

THE NEW NEGRO

Readings on Race,

Representation, and

THE NEW NEGRO

African American Culture,

1892–1938

EDITED BY

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

and Gene Andrew Jarrett

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON AND OXFORD

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Princeton University Press

Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540

In the United Kingdom:

Princeton University Press, 3 Market Place, Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1SY

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-publication Data

The new Negro: readings on race, representation, and African American culture, 1892–1938 /
edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-691-12651-7 (alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-691-12652-4 (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. American literature—African American authors—History and criticism. 2. United States—
Civilization—African influences. 3. United States—Civilization—20th century. 4. African
Americans—Intellectual life. 5. African Americans in literature. I. Gates, Henry Louis. II. Jarrett,
Gene Andrew, 1975—

PSI53. N5N49 2007

973'.0496073—dc22 2006052876

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Minion with Kino MT display.

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

press.princeton.edu

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Parts of the introduction were adapted from Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” *Representations* 24 (Fall 1988): 129–55, and from Gene Andrew Jarrett, “New Negro Politics,” *American Literary History* 18 (Winter 2006): 836–46. We thank the University of California Press and Oxford University Press for permission to incorporate these published essays.

Benjamin Brawley, “The Negro Literary Renaissance,” *Southern Workman* 56 (April 1927): 177–84; and Lloyd Morris, “The Negro ‘Renaissance,’” *Southern Workman* 59 (February 1930): 82–86, appear courtesy of Hampton University Archives.

Eugene Clay, “The Negro in Recent American Literature,” *American Writers’ Congress*, ed. H. Hart (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 145–53, is reprinted with the permission of International Publishers Company, Inc., New York.

We thank the Fisk University Library for permission to reprint two unpublished essays by Charles W. Chesnutt: “The Writing of a Novel” (after 1899) and “The Negro in Books” (*The National Buy-a-Book Campaign in the Interest of Negro Literature* [Philadelphia, PA: December 5, 1916]).

We thank The Crisis Publishing Co., Inc., the publisher of the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, for the use of the following materials from *The Crisis Magazine*: W.E.B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art,” *The Crisis* 32 (October 1926): 290–97; Allison Davis, “Our Negro ‘Intellectuals,’” *The Crisis* 35 (August 1928): 268–69, 284; J. W. Johnson, “Negro Authors and White Publishers,” *The Crisis* 36 (July 1929): 313–17; George S. Schuyler, “The Rise of the Black Internationale,” *The Crisis* 45 (August 1938): 255–57, 274–75, 277; and “The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed,” printed in *The Crisis* 31, no. 4 (February 1926): 165, 31, no. 5 (March 1926): 219–20, 31, no. 6 (April 1926): 278–80, 32, no. 1 (May 1926): 35–36, 32, no. 2 (June 1926): 71–73, 32, no. 4 (August 1926): 193–94, 32, no. 5 (September 1926): 238–39, and 32, no. 7 (November 1926): 28–29.

Zora Neale Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” first printed in *Negro: An Anthology*, ed. Nancy Cunard (London: Wishart and Company, 1934), 39–46, appears with the permission of the Estate of Zora Neale Hurston.

George W. Jacobs (George S. Schuyler), “Negro Authors Must Eat,” *The Nation* (June 12, 1929): 710–11, reprinted with permission of *The Nation*.

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Alain Locke, “The New Negro” (3–16), “Negro Youth Speaks” (47–53), and “The Negro Spirituals” (199–210), first appeared in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Locke (New York: A. and C. Boni, 1925), copyright © 1925 by Albert and Charles Boni, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Simon and Schuster, Inc.

Claude McKay, “For a Negro Magazine” (1934), appears courtesy of the Library Representative for the works of Claude McKay, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Used by permission of The Archives of Claude McKay.

The following texts are reprinted with the permission of the National Urban League: Brenda Ray Moryck, “A Point of View (An Opportunity Dinner Reaction),” *Opportunity* 3, no. 32 (August 1925): 246–49, 251–52; Fred DeArmond, “A Note on the Sociology of Negro Literature,” *Opportunity* 3 (December 1925): 369–71; Willis Richardson, “A Negro Audience,” *Opportunity* 3, no. 28 (April 1925): 123; Albert Barnes, “Negro Art, Past and Present,” *Opportunity* 4 (May 1926): 148–49, 168–69; Laurence Buermeyer, “The Negro Spirituals and American Art,” *Opportunity* 4 (May 1926): 158–59, 167; B. A. Botkin, “Self-Portraiture and Social Criticism in Negro Folk-Song,” *Opportunity* 5 (February 1927): 38–42; Charlotte E. Taussig, “The New Negro as Revealed in His Poetry,” *Opportunity* 5 (April 1927): 108–11; Harry Alan Potamkin, “African Plastic in Contemporary Art,” *Opportunity* 5 (May 1927): 137–39; Eulalie Spence, “A Criticism of the Negro Drama,” *Opportunity* 6 (June 1928): 180; Jules Bledsoe, “Has the Negro a Place in the Theatre?,” *Opportunity* 6 (July 1928): 215; Sterling Brown, “Our Literary Audience,” *Opportunity* 8 (February 1930): 42–46, 61; and Romare Bearden, “The Negro Artist and Modern Art,” *Opportunity* 12 (December 1934): 371–72.

Walter White, “Negro Literature,” first appeared in *American Writers on American Literature*, ed. John Macy (New York: Liveright, 1931), 442–51, is copyright © by Horace Liveright, Inc. Used by permission of Liveright Publishing Corporation.

Richard Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” *New Challenge* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1937): 53–65, is copyright © 1937 by Richard Wright. Reprinted by permission of John Hawkins and Associates, Inc.

We thank the following individuals for their assistance at various stages of this project: Bob Bettendorf, Renée Boynton-Jarrett, Tom Broughton-Willett, Christopher Brown, Angela De Leon, Ellen Foos, Jason Jones, Joanne Kendall, Cameron Leader-Picone, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Jonathan Munk, Lakisha Odlum, Heath Renfroe, Anna K. Steed, Hanne Winarsky, Abby Wolf, and Donald Yacovone.

THE NEW NEGRO

INTRODUCTION

A class of colored people, the “New Negro,” . . . have arisen since the War, with education, refinement, and money.

—*Cleveland Gazette* (June 28, 1895)

We are at the commencement of a “negroid” renaissance . . . that will have in time as much importance in literary history as the much spoken of and much praised Celtic and Canadian renaissance.

—William Stanley Braithwaite (1901)

*. . . Rough hewn from the jungle and the desert’s sands,
Slavery was the chisel that fashioned him to form,
And gave him all the arts and sciences had won.
The lynch, mob, and stake have been his emery wheel,
TO MAKE A POLISHED MAN of strength and power.
In him, the latest birth of freedom,
God hath again made all things new.
Europe and Asia with ebbing tides recede,
America’s unfinished arch of freedom waits,
Till he, the corner stone of strength
Is lifted into place and power.
Behold him! dauntless and unafeard he stands.
He comes with laden arms,
Bearing rich gifts to science, religion, poetry and song . . .*

—Reverend Reverdy C. Ransom, “The New Negro” (1923)

The three epigraphs tell the classic story of the American Negro’s symbolic transition from “Old” to “New” between Reconstruction and World War II. During this period, the Old Negro was a trope that depicted the African diaspora as an inferior race. Allegedly, Negro uncles, mammies, and chillun’ dressed, talked, behaved, and thought in ways that lacked the kind of sophistication and refinement generally attributed to Anglo America. Such caricatures oversimplified black subjectivity and experiences, while ridiculing the idea of black assimilability to American civilization. African American discourses of the New Negro, however, emerged to contest degrading black stereotypes. Literature, photographs, illustrations, theater, and speeches were but a few of the contexts in which African Americans declared that the race could be morally, intellectually, and culturally elevated to civilization.

In the wake of recent scholarship that has examined the remarkable history of the New Negro, this anthology hopes to flesh it out even further, showing why the New Negro was one of the most compelling stories of racial uplift that circulated throughout U.S. intellectual society, culture, and politics.¹ By reprinting approximately one hundred canonical and lesser-known essays written or published between 1892 and 1938, we lay the groundwork for scholars, teachers, students, and general readers to learn more about the political interconnection of race,

representation, and African American culture. Racial representation, we argue, functioned as an ideological or philosophical bridge between the cultural politics and the political culture of African America. Culture politics—or the politics of culture—mainly refers to how people acquire, understand, and apply power in their relationships to one another. Such power relations, in turn, underwrite the formation of certain patterns of human values, discourses, attitudes, actions, or artifacts. By contrast, political culture—or the culture of politics—emphasizes how cultural patterns inform the institutions, organizations, and interest groups of public policy or governmental activity. With these two preliminary definitions in mind, this anthology aims to show that the New Negro was a major discursive cornerstone of racial representation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What is more, this discourse helped to generate the terms by which we describe and understand African American culture today.

The tropes, politics, and discourses of racial uplift that we intend to explain in this introduction outline the parameters of what could be thought of as “New Negro criticism.” This tradition comprises not only essays that explicitly mention the term “New Negro,” but also those involved in a wider critical conversation on race, representation, and African American culture—a conversation of which the trope of a New Negro was, of course, an original, defining feature. For this anthology, we have chosen a vast array of essays written by sophisticated critics, historians, and thinkers interested in anchoring the meanings of art, culture, and politics to racial representation.

The Trope of a New Negro

Frederick Douglass, the great nineteenth-century writer and orator, was widely advertised during his lifetime as “the representative colored man of the United States.” It was a designation that Douglass liked; indeed, he seemed to have encouraged its use. What a curious manner by which to be known, or by which to be recalled: the representative colored man of these United States. But in what sense was Frederick Douglass “representative”? In the sense of mode, or mean, or median? Certainly not Frederick Douglass, a man of learning, an author of three masterful autobiographies as well as hundreds of speeches and essays. Douglass could not be mistaken for the mean, the mode, or the median of the African American community of the nineteenth century. Clearly, another sense of representation obtains here, one that we tend to forget.

Douglass was the representative colored man in the United States because he was the most presentable. And he was the most presentable because of the presence he had established as a master of voice. When Douglass spoke or wrote, he did so “for” the Negro, in a relation of part for whole. He spoke to recreate the public face of the race. Douglass, then, was the most representative colored man both because he represented black people most eloquently and elegantly, and because he was the race’s great opportunity to re-present itself in the court of racist public opinion. African Americans sought to re-present their public selves in order to reconstruct their public, reproducible images.

The word “reconstruction” and the concepts that it connotes are so familiar to American historians and to scholars of African American studies that we tend to forget the word’s etymology and its complex layers of signification. The dictionary

states that to reconstruct means “to construct anew in the mind; to restore [something past] mentally.” “Reconstruction,” it tells us, consists of “the action or process of reconstructing,” or “an instance or example of this; a thing reconstructed.” “Reconstruction” is also the proper name for “the *process* by which after the Civil War the States which had seceded were restored to the rights and privileges of the Union.” This period, we know, commenced officially with the passage (over President Andrew Johnson’s veto) of the Reconstruction Act of 1867, and ended with what is known popularly as the Hayes-Tilden Compromise of 1877. Reconstruction, then, endured officially for a mere ten years, to be replaced by a dark period in American history known as Redemption, which Sterling Brown once said lasted in the South from roughly 1876 “to yesterday”! By the turn of the century, Southern Redemption had become fused with black disenfranchisement and the rise of the white supremacist movement, led by the Ku Klux Klan.

