progress.[266] Anti-Black, anti-African, and anti-Arab incidents of racist insults and violence are also recounted, and Lightfoot shows that little in the way of colonial attitudes had changed in West German school textbooks since the Nazi era.[267] The fact that West Germany was a capitalist society was to blame, Lightfoot made abundantly clear. Capitalism encouraged West Germans to see the Jewish people, now an insignificant minority, and non-white peoples throughout the world as inferior and exploitable.

Lightfoot concluded that capitalism, with its long history of and reliance on economic exploitation, could never provide a solution to the problem of racism anywhere in the world, no matter how it might be reformed or made palatable. It was the pursuit of profit which motivated nations and people to exploit natural resources in lands not their own and treat those to whom the land and the resources belonged as nothing more than racially and culturally inferior machines of labor. To Lightfoot, East Germany, the Soviet Union, and other communist nations showed the way past that world. Through the socialist economic system, which would remove the profit motive and provide economic justice and equality, and the East German educational system, which confronted the issue

[265] Lightfoot, *Racism and Human Survival*, 189-90.
[266] *Ibid*., 191-95.
[267] *Ibid*., 202-09.

of racism, if somewhat indirectly, and educated it out of existence, Black Americans would have a model which they could follow. Lightfoot was adamant: Marxist-Leninist communism, and only Marxist-Leninist communism, was the only way that Black liberation could be achieved, at home and around the world.

Lightfoot Takes on American History

In 1977, Lightfoot tried his hand as an American historian, publishing his third book, *Human Rights U. S. Style: From Colonial Times Through the New Deal*. Unlike his first two books, *Human Rights U. S. Style* is not simply a polemic, or a communist apologia, rather it is an attempt to analyze and interpret American history from the point of view of the marginalized and the oppressed and placing capitalism at the center of historical events. Lightfoot recounted American history as one episode of exploitation after another, from the moment Columbus landed in the New World to the inauguration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as president in 1933. He conceded that noble aspirations may have motivated the Founders as they declared independence from Great Britain and began the process of building a nation. However, while the birth of the United States "provided hope for peoples of other colonies who were oppressed" by other colonial powers, "at the same time…some of the worst pages in world history" resulted from American independence.[268] Lightfoot argued that historians over the decades had participated in "one of the biggest cover-ups in history," glossing over the "severe class, sexual and unprecedented racial oppression" that existed from the very beginning of the Republic. He applauded contemporary historians who were beginning to consider the

[268] Claude M. Lightfoot, *Human Rights U. S. Style: From Colonial Times Through the New Deal* (New York: International Publishers, 1977). vii.

history of the oppressed and marginalized, but their main flaw was not relating historical weaknesses "to the system of capitalism," and Lightfoot saw *Human Rights U. S. Style* as a necessary corrective.[269]

"Class, racial and sexual oppression did not begin here in the United States," Lightfoot noted, echoing *Racism and Human Survival*. However, it was in the United States where those elements "reared its highest and most terrible development" from the beginning.[270] Notably, he reminded his reader that the only reason the Pilgrim Fathers accepted the assistance of the Wampanoag tribesmen Samoset and Squanto during their first winter in America was that the Pilgrims would have starved without such assistance. Lightfoot noted that the relationship was transactional on the Pilgrims' part; once the natives stopped being useful and began to contest English expansion, the Pilgrims and their descendants made war on the Native Americans. Scalping, traditionally thought by many Americans to be a Native American practice, was an English invention, characteristic, Lightfoot argued, of European brutality.[271] Lightfoot reminded his reader that the great apostle of liberty, Thomas Jefferson, was the first American president to suggest the policy of Indian removal, cloaked in the language of "humanity" to the native "savages," long before the arch-racist Andrew Jackson enforced such a policy in the 1830s, leading to the infamous "Trail of Tears."[272] Far from being a savage, "backward race," Lightfoot argued that the level of civilization, government, agricultural achievement, and medical development attained by the Native Americans in both North

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[269] *Ibid*., vii-ix.
[270] *Ibid*., ix.
[271] *Ibid*., 49-51.
[272] *Ibid*., 51-53.

and South America was comparable to anything that Europeans had achieved by and well into the Age of Discovery.[273]

Lightfoot was particularly impressed by the development of the American Constitution and contrasted it with Native American forms of government. The capitalist ruling class was threatened by the wave of democracy which followed the Revolution of 1775-1783, represented best by the democratic Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.[274] "Hailed by many in Europe as almost perfect," the Founders who gathered in Philadelphia for the Federal Convention considered it dangerously democratic, even codified mob rule.[275] Another form of government admired by Lightfoot, Benjamin Franklin, and Friedrich Engels belonged to the Iroquois Confederacy, which can best be described as consensus government, and may, Lightfoot argued, have influenced the Articles of Confederation.[276]

Yet none of these forms of government followed the bourgeois dictates of political theorists like Montesquieu, Locke, and Smith in prioritizing security of private property and the profit motive against the "tyranny of the majority." Thus, the Founders introduced the concept of the separation of powers, disempowering the legislative body

