LOCKE, Alain (1885-1954)

A teacher and philosopher, Alain Locke is best known as editor of the seminal modernist anthology *The New Negro: an Interpretation* (1925). A collection of poetry, essays, fiction, photography, illustration, and song, the anthology evolved out of a special issue of *Survey Graphic* magazine (1924), which Locke also edited, and included key figures of the Harlem Renaissance. In his introduction, “The New Negro,” Locke announces a cultural and aesthetic “Negro Renaissance” and declares Harlem “a race capital.” *The New Negro* earned Locke the titles of “dean,” “father,” and “midwife” of the Harlem Renaissance. Born in Philadelphia in 1885, not 1886 as he would claim, Locke was the only child of Pliny Ishmael Locke, a lawyer, and Mary Hawkins Locke, a teacher and disciple of rabbi Felix Adler. Locke attended Harvard, where he studied philosophy under George Herbert Palmer and Josiah Royce. In 1907, he became the first African-American to win a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford. In 1910-1911, he studied at the University of Berlin under sociologist Georg Simmel. In 1912, he returned to the United States, taking a job as an assistant professor of English at Howard University. He earned a doctorate in philosophy from Harvard in 1918.

Locke’s philosophical beliefs shaped his editorial approach to *The New Negro.* His introduction situates his “cultural racism” (race loyalty) within his developing theories of “cultural pluralism” (unity in diversity). Locke considered himself a “cultural cosmopolitan,” who believed racial equality would evolve from cooperative cultural interchange. *The New Negro* promotes such interchange: itincludes white and black contributors, situates American nationalism within an international context, and connects the “New Negro” to an ancient African past while arguing for his significance to white America. Locke was also a pragmatist influenced by the philosophies of John Dewey and William James, and like Franz Boas, he looked to transform mainstream understanding of race. While he acknowledged race to have a biological component, he recognized racial categories as being socially constructed. He outlines his philosophical ideologies in the autobiographical “psychograph” that introduces his essay “Values and Imperatives” (1935), a work that argues human values are socially determined attitudes that shape behavior. Locke championed racial equality in his writings as well as through his participation in the Racial Amity Conventions. He believed education essential to developing racial tolerance and, in 1945, became the first African-American president of the American Association for Adult Education. Other major works include Race Contacts and Interracial Relations: Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race (1916), *The Negro and His Music* (1936), *The Negro in Art* (1940), *When Peoples Meet: A Study in Race and Culture Contacts* (1947), co-written with Bernhard Stern, and the philosophical essay “Pluralism and Ideological Peace” (1947).

Bibliography

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