Moreover, the dictionary defines “construction” as the process of putting “a specified interpretation on.” “Construction” also means “the action of framing, devising, or forming, by the putting together of parts.” “Construction” signifies as well “the manner in which a thing is artificially constructed or naturally formed; structure, conformation, disposition.” “Construction,” finally, is “a thing constructed; a material structure; a formation of the mind or genius.” Here, of greatest concern are the latter two definitions: the manner in which a thing is artificially formed, and the structure of a formation of the mind and the imagination. Of greatest concern, more specifically, are two antithetical figures of the black—the curious heritage of the New Negro, and the white figure of the black as Sambo—and the complex relation that obtains between them.

These two figures bear an antithetical relation to each other, and function in a relation of reversal. Whereas the image of a “New Negro” has served various generations of black intellectuals as a sign of plenitude, regeneration, or a truly reconstructed *presence*, the image of the black in what could be thought of as “Sambo Art” has served various generations of racists as a sign of lack, degeneration, or a truly negated *absence*. The two sets of figures can also be said to have a certain cause-and-effect relation. The fiction of an American Negro who is “now” somehow “new” or different from an “Old Negro” was sought to counter the image in the popular American imagination of the black as devoid of all the characteristics that supposedly separated the lower forms of human life from the higher forms.

In an accurate, if humorous, sense, blacks have felt the need to attempt to “reconstruct” their image probably since that dreadful day in 1619, when the first boatload of Africans disembarked in Virginia. Africans and their descendants commenced their cultural lives in this hemisphere as veritable deconstructions of all that the West so ardently wished itself to be. Almost as soon as blacks could write, it seems, they set out to redefine—against already received racist stereotypes—who and what a black person was, and how unlike the racist stereotype the black original could actually be. To counter these racist stereotypes, white and black writers erred on the side of nobility, and posited equally fictitious black archetypes, from Oroonoko in 1688 to Kunta Kinte in more recent times. If various Western cultures constructed blackness as an absence, then various generations of black authors have attempted to reconstruct blackness as a presence.

Reconstruction, of course, is a broad concept that, in regard to the Negro in America, spans a period longer than the decade separating the Reconstruction Act and the Hayes-Tilden Compromise. Indeed, black intellectual reconstruction

commenced in the antebellum slave narratives, published mainly between the 1830s and the early 1860s, and ended (if indeed it *has* ended) in the decade after the New Negro, or Harlem, Renaissance of the 1920s. And the *trope* of reconstruction was the trope of the New Negro in African American discourse between Reconstruction and World War II. This long period, rather than the short one between 1867 and 1877, was the crux of the period of black intellectual reconstruction. For the literary critic, there is little choice. Between 1866 and 1877, for example, black people published as books only two novels, one in 1867 and one in 1871. Between 1892 and 1938, however, African American writers published close to seventy-five novels.

While a dramatic upsurge of energy in the American body politic had characterized the period known as Reconstruction, the corpus of *African American* literature and culture, on the other hand, enjoyed no such apparent vitalization. On the contrary, blacks published more novels between 1853 and 1865, when they were fighting slavery, than they did when they were at least nominally free, the freest that blacks had been since the day before they set sail for Virginia in 1619. It is as if the great and terrible subject of African American literature—slavery—found no immediate counterpart when blacks were freed. Once Redemption had established itself as a new form of enslavement for African Americans, they regained a public voice, louder and more strident than it had been even during slavery.

This stands as a paradox of our intellectual history. One of the most important contributions to African American literature between 1866 and 1877 was written not by a black person at all but by Mark Twain. His 1874 short story, “A True Story,” purports to be “Aunt Rachel’s” oral narration of her own enslavement, rendered entirely in what we call “dialect.”² In other words, Reconstruction was not a time of a great renaissance of African American letters, but the period between this moment and World War II was the era of the myth of a New Negro, a New Negro in search of a cultural renaissance capable of accommodating it.

The “New Negro,” of course, was only a metaphor, a trope. The paradox of this claim was inherent in the trope itself, combining as it did a concern with time, antecedents, and heritage, on the one hand, with that for a cleared space, the public face of the race, on the other. The figure, moreover, combined implicitly both an eighteenth-century vision of utopia with a nineteenth-century idea of progress to form a black fin-de-siècle dream of an unbroken, unhabituated, neological self—signified by the upper case in “Negro” and the belated adjective “New.” A paradox of this sort of self-willed beginning was that its “success” depended fundamentally upon self-negation, a turning away from the “Old Negro” and the labyrinthine memory of black enslavement and toward the register of a “New Negro,” an irresistible, spontaneously generated black and sufficient self.

Perhaps a more profound paradox of this form of neological utopia was that this willed, ideal state of being and renewal could exist only in what Michel Foucault has called “the non-place of language,” precisely because it was mainly a rhetorical or discursive figure. And, just as utopia signifies “no-place,” so did “New Negro” signify a “black person who lives at no place,” and at no time.³ It was a bold and audacious act of language, signifying the will to power, to dare to recreate a race by renaming it, despite the dubiousness of the venture. It was this kind of racial-historical fiction—the weary black dream of a perfect state of being, with no history in particular detail, rather than the search for a group of black and especial historical entities—which contemporary literary scholars must historicize.

Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel, writing in *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (1979), have aptly characterized the latent content of all utopic thought thusly: “The great utopia startles and yet is recognized as conceivable. It is not a sleeping or bizarre vision but one that satisfies a hunger or stimulates the mind and the body to the recognition of a new potentiality [. . .]. It can be studied as a reflection of the specific crises that it presumes to resolve [. . .]. It may capture the anguish of an epoch in a striking metaphor.”⁴ The weary dream of a perfected state of being, with no history, the dream of naming a second, new self, was emblematic of the anguish in African American history. This naming ritual, in short, was prefigured in the autobiographical texts of the ex-slaves published before 1865. Frederick Douglass called himself by three surnames before he stumbled upon “Douglass.”⁵ Sojourner Truth, in her own autobiographical narrative, strongly recalls the naming of her newly freed self, and attributes that art to the grace of God:

My name was Isabella; but when I left the house of bondage, I left everything behind. I wan’t goin’ to keep nothin’ of Egypt on me, an’ so I went to the Lord an’ asked him to give me a new name. An’ the Lord give me Sojourner, because I was to travel up an’ down the land, showin’ the people their sins, an’ bein’ a sign unto them. Afterward I told de Lord I wanted another name, ’cause everybody else had two names; an de’ Lord give me Truth, because I was to declare the truth to de people.⁶

In *Up from Slavery* (1901), Booker T. Washington, the Negro self as endowed institution, confirms Truth’s declaration of the name as a “sign” of the self, even if a less natural relationship prevailed between the sign and its referent for most Negroes than it did for her: “After the coming of freedom there were two points upon which practically all the people on our place were agreed, and I find that this was generally true throughout the South: that they must change their names, and that they must leave the old plantation for at least a few days or weeks in order that they might really feel that they were free.”⁷

From instances such as these, but multiplied, what was thought to apply to the part was willfully applied to the whole. At least since the creation in 1827 of the first black newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal*, African Americans had displayed consistent, and perhaps undue, concern for their racial name. Especially full was the account of debates over the race’s name at the turn of the twentieth century, as printed in *Alexander’s Magazine*, the *Voice of the Negro*, *Colored American Magazine*, and the *New York Age*. The idea that the race’s public perception turned largely upon the connotations of its name was a received and resistant one, as germane to African American intellectual history as was the idea of a direct relation between the race’s creation of “art” and its realization of political desire. As we shall soon see, nowhere in African American history was this complex relation more evident than in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.

In the centuries before this period, the phrase “New Negro” was so compelling that one eighteenth-century writer, for example, felt called upon to define it for his 1745 readership of the *London Magazine*.⁸ What was curious even about this early definition was that the name already connoted, as it would later at the turn of the century, both a temporal order of succession and an ahistorical American experience. Furthermore, its connotation of a direct spatial association with Africa implied a state of consciousness, perhaps a form of racial dignity or integrity, a sort of “organic community,” no longer even possible to aspire toward in the new world of

enslavement. But this usage, as suggestive as it was, was an isolated one. It was the several definitions of the “New Negro” as the sign of a new racial and public self after Reconstruction that applied most directly to the Harlem Renaissance. This racial self, as we define it here, did not exist as an entity or group of entities, but “only” as a coded system of signs, complete with masks and mythology.

At least since its usages after Reconstruction, the name had implied a tension between strictly political concerns and strictly artistic concerns. Alain Locke’s appropriation of the name in 1925 for his literary movement represented a measured co-opting of the term from its fairly radical political connotations, as defined in the *Messenger*, the *Crusader*, the *Kansas City Call*, and the *Chicago Whip*, in bold essays and editorials printed during the post–World War I race “riots” in which African Americans rather ably defended themselves from mob aggression.

During the 1920s, the New Negro indeed had undergone changes of the profoundest sort. The two poles of this apparently drastic transformation, however, were present in even the earliest uses of the phrase. The sheer resonating preserve and force of this transformation can be gleaned somewhat from the fact that the postwar writings of Alain Locke and his contemporaries saw fit to graft, onto its postwar connotations of aggressive self-defense, the mythological and primitivistic defense of the racial self that was the basis of the Harlem Renaissance.

New Negro Politics

In the brief history above, which states that the concept of the New Negro implied a tension between political concerns and artistic concerns, what was the exact nature of this tension? What definition or kind of politics created it? Is it the politics of culture (cultural politics), or the culture of politics (political culture)?

Certain scholars today have discouraged the misapplication of “politics” in histories of African American culture. For example, in *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought* (1997), Adolph L. Reed, Jr. has accused literary historians—and perhaps cultural historians more generally—of “unhelpfully blur[ring] the distinction between cultural history and the history of social and political thought, such that the former has tended to substitute for the latter.” These historians ascribe “politics” to African American culture, especially as it relates to social behavior and art, in ways that presumably a political historian would dismiss as ahistorical, if not also too hagiographical. Accurate definitions of politics should include issues of “legitimacy, justice, obligation, the meaning of equality, or the nature of the polity”; “demography, social psychology, political economy, or public opinion”; not to mention the conventions of government.⁹

Analogous critiques of African Americanist approaches to politics have arisen in literary studies, too. In *So Black and Blue* (2003), Kenneth W. Warren provides an important way of thinking about how and why historians should distinguish between “direct black political action” and “indirect cultural politics.” Direct black political action acknowledges that “race [...] is at bottom a problem of politics and economics—of constitution making and of wielding power legislatively and economically in order to mobilize broad constituencies to preserve an unequal social order.” In this context, African Americans have used activist, legislative, judicial, or public-policy means to access institutional resources and power, and to exploit them for their own best interests as racialized subjects. Indirect cultural politics,

by contrast, signifies the efforts of African American intellectuals and artists, after the “failure” of Reconstruction, to operate “outside the political realm of direct representation—whether one did so literarily, sociologically, philosophically, administratively, or philanthropically.” By way of this distinction, Warren identifies a long historical trend in African American intellectualism tracing back to a post-Reconstruction “cultural turn in black politics,” when African American leaders and uplifters linked cultural to political arbitrations of racial representation. According to Warren, this logic was flawed because culture was not—and has not been ever since—as responsible and transformative as direct political action.¹⁰

Warren’s call for more accurate historical contexts that account for the cultural turn does not decry—as much as Reed does—contemporary academic interest in cultural politics. But his assumption that “direct black political action” is more transformative than “indirect cultural politics” neglects those instances in African American history when cultural politics and political culture were more mutually dependent than he makes them appear. Moreover, there are successful examples when African Americans sought, in a sense, to make cultural politics as “direct” as possible.