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[273] *Ibid*., 60-66.
[274] Lightfoot describes the "most democratic" Pennsylvania Constitution thus: "Every male taxpayer and his adult sons could vote. Rotation in office was enjoined; none could serve as representative for more than four years in every seven. A single chamber legislature was set up, the only qualification for membership being that one must be a Christian. Membership was apportioned according to population. Instead of a single governor, this constitution provided an elective executive council with rotation of office to prevent 'danger of establishing dictatorship.' The president of the council, chosen annually by joint ballot of a council and the assembly, acted as chief executive. Another feature of the Pennsylvania constitution was the election every seven years of a council whose duty was to inquire whether the constitution had been preserved inviolate in every part, to order impeachments, and to summon a constitutional convention if necessary."
[275] Lightfoot, *Human Rights U. S. Style*, 22-24.
[276] *Ibid*., 68-69. Historians, in the main, doubt this argument, and it is not widely accepted.

"closest to the people," the House of Representatives, which cannot enact a piece of legislation, remove an elected official, or raise a tax on its own, and has no say over presidential appointments. The Senate, possessed of the confirmation power and the ability to quash any piece of legislation coming out of the House of Representatives, is the least responsive to the people of the two legislative bodies, insulated until 1913 from direct election and to this day by its six-year terms, compared to the two-year terms of the House of Representatives.[277] In this way, Lightfoot argued, the American Constitution protected the interests of capital and property from the swiftly changing passions of a democratic mob, in exactly the way the Pennsylvania Constitution and the Iroquois Confederacy did not.

Racial and class oppression were two of the three themes Lightfoot identified as undercurrents throughout American history. The third theme he discussed in *Human Rights U. S. Style* was sexual, or gender oppression. Lightfoot begins by critiquing the framing of the struggle for women's rights in terms of the franchise and property rights. He noted that advances in women's rights occurred only with the consent and at the initiative of men. As an example, he cited the 1848 New York State statute known as the Married Women's Property Act. Lightfoot noted that the state legislature passed the law at the behest of a judge and state legislators who wanted to protect their own property by transferring it to their wives and/or daughters, thereby exempting such property from their own debts while maintaining control through their wives or daughters.[278] Such

[277] Lightfoot, *Human Rights U. S. Style*, 25-27.
[278] *Ibid*., 139.

legislation "favored the [propertied] few and not the suffering many." Advances in women's rights took a long time to trickle down to the working class.

Lightfoot further recounted the struggles of women in pursuing careers and occupations of their own, citing the struggles of Elizabeth Blackwell, the first American woman to practice medicine professionally. Women continued to encounter obstacles as aspiring professionals, finding that their careers depended upon the good graces of men, who were in positions to grant or deny professional licenses as they saw fit.[279] Historians traditionally overlooked the central role of women in the abolitionist movement, or have tried to separate it from its connection to the women's rights movement. Lightfoot restored the critical link between the two movements in his book, and recalled the ties between activists like Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Lucretia Mott, Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, all active participants in the abolitionist struggle, as well as the struggle for women's rights. The relationships between Douglass, Truth, Mott, Stanton, and Anthony are especially interesting as they represented demographics which were, to use Lightfoot's term, "superexploited," some exploited as women, others doubly as Black and working class, and in the case of Truth, triply as Black, working class, and as a woman.[280]

"This summarized version of how U. S. history developed along class, racial and sexual lines should suffice to show how hypocritical the capitalist class, its politicians and ideologues are when they parade around the world proclaiming that they stand for 'Human Rights,'" Lightfoot declares in his conclusion.[281] The genocide of the native

[279] *Ibid*., 140-41.
[280] *Ibid*., 146-52.
[281] *Ibid*., 207.

inhabitants of the United States, the oppression of Black Americans via slavery and Jim Crow, the exploitation of woman as mere auxiliaries of men, and the failure to truly reckon with and account for all of these were enough to give the lie to American claims of moral leadership in the world. The capitalist ruling class, if history taught any lesson at all, had to be forced to concede rights, they would not grant them out of sheer goodness of heart or do so via compromise. Lightfoot saw each advance in racial, gender, and class equality as another chip in the wall of capitalism, and sooner or later, the wall would crumble. Only if the working class could overcome the racial and gender differences between them would they be successful in overcoming the burdens of American history and achieve a socialist state.

Winter

Days into the new year of 1976, Claude Lightfoot observed his sixty-sixth birthday and that summer would mark forty-five years in the cause of the Communist Party USA. Lightfoot was beginning to wind down his career as a traveling international spokesman for the CPUSA, and he made his final such trip abroad to the Congress of the Communist Party of Bulgaria, where he presented the greetings of the American party and mingled with fellow communists from around the world. This was no different from the other official party trips he had taken in the decade previous, except, Lightfoot noted, for the presence on the dais of many more leaders from Africa than before. Lightfoot was encouraged by their presence, interpreting it as yet another sign of socialism's steady

march of progress and as an "extension of the freedom movement of former colonial peoples."[282]