Recently, scholars such as Barbara Foley, Marlon B. Ross, Anne Elizabeth Carroll, and Martha Jane Nadell have supported this point. They have studied various aspects of “New Negro politics,” a paradigm encapsulating black and white interest in the cultural politics and the political culture of racial representation. In *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (2003), Foley details the New Negro’s ideological transition from political radicalism in 1919 to romantic culturalism in 1925, while Ross in *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (2004) shows that the gender and sexual assumptions about African American men placed certain pressures on, and created certain impressions within, New Negro political discourse between the Civil War and the early twentieth century. Ross also gestures to how African Americans tried to control the cultural politics of racial representation through artistic forms more accessible and emotive than literary art. Carroll’s *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance* (2005) and Nadell’s *Enter the New Negroes: Images of Race in American Culture* (2004) elaborate this idea by examining the relationship between written words and visual images in New Negro politics. While Carroll celebrates the multimedia legacy of African American culture, Nadell exposes the discursive limitations of words and images intrinsic to this legacy. Published within the past few years, these four books mark a crucial moment in the academic study of New Negro politics. The new scholarship demonstrates that the political inflation of culture in African American studies has not been as misguided as we have been led to believe.¹¹

Working in concert with this scholarship, this anthology illustrates the significance of New Negro politics to our understanding of African American history. In the first section of the anthology, entitled “The New Negro,” the reprinted essays provide an ideal context for determining the cultural role of the New Negro in the history of African American political mobilization. Conversely, as we shall soon see, the construct helps us to realize the original political role of racial representation in the development of African American culture.

Certain black leaders, for example, rhetorically aligned the international, imperialist war being waged in Europe with the domestic, racial war being waged in the United States. In a 1919 editorial published in *The Crisis*, W.E.B. Du Bois decries the

wartime mistreatment of Negro troops in France, whom white Americans at home and abroad had unfairly, and excessively, accused of raping women, among other atrocities. The admirable participation of African American soldiers in an international struggle on behalf of America and its European allies against the German military, according to Du Bois's testimony, could not alleviate the soldiers' concerns that their home country "represents and gloats in lynching, disenfranchisement, caste, brutality and devilish insult" of the darker-skinned race. Consequently, African Americans did not desire just to "*return from fighting*," but to "*return fighting*" on behalf of "Democracy."¹²

If we investigate ideological areas in postwar New Negro discourse other than left-wing radicalism, we can see that Du Bois's political-warrior mentality had resonated among black intellectuals. In his 1920 book, *When Africa Awakes: The "Inside Story" of the Stirrings and Strivings of the New Negro in the Western World*, Hubert H. Harrison argues that the New Negro must embrace a "Race First" philosophy that realizes the importance of direct political representation and action: "*The new Negro race in America will not achieve political self-respect until it is in a position to organize itself as a politically independent party.*" Outlined in the chapter entitled "The New Politics: The New Politics for the New Negro," Harrison further contends that African Americans must "demand, not 'recognition,' but representation, and we are out to throw our votes to any party which gives us this, and withhold them from any party which refuses to give it," which at this time was the Republican Party. Granted, he suggests unrealistically later in the chapter that a New Negro could become president of the United States if the race concentrated its votes around that candidate—whose African ancestry, by the way, needed to be indiscernible to the naked eye. But Harrison's nearly Garveyistic idea that the development of racial-political consciousness and nationalism marked the Negro's transition from Old to New was deemed quite practical by his contemporaries.

Of course, the publications of essays and books like Du Bois's and Harrison's did not discourage certain writers from accusing the New Negro of being politically meaningless. In "The New Negro Hokum" (1928), Gustavus Adolphus Stewart laments that the Negro secures governmental positions that are at best "second-rate," without significant influence. The level of iconoclastic cynicism characterizing this article, however, insinuates Stewart's degree of disingenuousness. Rhetorically, it resembles the original article after which Stewart modeled his essay, George S. Schuyler's "The Negro-Art Hokum" (1926), which similarly masked the author's true belief in the Negro's political salience.¹³

Schuyler's iconoclastic campaign, it turns out, began amid the public debate over Alain Locke, his ambassadorial status, and his two edited collections of 1925, "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro" (*The Survey Graphic Number* [March 1]) and, its later edition in book form, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Locke's romantic construction of the New Negro neglected the depth and complexity of African American struggle. The wartime and postwar New Negro was actually undergoing an ideological evolution, or what Barbara Foley has called "devolution." This idea helps us to avoid the conventional apolitical story of the Negro symbolically transmuting from Old to New in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In reality, Locke's romantic New Negro was a "militant, card-carrying, gun-toting Socialist who refused to turn the other cheek," a "New Negro class struggle warrior," or a "gun-brandishing New Negro." Modern political culture, in short, revolved about the New Negro. According to Foley: "In the revolutionary crucible of 1919, the term

New Negro signified a fighter against both racism and capitalism; to be a political moderate did not preclude endorsement of at least some aspects of a class analysis of racism or sympathy with at least some goals of the Bolshevik Revolution.” In periodicals ranging from *Call*, *Liberator*, and *Worker’s Monthly* to *Negro World*, *Messenger*, and *Crusader*, antiracist discourse portrayed the New Negro, through a class frame of analysis, as a political activist of both national and international stature.¹⁴

Through Locke’s popular 1925 collections, however, New Negro discourse shifted from political radicalism to romantic culturalism. That ideological turn within the New Negro movement pivoted on Locke’s hegemonic tropes of the “folk,” vis-à-vis his proclamation that African American art and culture were undergoing a rebirth of extraordinary proportions. Although only a glimmer in some of his earlier, pre-Renaissance writings and lectures, Locke relatively succeeded in disengaging African American culture from radicalism in *The New Negro*. Through the revision of certain essays to the omission of others that conjured up radical sentiment, Locke suppressed in his 1925 collections the idea that the New Negro was radical both in tone and in purpose.¹⁵ Romanticized as ahistorical, lower-class, and authentically black, the folk served as metonym or synecdoche of the African American community, lubricating Locke’s turn from racial antagonism to racial amelioration. The consequent decline in production and consumption of left-leaning New Negro cultural politics, in other words, was, to a certain degree, an accurate compass for the direction of larger U.S. political culture.¹⁶

Locke’s relationship to political radicalism came full circle in the 1930s. If one interprets Richard Wright’s historic essay, “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (1937), as a 1930s (as opposed to pre-Renaissance) version of New Negro radicalism, then we can see that Locke’s early-1930s writings anticipate, and even concede, Wright’s critique of the Harlem Renaissance. Both Wright and Locke pointed out the ideological disconnections, once exacerbated by the Renaissance, between the proletariat and the intelligentsia of African American society. What is more, Wright’s demand that the African American writer should meet the “serious responsibility” of doing “justice to his subject matter, in order to depict Negro life in all its manifold and intricate relationships,” echoed Locke’s insistence that the African American writer should avoid the “spiritual truancy and social irresponsibility” of Claude McKay, for example. Although once a New Negro radical, McKay lived abroad from 1922 to 1934, compromising his relationship to African American cultural, intellectual, and political institutions.¹⁷

All this means that the powerful transfer of cultural ambassadorship from Locke to Wright—that is, from the Harlem Renaissance to the so-called Chicago Renaissance—did not operate through extreme philosophical disagreement. Rather, it occurred through their mutual recognition of the decline of the Harlem Renaissance, the African American cultural opportunities afforded by political radicalism, and the importance of pragmatic collaborations between writers and “the people” during the long New Negro movement. In sum, the ideas of Wright and Locke were more continuous in the 1930s than their long-standing and divergent reputations as deans of the Harlem Renaissance and the Chicago Renaissance, respectively, have led us to believe.

Published one year after Wright’s “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” George S. Schuyler’s “The Rise of the Black Internationale” similarly captures the political mood of the New Negro, but it does so from a more global perspective. Schuyler

characterizes black political internationalism as the penultimate stage of the New Negro's "arrival":

The New Negro is here. Perhaps no more courageous than the Old Negro who dropped his shackles in 1863, and fought against ignorance, propaganda, lethargy and persecution, but better informed, privy to his past, understanding of the present, unafraid of the future. [. . .] He believes that to combat this White Internationale of oppression a Black Internationale of liberation is necessary. He sees and welcomes a community of interest of all colored peoples. No longer ignorant, terrorized or lacking confidence, he waits, and schemes and plans. He is the Damoclean sword dangling over the white world. Everywhere he is on the march, he cannot be stopped, and he knows it.

Schuyler's words belong to a long history of African American discourse on New Negro local and global politics, spanning from the postbellum nineteenth century to the first years of the twenty-first. They bespeak the historic desire of many African Americans to know why America's optimistic democratic project remains unfinished. The New Negro, it turned out, captured the political goal of certain African Americans to facilitate this project for uplifting the race and, by extension, for the betterment of the nation and the world.

New Negro Uplift

New Negroes, in marked contrast with their enslaved or disenfranchised ancestors, demanded that their rights as citizens be vouchsafed by law. Significantly, New Negroes were to be recognized by what editorials in the 1890s called "education," "refinement," and "money," with property rights strongly implied as the hallmark of those who can demand their political rights. "Property," in this sense, was only one of a list of "properties" demanded of this New Negro. "Education" and "refinement"—to speak properly was to be proper—would ensure one's rights, along with the security of property.

Curiously, as the first section of this anthology, "The New Negro," attests, these terms of racial uplift came to bear on subsequent definitions of African American culture. For example, J.W.E. Bowen, writing in *An Appeal to the King* (1895), defines the New Negro only in terms of racial "consciousness" and its relation to "civilization": "the consciousness of a racial personality under the blaze of a new civilization." Bowen's "New Negro" led directly to the Harlem Renaissance, for it was above all through literature that both "a racial personality" and "the blaze of a new civilization" manifested themselves. Bowen's New Negro tried to create a universal racial art.

Booker T. Washington, Fannie Barrier Williams, and N. B. Wood dreamed of *A New Negro for a New Century*. The book was an elaborately constructed compendium of excerpted black histories, slave narratives, journalism, biographical sketches, and extended defenses of the combat performances of black soldiers from the American Revolution and "the Rebellion" to the Spanish-American War, in general, and the actions of "Regulars in the Philippines" and "Regulars in Cuba," more specifically. Published in 1900 and subtitled "An Accurate and Up-to-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race," *A New Negro* clearly intended to "turn" the new century's image of the black away from the stereotypes scattered

throughout plantation fictions, blackface minstrelsy, vaudeville, racist pseudoscience, and vulgar social Darwinism. The task was an enormous one. African American society had only the most minimal control over the mass production and dissemination of information, and its intellectuals believed that their racist treatment in life merely imitated their racist “treatments” in art. Accordingly, to manipulate the image of the Negro was, in a sense, to manipulate reality. The public Negro self, therefore, was an entity to be crafted.