Lightfoot remained busy as a commentator on current events, spending most of 1976 as an opinion columnist for a Black newspaper, the *Chicago Courier*. His column, entitled "Strategy and Tactics for Black Liberation," was billed by the *Courier* as the product of "one of the…most intelligently cultivated minds of our time."[283] Lightfoot wrote on a wide variety of subjects he thought critical to Black liberation, from the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment bill[284] to the election of Jimmy Carter[285] to the presidency in November 1976. In particular, Lightfoot chastised the two major party presidential candidates, Republican incumbent President Gerald R. Ford and the Democratic challenger, Carter, for avoiding direct engagement with Black issues. "Circumstances compel Black people to seek ways and means of advancing their status all the while knowing full well that they can move only an inch forward" by supporting Carter, a racial moderate.[286] After Carter's election, Lightfoot made clear that the newly powerful Black voting bloc would hold Carter accountable for the few promises he did make regarding Black issues. "President-elect Carter is almost completely out of touch" with economic inequality in the Black community, Lightfoot thundered. Quoting Black activist Vernon Jordan, Lightfoot pointed out that "'It is not enough for Carter to pray with blacks; it is not enough to send Andy Young to the United Nations; It is not enough

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[282] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 194.
[283] Clipping from the Chicago *Courier*, 27 December 1975, File 1-8, Box 1, Claude M. Lightfoot Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois.
[284] Named for its Senate and House of Representatives sponsors: Hubert H. Humphrey, Democratic Senator from Minnesota, and Augustus F. Hawkins, Democratic Representative from California.
[285] Former Democratic Governor of Georgia, 1971-75.
[286] Clipping from the Chicago *Courier*, 12 June 1976, File 1-8, Box 1, Claude M. Lightfoot Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

for the Carters to dine with blacks or send Amy [Carter] to a black school. We want jobs.'"[287] Lightfoot used his column, in addition to nationwide college tours, to spread the CPUSA point of view on the major issues of the day.

Lightfoot's final dozen years were spent largely close to his bungalow in his adopted hometown of Gary, Indiana. After a speaking engagement at Harvard in March 1978, Lightfoot's health began to fail, as a heart attack and emphysema laid him low. He was healthy enough to participate in a February 1979 testimonial dinner and reception held in his honor in Chicago, eliciting the attendance or regrets and best wishes of luminaries like Jesse Jackson, publisher Gus Savage,[288] Congressman John Conyers,[289] and Reverend Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.[290] He gave an interview to his old *bête noire*, the *Chicago Tribune*, in 1982, recounting with fellow communist Jack Kling their shared struggles as political targets of government oppression. "The Communist Party provided me the instrument to get out of my shy, cowardly background as a child and to stand up and say what I thought without fear of what was going to happen," Lightfoot explained, 51 years after joining the CPUSA.[291] Even as Lightfoot regretted not being able for health reasons to take part in electing Harold Washington as mayor of Chicago in 1983, or in Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign, he remained active as long as he could.[292]

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[287] Clipping from the *Chicago Courier*, 24 December 1976, File 1-8, Box 1, Claude M. Lightfoot Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois.
[288] Later U. S. Representative from Illinois' Second Congressional District, 1981-93.
[289] U. S. Representative from Michigan, 1965-2017.
[290] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 202-03.
[291] Hirsley, "REDS."
[292] Lightfoot, *Chicago Slums to World Politics*, 203-04.

His last major turn as an activist echoed his first; 54 years after Lightfoot defied Mayor Anton Cermak's police department, he was arrested in August 1985 for attempting to block the eviction of a family from a South Chicago home. "When somebody would get evicted [during the Great Depression], we would put them back in their homes and then we would get arrested," Lightfoot explained to a reporter from the *Daily Calumet*. The *Daily Calumet* story made no mention of Lightfoot's communist leadership and activism, and at the end of the day, that was probably all right by Lightfoot.[293] He had ended his career of activism the way he had started it. That was the most important thing. He was ready to lay down his burdens and towards the end of his life declared faith in America's future. He prophesied that "the forces for peace" would "triumph over the war hawks who would lead us…to the destruction of the whole human race."[294]

Claude Lightfoot died of long-standing illness on July 17, 1991, at the age of 81. Emphysema and heart disease had caught up with the old revolutionary. The Soviet Union, which Lightfoot had thought showed the way to the future, would not long survive him, finally collapsing due to its own internal economic and political contradictions by the end of 1991. Many of the Eastern Bloc nations which Lightfoot had toured and viewed as examples to the world had been discredited and replaced by liberal capitalist democratic governments. Like these communist governments dying out in Europe, still loyal to Soviet Marxism-Leninism, Claude Lightfoot too was a relic of a

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[293] Clipping from the *Daily Calumet*, "2 Arrested in Eviction of South Chicago Family," 29 August 1985, File 1-7, Box 1, Claude M. Lightfoot Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois; clipping from the *Chicago Metro News*, "$10,000 Behind, Family Set on Street," 31 August 1985, File 1-7, Box 1, Claude M. Lightfoot Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois.
[294] Lightfoot, 204.

bygone era. The struggle for Black liberation had moved in other directions and passed him and his ideology by, but he remained, still standing, still a force for the cause in which he believed, still speaking, still writing, still defending the Communist Party to the end of his life.

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