And craft it Washington and his fellow editors attempted to do. The whole of *A New Negro*—some 428 pages and 60 portraits—reads now as a complex, if bulky, sign of the individual achievements of black men and women as abolitionists, soldiers, and artists. It also reads as a sign of the twentieth century’s “New Negroes,” the “progressive” classes of the race, who were forming numerous self-help institutions, such as “Colored Women’s Clubs,” which were key indicators of the race’s capacity for “elevation.” These two metaphors, by the way, along with the myriad versions of the vernacular phrase “we is risin,’” were echoes of the eighteenth-century terminology of racial uplift, related to the idea of a vertical great chain of being, along which both races and individuals “rose” from the animal kingdom to the most sublime instances of humanity, such as those frequently identified with the mathematician Isaac Newton and the poet John Milton. “Capacity” designated physical cranial measurements, but it quickly became the metaphor for the measure of the potential of human intelligence. The following lines from Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, quoted in Mrs. Booker T. Washington’s essay on the “Club Movement among Negro Women” in J. L. Nichols and William H. Crogman’s 1920 edition of *The New Progress of a Race*, indicate these origins clearly:

There is light beyond the darkness,
Joy beyond the present pain;
There is hope in God’s great justice
And the Negro’s rising brain.

A New Negro’s use of the keyword “progressive” dozens of times corresponds directly to an idea of progress through perfectibility, an eighteenth-century idea of racial uplift. Booker T. Washington’s *New Negro*, then, stood at a point on the great chain head and shoulders above the ex-slave black person, freed now for only thirty-five years. As the introduction postures: “This book has been rightly named *A New Negro for a New Century*. The negro of today is in every phase of life far advanced over the negro of thirty years ago. In the following pages the progressive life of the African American people has been written in the light of achievements that will be surprising to people who are ignorant of the enlarging life of these remarkable people.” Of this anthology’s eighteen chapters, no less than seven are histories of black involvement in American wars, while six chapters “unmask” slavery. Rather creatively, a large part of this material derives from the writings of African American historians such as George Washington Williams, William C. Nell, and William Grant Still. “Heroes and Martyrs” to the race are John Brown, Calvin Fairbanks, William Lloyd Garrison, and Elijah P. Lovejoy, while two men and two women—Frederick Douglass, Toussaint L’Ouverture, Phillis Wheatley, and Sojourner Truth—are accorded the unusual privilege of being called “Fathers [and Mothers] to the Race.”

Two chapters in the collection treat the “Club Movement among Colored Women,” and another charts the educational progress of the race. Booker T. Washington’s

portrait forms the frontispiece of the volume, while Mrs. Washington's portrait concludes the book, thus standing as framing symbols of the idea of progress.¹⁸ Between this handsome pair are portraits of military figures, such as Antonio Maceo, Maximo Gomez, Charles E. Young, and John H. Alexander; creative writers such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, T. Thomas Fortune, Charles W. Chesnutt, and Frederick Douglass; scholars including W. S. Scarborough, H. T. Kealing, S. Laing Williams, and W.E.B. Du Bois; and notable women such as Mary Church Terrell, Anna J. Cooper, Dr. Ida Grey Nelson, Miss Lulu Love, and Fannie Barrier Williams, all of whom appear to be very "progressive" indeed.

The concomitant militaristic emphasis in *A New Negro* intends to refute claims made by Theodore Roosevelt in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1899 of the inherent racial weaknesses that prevented black officers from commanding effectively, thus making mandatory, in subsequent wars, their command by white officers. Almost the whole of Sgt. Presley Holliday's rebuttal, printed initially in the *New York Age* in 1899, appears in *A New Negro*, along with the histories of black valor in every American war. The tone of these essays is fairly represented by Holliday's claim that black soldiers in the Civil War "turned the tide of war against slavery and the Rebellion, in favor of freedom and the Union." To have fought nobly, clearly, was held to be a legitimate argument for full citizenship rights.

Fannie Barrier Williams's essay, "The Club Movement among Colored Women of America," furthermore, is pertinent evidence here of an urge to displace racial heritage with an ideal of sexual bonding. "To feel that you are something better than a slave, or a descendant of an ex-slave," she writes, "to feel that you are a unit in the womanhood of a great nation and a great civilization, is the beginning of self-respect and the respect of your race." It is this direct relationship between the self and the race, between the part and the whole, that is the unspoken premise of *A New Negro*. As much as transforming a white racist image of the black, then *A New Negro*'s intention was to restructure the race's image of itself. As Williams puts this necessity: "The consciousness of being fully free has not yet come to the great mass of the colored women in this country," in part because "the emancipation of the mind and spirit of the race could not be accomplished by legislation." This call to "progress" and "respectability," therefore, was meant to marshal the masses of the race into the regiments of the New Negroes who, of course, would command them. And if "Zip Coon," "Sambo," and "Mammy" were thought to be the stereotyped figments of racist minds, there was just enough lingering doubt about their capacities for progress for Washington and his cohorts to structure a manifesto directed as much at them as at sensitive, intelligent, and wealthy whites.

Fannie Barrier Williams, writing in Croghan's 1902 edition of *The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation*, again in an essay entitled "The Club Movement among Colored Women of America," places the black woman at the center of the New Negro's philosophy of self-respect and racial uplift. "The Negro woman's club of today," she maintains, "represents the New Negro with new powers of self-help." Two years later, in 1904, John Henry Adams, Jr., in a *Voice of the Negro* essay called "A Study of the Features of the New Negro Woman," concurs with Williams's assessment of the central role of African American women in the New Negro movement, and even goes so far as to reproduce images of several ideal New Negro women so that other women might pattern themselves after the prototype.

Undaunted, two months later John Henry Adams published the male companion piece to his earlier essay. “The New Negro Man” appeared in the October 1904 number of the *Voice of the Negro*. Again, Adams is eager to chart the unpainted features of this New Negro:

Here is the real new Negro man. Tall, erect, commanding, with a face as strong and expressive as Angelo’s Moses and yet every whit as pleasing and handsome as Reuben’s favorite model. There is that penetrative eye about which Charles Lamb wrote with such deep admiration, that broad forehead and firm chin. [...] Such is the new Negro man, and he who finds the real man in the hope of deriving all the benefits to be got by acquaintance and contact does not run upon him by mere chance, but must go over the paths of some kind of biography, until he gets a reasonable understanding of what it actually costs of human effort to be a man and at the same time a Negro.

As he had done in his essay on the New Negro woman, Adams prints seven portraits of the New Negro man, so that all might be able to recognize him. What is of importance here is Adams’s stress upon the “features” of this “new” Negro, drawing a correlation between the specific *characteristics* of the individuals depicted and the larger, uplifted *character* of the race. Why is this so important? Precisely because the *features* of the race—its collective mouth-shape and lip-size, the shape of its head (which especially concerned phrenologists at the turn of the century), its black skin color, its kinky hair—had been caricatured and stereotyped so severely in popular American art that black intellectuals seemed to feel that nothing less than a full facelift and a complete break with the enslaved past could ameliorate the social conditions of the modern Negro. While this concern with features would imply a visual or facial priority, it was also the precise structure and resonance of the black *voice* by which the very *face* of the race would be known and fundamentally reconstructed. Both to contain and develop this voice, a virtual cultural renaissance was called for.

The trope of the New Negro did not disappear between 1904 and the 1920s, when it resurfaced as the sign of the cultural movement that contained the New Negro voice. Ray Stannard Baker outlines his idea of the New Negro in 1908 in *Following the Color Line*. In 1916, William Pickens published a book of essays entitled *The New Negro*, and two years later in 1918, the “New Negro” Magazine, edited by August Valentine Bernier, made its brief appearance. Between January and March of 1920, the *New York Age* published an open forum entitled “The New Negro—What Is He? Does the New Negro Differ from the Negro of the Past?”

We have come a remarkably long way from Booker T. Washington’s image of the New Negro at the turn of the century. The militancy of the reconstructed image of his figure of the New Negro was both too potent and too problematical to predominate within the black intelligentsia. As mentioned earlier, in 1925 Alain Locke edited special editions that served both to codify and launch a New Negro cultural movement. But Locke’s New Negro served in yet another capacity: it transformed the militancy associated with the trope and translated it into a romantic, apolitical movement of the arts—which his debate with Du Bois over aesthetics versus propaganda made clear. Locke’s New Negro was an artist, and it would be in the sublimity of the fine arts, and *not* in the political sphere of action or protest poetry, that Anglo America (it thought) would at last embrace the Negro of 1925,

a Negro ahistorical, a Negro who was “just like” every other American, a Negro more deserving than the Old Negro because he had been reconstructed as an entity somehow “new.”

Race, Representation, and African American Culture

The section “How Should Art Portray the Negro?” begins this anthology’s turn toward the general intellectual discussion of the political role of racial representation in African American culture. In her essay, Anna Julia Cooper critiques the literature of William Howells, the “dean” of American literature in the late nineteenth century, because of its caricatures of Negroes and its oversimplification of their lives and struggles. Although Albion Tourgée and George Washington Cable drew more realistic images of the Negro, Cooper nonetheless concludes that “an authentic portrait, at once aesthetic and true to life, presenting the black man as a free American citizen, not the humble slave of [Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1853 novel] *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*—but the *man*, divinely struggling and aspiring yet tragically warped and distorted by the adverse winds of circumstance, has not yet been painted.” The other writers of this section—most notably, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles W. Chesnutt, William Stanley Braithwaite, and the prominent contributors to a 1926 symposium in *The Crisis* magazine—to an extent reiterate Cooper’s frustration. By recalling nineteenth- and twentieth-century art in the United States and Europe, they arrive at Cooper’s own opinion that artistic portrayals of the black race should aspire to acceptable standards of historical realism and racial-political diplomacy. Ultimately, they believe, the success of this project hinges not only on the expertise of black artists but on the cooperation of whites as well.

The next section, “The Renaissance,” revolves around the implications of racial representation for African American culture. The essays illustrate how black and white intellectuals connected New Negro politics to particular cultural-historical phenomena, philosophical debates, and culture genres. In 1924, W.E.B. Du Bois, for example, called the collective emergence of talented Negro authors a remarkable “younger literary movement”—that is, younger than his own literary generation of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles W. Chesnutt—that was revising the norms of class, society, and sexuality. One year later, Alain Locke, the putative dean of this movement, which he termed a “Negro Renaissance,” likewise recognized a “younger generation” of black writers for whom racial experience provided the material for their creative expression. He also argued that their movement coincided with the advancement of white writers toward more realistic—if less Old Negro—portrayals of African America. For Locke, such images demonstrated sensitivity, tact, and realism unlike the minstrel images found in the plantation tradition of Anglo-American literature in the postbellum nineteenth century, or in the equally racist but more threatening, violent, and Negrophobic images found in early twentieth-century Anglo-American literature.

Carl Van Vechten, in his review of Locke’s *The New Negro*, agrees. Van Vechten takes issue with William Stanley Braithwaite, a Negro poet-critic featured in Locke’s book, who kept recycling the “old cliché that Negro novels must be written by Negroes.” H. L. Mencken’s 1926 review of *The New Negro* and the subsequent reflections on the Harlem Renaissance, especially by Carl Van Doren, Benjamin Brawley, Martha Gruening, and Allison Davis, all speculate on the degree to which the

African American cultural efflorescence could be called simply a fad, a vogue for things primitive and exotic, a commercial bubble of patronage and fetishism destined to burst. On the one hand, the essays in this section of the anthology move us to consider whether the Harlem Renaissance was a failure or a success. On the other hand, they also demand a more sophisticated inquiry into whether the scholarly prevalence or disregard of these terms serves as a reliable index of the ideological or philosophical tendencies of African American studies in the past few decades.¹⁹

The section “Art or Propaganda?” covers the tension in African American cultural history between art for the sake of art and art for the sake of racial politics. The central point of contention appears between Du Bois and Locke. In 1926, Du Bois remarked that the desire of black artists to conform to public expectations, held mainly by whites and adopted by blacks, led them to perpetuate false racial stereotypes, to cling to obsequious attitudes toward whites, as well as to settle into political ambivalence or complacency. Thus he advocated the kind of Negro art in which the apostle of “beauty” intertwined with those of “truth,” “goodness,” “justice,” “honor,” and what was “right.” In the end, art should express propaganda so that it could “gain[] the right of black folk to love and enjoy,” a right that should go hand in hand with black political demands for fair, humane treatment in U.S. society and around the world.

Du Bois’s disregard, in his words, of the “wailing of the purists” partially indicted Locke’s position on art and propaganda. Indeed, Locke’s 1928 and 1936 essays—“Art or Propaganda?” and “Propaganda—or Poetry?”—reveal his long-held belief that propaganda must presuppose myths of black inferiority in order to build its refutation of them. Propaganda was thus an inevitable limitation of black self-expression and creativity in the arts. Unsurprisingly, in the latter essay, Locke admonishes the new proletarian wave of African American writers “not to ignore or eliminate the race problem, but to broaden its social dimensions and deepen its universal human implications.” One year later, in 1937, however, Richard Wright redeemed Du Bois’s criteria for Negro art in the name of “protest.” Wright presented a blueprint for Negro writing that refuses to go “a-begging to white America” for self-justification or for the imagination of wide social impact.

The next four sections of this anthology survey major genres of African American culture. The first part of the section, “Literature: History and Theory,” begins with essays that historicize or theorize literary representations of the race. More specifically, the omnibus essays on African American literary history by Du Bois, Thomas L. G. Oxley, and Benjamin Brawley examine the range and complexity of African American literary accomplishments and struggles. Equally erudite essays by Katherine Tillman and Victoria Earle Matthews corroborate these accounts, but not without foregrounding the important political role of women in racial advancement. Moreover, Arthur Schomburg and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, respectively, turn to such intellectual paradigms as archaeology and pedagogy to devise the best, if most practical, ways of imagining and recovering African American literary history, while Robert E. Park and Fred DeArmond apply sociology in order to limn what Park has called the “human nature” or “inner life” of African American authors. Finally, Zora Neale Hurston’s outline of the “characteristics of Negro expression” links the history of Negro authorship to theories of black aesthetic and cultural typology.

The essays by Brenda Ray Moryck and James Weldon Johnson anticipate the articles in the next part of the section, which talk mainly about the literary profession

and marketplace for black authors. The key, recurring ideas—raised by Hubert H. Harrison, Willis Richardson, James Weldon Johnson, and Sterling Brown—touch on the tense relationship between black authors and their white editors, publishers, and readers who imposed on these authors certain expectations about what they could or should write about. In their essays, George W. Jacobs (a pseudonym for George S. Schuyler), Claude McKay, and Eugene Holmes confront the implications of such external burdens for the creative options and freedom of African American authors.

The last part of this section illuminates many of these themes in the context of poetry. Aside from James Weldon Johnson in his now-famous preface to the 1922 edition of *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, several authors in his era were talking at length about poetry as a crucial form of literary art. Given that contemporary scholars tend to focus mostly on fiction when they survey African American literary history after the death of Paul Laurence Dunbar in 1906, this selected group of essays should support the case that poetry always held a special place in the minds of black intellectuals, even in the minds of such luminaries as Wallace Thurman and Alain Locke, whom scholars have celebrated more often for their writing and editing of prose than for their poetics.

The next section, “Music,” focuses on the spirituals and jazz. Several of the writers, especially Paul Laurence Dunbar and W.E.B. Du Bois, portrayed spirituals as the key to realizing the collective trauma of slaves and their ancestors as they struggled against colonialism in Africa, the middle passage, and the institution of slavery in the New World. While Alain Locke, John W. Work, and Zora Neale Hurston recognized the thematic interplay of religion and secularity born out of this genre of African American music, Hurston and Laurence Buermeyer examined the specific formal properties of the spirituals as well as their cultural and commercial development over the centuries as “folk-songs.” B. A. Botkin comments on several of these issues in his review-essay of recent collections and scholarship devoted to “workaday” songs.

Several of these writers on the spirituals resorted to such stereotypes as “primitive” and “simple” to characterize black creativity. Similarly, certain writers on jazz—exemplified by Walter Kingsley, a supposed “authority” on the subject—consistently restricted the music to the idea that black demonstrations of rhythm result from a “savage” or “exotic” racial inheritance. However, other writers, namely J. A. Rogers, R.W.S. Mendl, and Louis Armstrong, broadened the history of jazz beyond denigrating myths of African culture. They considered instead the musical genre’s modern formal and cultural development in America, above all in New Orleans and, to a lesser extent, in the great cities of the Midwest, Northeast, and West Coast, as the best context for speculating on the nature and future of jazz.

One thematic subtext in the selected criticism on music, theater, and the fine arts is that print literacy is not a precondition for the mass consumption of these cultural media. Rollin Lynde Hartt follows up on this point in his essay, included in the section “Theater.” He refutes the prevailing idea that the “Negro press” is the primary means by which African American leaders could influence their constituencies. The commercial proliferation of theaters and movie houses managed and owned by African Americans supported his counterargument that these cultural media are poised to be more influential than the Negro press.

Rowena Woodham Jelliffe and Montgomery Gregory echoed Hartt’s indication of the “vast potentialities in this field.” Indeed, Negro theater had evolved within

and against minstrelsy and vaudeville in the nineteenth century and on Broadway in the early twentieth century. The essays by Gregory, Paul Robeson, Jessie Fauset, and Alain Locke view the more complex dramatic roles of Negroes—including the “noble savage” roles of Robeson in Eugene O’Neill’s plays—as a defining and welcome stage in the growth of Negro theater. Fauset took this idea one step further. Humor or comedy, she asserted, was a therapeutic way for African American actors and their audiences to grapple with and overcome the trauma of racial oppression. In some ways, her notion of the “gift of laughter” resembles similar ideas in Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem “We Wear the Mask” in *Majors and Minors* (1896) and Langston Hughes’s *Laughing to Keep from Crying* (1952). Taking a different, if cynical, approach, Ralph Matthews—writing from the position of theater editor of Baltimore’s *Afro-American* in 1934—contended that Negro theater rehashes many of the same racial stereotypes found in nineteenth-century minstrelsy and vaudeville, just in more subtle and modern ways. Negro theater, in his words, was akin to a “Dodo Bird, an extinct fowl which, as was later revealed, did not exist at all,” or was at best a fleeting cultural phenomenon.

The last section, “The Fine Arts,” addresses painting and sculpture. Essays by Alain Locke, Harry Alan Potamkin, and Romare Bearden seek to dispel the notion that art created by the African diaspora was merely an exotic fad during the years after World War I. Rather, their serious analyses of the history and nature of African art and Negro art demonstrated their collective belief that, in the words of Bearden, this field required “some standard of criticism then, not only to stimulate the artist, but also to raise the cultural level of the people.”

Of these three writers, Locke above all heeded this idea. By publishing criticism on African art in reputable magazines ranging from *Opportunity* to the *American Magazine of Art*, Locke cemented his stature as one of the leading and most prolific art critics in the early twentieth century. (The multiple selections of Locke’s essays in this anthology reflect the great diversity, frequency, and value of his critical writings.) His 1924 essay “A Note on African Art” forms a core part of his writings on African “ancestral art” in *The New Negro*. Here, he focused on how African art and European art had both factored into the African American achievement of a “characteristic idiom” that could be called New (World) Negro art. Locke’s essentialist articulation of the artists and cultural geographies of Europe, Africa, and African America hoped to reveal the legacy of the ancestral arts. While making this case, Locke accused the dean of American painters, African American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner, for perpetuating “the conventional blindness of the Caucasian eye with respect to the racial material at their immediate disposal.” Tanner’s avoidance of racial realism in his paintings—or, equally reprehensible in Tanner’s early career, his paintings of Negroes playing banjos and dancing—was a symptom of his cultural alienation from what Locke called the “folk” of African America. The white ethnocentrism and cultural privilege of Tanner’s academic training in Europe, Locke went on to say, dissuaded him from creating more racially pragmatic and politically responsible art that provided the kind of progressive images the Harlem Renaissance needed.²⁰ Jessie Fauset’s 1924 interview of Tanner in *The Crisis* conceivably stoked Locke’s emotional fire. For all the Harlem Renaissance community to see, Fauset lauded the person “known internationally now as a painter of religious subjects” and as “the great Artist” who was then staying in America, mostly in New York City, for a three-month tour. The discrepancy between Locke’s concern with Tanner’s painterly alienation from black folk, on the one hand, and Fauset’s praise

of Tanner's professional accomplishments despite and because of his expatriation, on the other, illustrates the extent to which the politics of racial representation—both as embodied by Negro artists and within their works—shaped and were shaped by critical evaluations of African American culture.



The essays reprinted in this anthology are first grouped by thematic sections to display the common subjects on which intellectuals, black and white, wrote between Reconstruction and World War II. Within these sections, the essays are laid out in chronological order, alerting readers to the fact that those subjects were always historically contingent, at once time-bound yet changing across time.²¹

To repeat an earlier point, the number and variety of essays chosen for this anthology should remind readers that the term “New Negro” did not have to be explicitly invoked in order for its implicit political discourses on race, representation, and African American culture to constitute a tradition of New Negro criticism. Put simply, people were talking about Old Negroes and New Negroes even when they were not referring to these tropes by name. When abstracted in this way, one can see that the politics of racial representation remains relevant today, when labels such as “Uncle Tom” conjure up not only the cultural history of black stereotypes, but also the current controversy surrounding black political responsibility, or lack thereof.²² In the following pages, the documents of New Negro criticism should lay the basis on which future intellectual approaches to race, representation, and African American culture could be built.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard University
Gene Andrew Jarrett, Boston University

NOTES

1. The most notable examples of scholarship specifically about the New Negro include Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” *Representations* 24 (Fall 1988); Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism 1850–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995); Jon Michael Spencer, *The New Negroes and Their Music: The Success of the Harlem Renaissance* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997); J. Martin Favor, *Authentic Blackness: The Folk in the New Negro Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism between the Wars* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999); Anne Elizabeth Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Rebecca Carroll, ed., *Uncle Tom or New Negro: African Americans Reflect on Booker T. Washington and Up from Slavery 100 Years Later* (New York: Broadway Books/Harlem Moon, 2006); Marlon Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Martha Jane Nadell, *Enter the New Negroes: Images of Race in American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Barbara Foley, *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

2. Mark Twain, “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It,” *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1874).

3. Michel Foucault, "Preface," in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970; New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xvii.
4. Frank Edward Manuel and Fritzie Prigohzy Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 1979), 29.
5. See Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994).
6. Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, ed. Nell Irvin Painter (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 111; our italics.
7. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York: New American Library, 2000), 16.
8. Anonymous, "Itinerant Observations in America," *London Magazine* 14 (1745–46) and reprinted in the Georgia Historical Society, *Collections* IV, 17 (1878). The explicit reference to the term "New Negro" appears in this line: "To be sure, a new Negro, if he must be broke, either from Obstinacy, or, which I am more apt to suppose, from Greatness of Soul, will require more hard Discipline than a young Spaniel: You would really be surpriz'd at their Perseverance; let an hundred Men shew him how to hoe, or drive a Wheelbarrow, he'll still take the one by the Bottom, and the other by the Wheel; and they often die before they can be conquer'd." See Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (1974; New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), 287, for the implications of this quotation and its historical period.
9. Adolph L. Reed, *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 130, 152.
10. Kenneth W. Warren, *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 20–21, 31, 33–34.
11. This scholarship is more progressive than what Reed and Warren suggest. Reed and Warren point to rather outdated essays and books, and Reed in particular tends to use Gates and Baker as the synecdoche of all of African Americanist society.
12. Although the essay is entitled "Opinion by W.E.B. Du Bois," people at the time referred to it as "Returning Soldiers," since Du Bois wrote it upon his return to the United States in 1919 from a summit in Paris. See Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 110, for example.
13. In "The Negro-Art Hokum," Schuyler argues that since Negroes are not peculiarly racial, they do not produce peculiarly racial art. "Negro art," or what Schuyler calls art whose creators are identified as "Negro," bears the cultural imprint of the nation, a pattern discernible in art created by Anglo-Americans, generally called "American art." The idea of considering Negro art "true"—or an authentic, singular tradition—is a sham, a hokum.
14. Foley, *Spectres of 1919*, 4, 31–32, 70–71, 121, 168.
15. For more information about Locke's earlier writings, see Foley, *Spectres of 1919*, 205–17; for the subtext of his editing of *The New Negro*, see *ibid.*, 224–44. The footnoted sentence plays on Locke's line in "The New Negro," the introductory essay in *The New Negro*, that "the mainspring of Negro life is radical in tone, but not in purpose" (quoted in *ibid.*, 1).
16. According to Barbara Foley, Locke's version of the New Negro coincided with the fact that "the production of literature inflected with revolutionary politics had slowed to a near-trickle by the last half of the decade" (*ibid.*, 76).
17. Aside from Alain Locke, "Spiritual Truancy," *New Challenge* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1937), see an earlier essay Locke published, "Harlem: Dark Weather-Vane," *The Survey Graphic* (August 1936).
18. In order to see the portraits of the figures mentioned in this introduction, see John H. Adams, "Rough Sketches: A Study of the Features of the New Negro Woman" and "Rough Sketches: The New Negro Man," both of which are reprinted in this anthology.
19. See Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance*, 14–28, for a thorough overview of the rhetoric of "failure" in Harlem Renaissance scholarship.
20. Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," in *The New Negro*, ed. Locke (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 264.

21. An exception is the case of Alain Locke in the section “The Fine Arts,” where the range of dates of his multiple essays succeeds those of the essays by subsequent authors in that same section.

22. See, for example, Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

REV. W.E.C. WRIGHT

The New Negro (1894)

The American Negro of thirty years ago was the product of African paganism and American slavery that called itself Christian. Two widely different pictures of the Negro of that period are to be found in the descriptions and allusions of writers both of that time and of the present day. In apologies for slavery, whether direct or indirect, the Negro appears as docile and happy, loyal to his master and to his master's family, kind in disposition, of a warm religious nature, and so trustworthy that his very vices leaned to virtue's side. Such idyllic pictures of the Negroes as the best laboring population in the world are to be found abundantly in the literature of the past and present generation, and in wayside conversations of to-day.

On the other hand, in criticisms of the legislatures of the reconstruction period, and in excuses made for separate railway coaches, separate schools and churches, and the exclusion of Negroes from all offices and from the ballot-box, the Negro appears as ignorant, depraved, given over to all the vices, and incapable of cultivation in mind or in morals.

A judicial estimate of what the millions of the freedmen were when just emancipated must no doubt retain enough features from the last characterization to show that if slavery was in any sense a missionary instrumentality it was not efficient for producing the highest Christian civilization. It did not develop in the slave thrift, foresight and self-reliance to make him more and more fit for successful freedom. It did not graft firmly upon the religiosity of his nature the virtues of honesty, truthfulness, and chastity.

When we add the fact of universal illiteracy on the part of the freedmen at the close of the war, it is evident that their condition called for something slavery had not given them. There was crying need of some new form of missionary work other than the "peculiar institution." It was necessary not only for their own sake,

but for the welfare of the whole South and the entire nation. The situation demanded not the development of a better slave nor the production of a serf, but the transformation of a vast population trained as slaves into a population with the character, habits, and virtues of freemen. The nation could not prosper with these millions continuing as they were. The problem for statesman, philanthropist, Christian, was no less than to make a new Negro.

The American Missionary Association was one of the most important agencies that grappled with this problem. It rightly regarded the schoolhouse as the starting point for the great transformation. The change must come in response to intelligent appeal. In developing individual intelligence and character, the schoolhouse can build into society all the elements of Christian civilization. For the schoolhouse has to do with health and skill and thrift and morals and religion.

Thirty years have brought many changes to the South. The greatest of them all is to be found in the results already attained by Christian education in making a new Negro. In putting forward this claim and some of the evidence in its support, I shall deal but slightly with statistics, and confine myself largely to testimony from personal observation.

In the matter of physical stamina and health, Christian education cannot claim that it has up to the present time improved on the old Negro, when the whole mass is taken into view. The death-rate among the colored population in such Southern cities as publish a record, is nearly double that of the white population. It is undoubtedly much larger than it was among the slaves. This high death-rate is not surprising in view of their poverty and ignorance, and, moreover, is partly to be explained by the high birth-rate among the same population. For in all cities nearly half the deaths are of little children. The higher rate than in the slave times

shows that we have not yet carried education far enough with the Negro population to secure as good care of themselves and their children as the old masters took of them when each had a high market value. Every missionary school gives instruction in hygiene and sanitation. The new Negro in this sphere of the physical life is to be seen in the trained colored teachers and the growing company of thoroughly educated colored physicians. The number of both these classes must be increased, and they will lift the millions to a new physical level.

In the intellectual sphere, the new Negro is unmistakably prominent. We marvel at the literature which has sprung up in the white South since the war. This brilliant constellation of writers now glowing in the Southern sky, is not so indicative of a new era for the South and the nation as are the gatherings of the state associations of colored teachers. I have attended that of Alabama where were some four hundred present, of whom the president said the larger part owed their education at first or second hand to the American Missionary Association. They were principals and teachers of city and village schools, shaping the colored youth of their respective communities. They were presidents and professors in colleges and normal schools, training the teachers of the majority of the children of that state which has a larger colored than white population. Whether old enough to have been born in slavery, or only the children of slaves, these earnest, capable, and many of them highly educated teachers were the new Negro in sharp contrast with the absolutely illiterate slave population of less than a generation before.

It was a smaller company of higher grade teachers that met a few months ago in Frankfort, Ky., to protest against the two-coach bill which drew from Gov. Buckner the surprised remark, "I had no idea there were so many cultivated colored gentlemen in the state."

It was the addresses on the same topic, near the same time, of colored women trained in missionary schools that were reported at considerable length in the daily papers and referred to as the utterances of the ablest colored women in the state, if not in the nation. These all are

examples of the new Negro, not the old Negro, of slave times.

It was a new Negro educated in a missionary school of whom one Southern white man said, not long ago, to another, "It was all I could do to keep from saying 'mister' to him."

It is a Mississippi Negro graduated at Fisk University, who, as a missionary of the American Board, has reduced to writing the language of the Sheetzwa tribe in East Central Africa, and already given to that tribe four books of the New Testament translated from the Greek by himself and published by the American Bible Society.

Just as new a kind, though his studies are for personal recreation, is another of our graduates, now a lawyer in Texas, whom I found occupying his spare time with Prof. Harper's correspondence course in Hebrew.

New Negroes worthy of all honor are the multitudes of our pupils, and pupils of our pupils, who are pushing out into the remoter public school districts of the Black Belt. They are at once examples and apostles of a new era, for they are missionaries of a better life to the rural millions of the South. I have seen them at their work and found them not only good teachers in the schoolhouse, but also a spiritual power in the churches, and practical examples of thrift, and nobly ambitious in their communities.

It is the new Negro of the era of freedom, not the old Negro of a slave civilization, that is here and there emerging into a capitalist or a large planter, or a contractor, or a successful merchant, or a professional man. The number of these increases all too slowly. The difficulty lies not alone in the absolute poverty of the slaves when first set free, with no capital but their hands, untrained to any but the coarsest kind of labor. A more serious difficulty is in the inveterate unthrift and dependence to which slave life had bred them. The wonder after all is that this race, in whose previous contact with civilization was no tendency to thrift, has in thirty years accumulated some four hundred millions of taxable property.

Quite as important as lists of taxable property is the new spirit of self-reliance and independence beginning to show itself among many

of the Negroes who are still poor. It would be an impressive sign of the new industrial South if we could gather in one assembly the white iron masters of Alabama, whose skill and energy have in twenty years brought that state from zero in the production of pig iron to a position next to Pennsylvania and Ohio. I affirm in all truth and soberness that far more significant to one that looks deep into the sources of civilization was the gathering I saw of some hundreds of hard-handed Negro cotton planters in the Black Belt who met to discuss their condition, prospects, and means of improvement. Some of this company had not much book learning, and others were teachers for a part of the year. All had felt the influence of the missionary movement of Christian education. They lived—most of them—in cabins without glass windows, and many of them in the one-roomed cabin. Few of them owned land. Year by year their cotton crops were mortgaged for food while they tilled the fields. But there was in them the spirit of freemen. They raised no clamor for government aid. They indulged in no chimerical visions of reaching the millennium by wholesale emigration. All day long they exhorted one another to more intelligent farming, more unremitting industry, greater economy, and the purchase of land. They urged that the pulpits be purged of immoral preachers. They applauded loudly the exhortation to talk religion less and live it more. Such spirit and purpose among the laborers is the best of all auguries of industrial improvement.

The graduates and former pupils of our missionary schools are to be found everywhere in the South among the foremost leaders of every upward movement. The steady and rapid development of industrial training in our schools makes them important factors in diversifying and developing the industries of the South. The amount and character of Biblical study in our schools of all grades is a powerful instrumentality for changing the old-time religion of emotion into a religion that concerns the intelligence and the conduct as well as the feelings. We are making a new Negro.

When criticisms of our work call attention to millions of Negroes who are still ignorant

and degraded, we are only incited to press our work more vigorously, till the lowest are lifted. When we are told that many partially and some highly educated Negroes are in Southern penitentiaries, we remember that our Northern prisons hold some white graduates of colleges, and are moved not to educate less, but to increase the moral and religious element in education.

A Georgia critic complains in the Forum for October that education is leading the Negro away from "his feeling of dependence," and causing him to cease showing "proper respect to the white people," and says "a little education is all the Negro needs," and that he "will have to be disfranchised," and have "a separate code enacted that will fit him." This leads one to wonder whether the Anglo-Saxon race in the South has lost its capacity of adjustment to new conditions. Many even of the educated men of that race seemed to have learned nothing on this subject in thirty years. They still have no suggestion to make for the Negro but to suppress him. They still write in the spirit of Chancellor Harper's antebellum memoir on slavery, in which he maintained that the aspirations of a freeman unfit a laborer for his situation, and asked triumphantly, "Would you do a benefit to the horse or the ox by giving him a cultivated understanding or fine feelings?"

Usually when I have asked a Southern white man what he thought of having some of the more intelligent Negroes serve on school boards or as petty magistrates, the answer has been, "Never in any place where he can have any authority over a white person."

Such utterances as these, and the ostracism still too generally exercised toward white teachers of colored schools and white pastors of colored churches, illustrate the depth of the moral wound slavery inflicted on the masters. The noble development of chivalrous virtues by the exercise of autocratic power, with no responsibility except to one's own honor, went side by side with an evil development of self-assertion which tended to become more intolerant and cruel under the constantly expected danger of insurrection. As we mark how white civilization was dragged down by slavery, we understand what was meant by the remark of an army

surgeon from Ohio. He had been an abolitionist before the war, and on returning to his home was bantered by some of his neighbors with the question, "What do you think of the poor Negroes now?" He answered, "I went South saying, 'poor Negroes.' I have come back saying also, 'poor white people.'"

We are thankful for the words just spoken at our annual meeting by Rev. Mr. Southgate, of Kentucky. They assure us again that there

are open-eyed Southerners who recognize the enormous progress made by the Negro in a generation. We who are in the work know the appalling needs still unmet, but we are not appalled, for we see the improvement to be so great that we regard the time as not remote historically when the Negro shall be so completely made new as to become wholly an element of strength and hope in the nation's life and the world's evangelization.

J.W.E. BOWEN

An Appeal to the King (1895)

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

As a representative of the American Negro, I venture to address a modest statement and to appeal to the king. We realize that, although the king is invisible, his personality is tangible. He occupies a front seat in the halls of legislation; he dictates the political policy of the nation; his nod of approval is more significant than the mythological rod of Jupiter, while his disapproving nod spreads fear and consternation far and wide amid the ranks of his subjects. He determines what statutes shall be enacted, and should his subjects in a mad freak enact any statute contrary to his wishes he annuls them immediately and relegates the reckless and vituline political Titans to the limbo of political forgetfulness. He sits in high chair in the police, the criminal, the equity, the appellate and supreme courts of the states and of the nation and interprets the law. He then prescribes to the police, the sheriff, the constable, the mayor, the governor and president how these interpretations shall be carried out. The great body of his laws is unwritten, but they are executed with scrupulous exactness in the minutest detail. He sets the pace in the drawing room; the swing of his baton describes the movement of the foot, the hum of the music and the color, quality and style of the dress.

Recent Social Changes

The whirligig of time is merciless and providential—merciless to the indolent and reckless, but providential to the faithful and honorable. The poetic truth that "there is a divinity that shapes our lives, rough hew them as we may," may be rewritten in the prosaic facts of today as found in the experience of individuals as well as in that of peoples and of nations. The changes are so rapid and radical in human society, flitting before our gaze like the fast-unfolding views of a huge panorama, or like dissolving and charming lines in the Kaleidoscope, that we can scarcely get more than an outline or rightly esteem their far-reaching effects. The eye grows weary and the brain is overpowered in contemplating these monotonous and astounding changes. And yet we have but come to the outskirts of a mighty and harmless cataclysm in society when the present inequalities and misadjustments will be remedied and human society become so based that there shall be equality of opportunity for every human being. In actual illustration the Greeks are at our doors. We are too near the recent civil and fratricidal strife to appreciate this fact, whereby a new people was born in a day; a people that to all practical appearance, as well as by antecedents, were no people at all. And even

surgeon from Ohio. He had been an abolitionist before the war, and on returning to his home was bantered by some of his neighbors with the question, "What do you think of the poor Negroes now?" He answered, "I went South saying, 'poor Negroes.' I have come back saying also, 'poor white people.'"

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An Appeal to the King (1895)

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

As a representative of the American Negro, I venture to address a modest statement and to appeal to the king. We realize that, although the king is invisible, his personality is tangible. He occupies a front seat in the halls of legislation; he dictates the political policy of the nation; his nod of approval is more significant than the mythological rod of Jupiter, while his disapproving nod spreads fear and consternation far and wide amid the ranks of his subjects. He determines what statutes shall be enacted, and should his subjects in a mad freak enact any statute contrary to his wishes he annuls them immediately and relegates the reckless and vituline political Titans to the limbo of political forgetfulness. He sits in high chair in the police, the criminal, the equity, the appellate and supreme courts of the states and of the nation and interprets the law. He then prescribes to the police, the sheriff, the constable, the mayor, the governor and president how these interpretations shall be carried out. The great body of his laws is unwritten, but they are executed with scrupulous exactness in the minutest detail. He sets the pace in the drawing room; the swing of his baton describes the movement of the foot, the hum of the music and the color, quality and style of the dress.

Recent Social Changes

The whirligig of time is merciless and providential—merciless to the indolent and reckless, but providential to the faithful and honorable. The poetic truth that "there is a divinity that shapes our lives, rough hew them as we may," may be rewritten in the prosaic facts of today as found in the experience of individuals as well as in that of peoples and of nations. The changes are so rapid and radical in human society, flitting before our gaze like the fast-unfolding views of a huge panorama, or like dissolving and charming lines in the Kaleidoscope, that we can scarcely get more than an outline or rightly esteem their far-reaching effects. The eye grows weary and the brain is overpowered in contemplating these monotonous and astounding changes. And yet we have but come to the outskirts of a mighty and harmless cataclysm in society when the present inequalities and misadjustments will be remedied and human society become so based that there shall be equality of opportunity for every human being. In actual illustration the Greeks are at our doors. We are too near the recent civil and fratricidal strife to appreciate this fact, whereby a new people was born in a day; a people that to all practical appearance, as well as by antecedents, were no people at all. And even

more marvelous is that other incomparable fact standing alone in its gracious magnanimity and in the silence of its untarnished splendor is the revolution in the moral and social sentiment toward the Negro on the part of his former master. This fact alone is a sufficient and an unwitting confirmation of the existence of an undertow of righteousness in human society; and moreover it is a reasonable guarantee that ultimately all the world will brothers become.

Our eyes have seen strange sights and our ears have heard strange sounds. When Booker T. Washington delivered his unmatched speech from this platform, a distinguished citizen of Georgia, the successor to one of her proudest sons, said: "That man's speech is the beginning of a moral revolution in America." That utterance is proof in itself that the revolution has already come, and it only remains for time to crystallize its various phases and essentials into the component elements of civilization.

The erection and equipment of the Negro building; the Negro's place of usefulness and honor, in this most notable of southern expositions; and the general satisfaction expressed with his accomplishments are all additional marks of unperceived but positive changes in society. And once again the Negro wishes to put himself on record in the most positive, hearty, and unequivocal terms, without the least tinge of Jesuitical sophistry, that he loves the land of his nativity and is ready, as of yore, to pour out his heart's best blood for the institutions of that land. The sad and sweet memory of his historic sorrows saturate this atmosphere and every foot of ground in Southern soil is made holy because it embalms the sacred dust of his faithful sires. The memory of our deeds is still a fragrant and faithful theme. I appeal to the bronzed lips of your orator on Marietta street, who stands supremely alone in painting the devotion of my sable and ignorant sires. Hear him in his speech before the Merchants' Association of Boston in their annual banquet, December 1889: "I see a slave scuffling through the smoke, winding his black arms around the fallen form, reckless of the hurtling death, bending his trusty face to catch the words that tremble on

his stricken lips, so wrestling meantime with agony that he would lay down his life for his master's stead. I see him by the weary bedside ministering with uncomplaining patience, praying with all of his humble heart that God would lift his master up until death comes in mercy and in honor to still the soldier's life. I see him by the open grave, mute, motionless, uncovered suffering for the death of him who in life fought against his freedom. I see him when the mound is heaped and the great drama of his life is closed, turn away with downcast eyes and uncertain step, start out in the new and uncertain fields, faltering, struggling, but moving on until his shambling figure is lost in the light of this better and brighter day. And from the grave comes a voice saying: 'Follow him! Put your arms about him in his need, even as he puts his arm about me. Be his friends as he was mine.'"

Our ears have become familiar with the so-called race problem, which has been popularly interpreted to mean the Negro race problem. A truer and larger conception of the subject would speak of the human race problem, instead of the narrower Negro race problem. This great problem assumes different names in different parts of the world. We have nihilism in Russia, socialism in Germany, communism in France, socialism and the submerged tenth in England, while in the United States it is as multiform in its elements as the nation is composite in its blood and physiognomy. In California it is the problem of the Chinese, in the great middle west it is the Scandinavian and other foreign struggles; in the north, central, and eastern states it is the Irish and Italian problem, while overreaching all of these is the problem of the battle for bread, and in the south it is the Negro problem. It is, therefore, no sign of breadth of vision to declare that there is only one great problem in the United States and that one part is the Negro problem. These problems will require centuries of persistent effort that they may be solved upon the ethical and equitable basis of the New Testament teachings. In dealing with all of these the principles of equality and of brotherhood should obtain.

Three Feet Make a Yard

It is a basal and sociological truth that, other things being equal, like treatment and like opportunities produce like results, the breadth and quality of which will depend upon native power and inherent ability. What is the condition for the development of the noblest type among men? There can be but one answer to this question, namely, equality of opportunity. The largest struggle of human society is to attain this concrete reality of civil justice. Under it, each will produce according to his ability for the good of mankind, and that good will not be a passive uniformity cast into the stereotyped mold of racial capacity, but will be complex in its essentials and divinely human in its cast.

The Negro has learned that three feet make a yard in mathematics, and he believes that they make a yard in politics, economics, and ethics; in Europe, Asia, and Africa; among whites and among blacks. It is noteworthy that inside of one generation the Negro should learn such valuable lessons. And in consequence of which he has begun the study of himself and is seeking to locate himself as a factor among men. The Negro has a definite sphere to fill in history, and although his day is a day of small beginning, the present results are prophetic of large victories in the future. His educational life has just begun and his teachers, without bias, say that he will some day fill the world with his name. This belief to the contrary notwithstanding, the old question still lives and with vital pertinacity challenges the soberest thought of statesmen, namely: Has the Negro any place in American life? If so, what is that place to be? But the most encouraging feature about this question is the fact that the Negro himself has addressed his best thought to its answer. A certain school of political economists assume to lay down as a maxim to govern the formation and development of a nation this theory: Without amalgamation of blood, there can be no national life to those not amalgamated. This is as crude a notion as the ancient theory of the flatness of the earth. The present progress of mankind in

every clime is its best refutation. Nevertheless in spite of the fact that the noble Sinbad is almost ridden to death by this Old Man of the Sea, it must be observed that America is the only country that is at work upon this problem. England and Europe have not had the courage nor disposition, if they had the wisdom, so much as to read the problem through once. But the American people have the disposition and the audacity not only to read it through, but to begin its wise solution upon the broad basis of humanity, and please God, the Negro will have sense enough to stay and contribute to its correct solution until this nation shall become in truth homogeneous in sentiment though heterogeneous in blood.

The United States is the sphere of nationality and not of raciality; blood makes a race, but sentiment a nation; and the chief corner stone of the nation is the first statement in the original charter of the proud republic: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The question of the equality of the races as familiarly understood and as commonly interpreted is a threadbare and musty saying and is groundless in reason and in the concrete facts of today.

There is no such thing as perfect equality of individuals or races. This is a figment clung to by minds that are woefully deficient in rudimentary training or are still wrapped in the swaddling bands of medieval infancy. The true or native equality of men as stated by the great Jefferson in the fundamental charter of the republic, and as rationally and biblically interpreted in biology, philosophy, reason, Scripture, and common sense, is that all men are natively and equally endowed with the essentials of humanity and of divinity. And because of this, all should be permitted to develop their endowments for the good society within the limits of unprejudiced legislation. Such an interpretation and process of development must lead to the largest good for the largest number.

The Negro's Place in History

With regard to the Negro's place in American life, it was formerly stated that he was only fit for servitude; that the best part of him was his faithful muscle; that even today and forevermore he must remain a serf or a hewer of wood and a drawer of water to the vast revolving machinery of civilization; he must be the ignorant workman and the unassimilated pariah of American society. It is to his credit that in his early days he had brawn; that it drove the ax that rang through the forest of the old Dominion and the plow that upturned the sod of Louisiana and Mississippi for the cane and cotton, while his voice endowed their leaves with a tongue never before heard. With his powerful might, he scattered the silver grain in the Carolinas, and the golden grain in Maryland and Georgia, and disemboweled the mountains of Tennessee of their ancient black treasury, and from his earliest days in this country unto a very recent day, his sweat was almost the only oil for the machinery of Southern industry and his arm the driving wheel of its trade. And when we shall be removed from the struggles of recent times in the social and political world to the centuries beyond, in which the prejudices engendered in the participants of the strife shall be known only through the cold type of history, then under the unblurred eye and the cold and unsympathetic logic of the patient historian, the period of the servitude of the Negro will shine forth with a luster unapproachable in American history.

When it is asserted that he must be a worker, all sensible Negroes answer yea and amen? A worker in clay wrenching from nature her hidden stores; a worker in wood, iron, brass, steel, and glass turning the world into an habitation fit for the Gods; a worker in the subtle elements of nature in obedience to the original command to subdue and conquer it; a worker in the realm of mind contributing to the thought-products of mankind, thereby vindicating for himself a birthright to the citizenship of the republic of thought; a statesman in church and in state; a publicist and a political economist; in

short, he must be a man among men, not so much a Black man but a MAN though black. And for the attainment of all the possibilities of his rich, unexplored African nature of docility and tractability of enthusiasm and perseverance, with his burning African fervor, there must be measured to him as well as to the white man three feet to make a yard. Such an equality of opportunity not only establishes an equality of responsibility, but must be reached before human society shall prosper under the normal laws of true development. The Negro does not shrink or ask to be exempted from the working of the latter half of this statement, namely, equality of responsibility; but simply prays to the American sentiment, who is the king, for equality of opportunity in all matters that affect the welfare of the state. In all matters relating to the security of the homes of the people and the institutions of the republic, we say to the king that the story of our past fealty is the best answer we can make touching upon our future devotion and interest. It is on record for us, written by one of the greatest of democratic presidents, Andrew Jackson, that we may be actuated by lofty purposes, as seen in the noble defense made by the Negro soldiers of the city of New Orleans in the second British war. It is on record for us that in all of the social upheavals between capital and labor, the Negro has never been found with firebrand in hand. We point with pride to our loving and lucid history that we are humane as well as human.

A Plea for the Higher Education of the Negro

Before asking, now what is the Negro's place in American civilization?, a larger question comes into notice that affects all men, namely, what is the place of any branch or family of the human race in the sum total of humanity? The man who attempts to answer this question will risk his wit. The Negro's place will be what he makes for himself, just as the place of every people is what that people makes for itself, and he will be no exception to the rule. The method whereby he shall make that place is under consideration.

One class contends that he must make it by staying in the three "R's" and they are specially at pains in ridiculing the higher education of the Negro, even for leaders in church or state. Yea, he must learn the three "R's"; he must master the king's English and then he must plume his pinions of thought for a flight with Copernicus, Keppler, and Herschel; he must sharpen his logic for a walk with Plato, Immanuel Kant, and Herbert Spencer; he must clarify his vision for investigations with Virchow, Huxley, and Gray; he must be able to deal in the abtruse questions of law as do Gladstone, Judge Story, and Judge Speer; he must fortify himself to divine rightly the Word as do Cannon Farrar, Bishop Foster, Bishop Haygood, Dr. John Hall, and Dr. H. L. Wayland. In short, the education of the Negro must be on a par with the education of the white man. It must begin in the kindergarten, as that of the white child, and end in the University, as that of the white man. Anything short of this thorough preparation for all of the stages of life for the Negro would be unfair to a large part of humanity. We ask that nothing be done that would spoil his nature or emasculate his personality, but let everything be done that would fit him to fill every situation in life that man may fill, from the blacksmith and hod carrier to the statesman and philosopher. And if such preparation require a knowledge of the old blue-black spelling book or of Aristotle's logic; a knowledge of the plow or the trip hammer or of the spade or of the driving wheel; or of simple addition or integral calculus; or the first reader of Kant's "Critique," simple justice and common sense require that he be acquainted with whatever shall fit him to fill his station in life. Does this mean that the Negro be turned into a white man? Is he to be so educated that he will cease to be what God meant that he should be? Nay! Verily, for any education that makes a people dissatisfied with their racial personality is a farce and a reproach.

Protect Every Woman

Gentlemen of the South, and of the North, may I speak for myself. If so, "Hear me for my cause

and be silent that ye may hear." You are the representatives of the noblest civilization that ever leaped from the brain of man. In the earliest days of Puritan discipline in this country, and even in England, your fathers were giants in the land, and in many parts their sons are worthy successors. Your indomitable courage and resistless power have won for you victories upon battlefields that reduce the victories of Xerxes and Alexander to the achievements of novices. Your triumphs in the world of mind, in science, philosophy, history, and ethics, are unparalleled in history. Your ethical and political conceptions have honeycombed the world, and although your record is stained with spots unworthy of your training and privileges, still like the sun, though spotted, it is glorious. Your conception of the sacredness of the family relation and the value of personal chastity and of the paramount necessity for the protection of womanly virtues is the crown and glory of your splendid history. We cannot but bow to you for these magnificent achievements. As a representative of the thinking people of my race I take off my hat to the white man of this country, North and South, when he swears by all that liveth that the sanctity of his home and the purity of his family shall be maintained inviolate at every hazard. Our noblest nature affirms this. *We too* have come to learn that purity of woman means the purity of the family and the purity of the family the purity of the race and nation, and whosoever insults that purity is an enemy to society and in league with hell. And when it is said that we have no conception of the value of purity or the sacredness of the marriage relation, we simply ask that the sins of the vicious be not charged to the whole race. We confess with shamed face that our notions of these relations, on the whole, are not what they should have been. With this confession it ought to be stated that our training on the whole has not been what it should have been. But the race is making a heroic effort to expel from its system all the virus of degrading sin and thus far we have made progress. We pray thee to deal gentle with thy servants in this respect, seeing that we are struggling to make our race a race of purity, sobriety, and Christian power. We do not ask that

the criminal escape, but we plead that he receive the full measure of punishment according to law. We ask that justice—sure unbiased, and remorseless—be meted out to all criminals, black and white, who violate the purity of any woman, white or black, South or North, and we here would join hands with you around our common altar and swear allegiance to those principles to aid you in finding and punishing the criminals wherever found. Thus the education that the Negro needs is the education that the white man needs to make him honorable, virtuous, and industrious, and to fit him to fill his place, whatever it may be.

A Tribute to Northern Philanthropists

We have come today to present to you and to the country a few products of our brain and skill wrought out under adverse and trying circumstances. We present them humbly and modestly, not as complete products, but as the earnest of our undeveloped power and the prophecy of our possible future. We record with grateful recognition the magnanimity of our Southern friends in this opportunity given us to come before the country in a new light. This act in itself is a clear indication of future developments. By observation it will be seen that the exhibits from the schools among the American Negro are by far in excess of that of a promiscuous character, and this is as it should be, for the largest life of the Negro since emancipation has been a school life. These results are due to our philanthropic friends. The Negro would be unworthy of the confidence of his Southern white friends and prove himself a sordid ingrate did he not hold in grateful memory the unstinted deeds of his philanthropic Northern friends. When the smoking throat of the angry gun ceased to belch forth death and destruction, and when the shotted cannon ceased in its carnage of death and the thunders were “hushed on the moor,” suddenly there leaped upon the stage of action a people crude, rude, ignorant, superstitious, with only a few marks of divinity left, but enough to be identified as human. Then it was that the messengers of love

came into our bleeding and sorely distressed South, and with a patience and cheerful generosity that would make the angels hush their heavenly harps to watch and admire, they began their tedious, discouraging, and seemingly fruitless, but self-imposed, task to teach the Negro the elements of civilized life in a state of freedom. The philanthropists in the North of every church and of no church poured out their millions for the work. Their monuments and those of the workers are in every Southern state in brick and mortar, the lighthouses of civilization, the fortresses of American patriotism, and the institutes of religion. Their names are legion, but among them stand out prominently John F. Slater, Daniel Hand, Alexander Meharay, Clinton B. Fisk, Mr. Fayerweather, Elijah H. Gammon, William F. Stewart, and others. And moreover the sacred dust of some of these heroes and heroines lies sleeping in Southern soil. On yonder hill, beneath the classic shade of Atlanta University, is laid in perpetual peace the remains of the late Dr. Ware, whose very life is a constant source of inspiration to all who knew him, and there is an atmosphere of holy awe that surrounds that solitary grave. The monument of these heroic laborers and generous givers is in more than brick and stone. It is in flesh and blood, in the multitudes of broadly educated and scholarly and cultured men and women who are working out a magnificent destiny in the South, in the leaders of the race, in the pulpit, at the bar, in the medical profession, in the school room, in the workshop, at the bench, and in every trade and calling, to bless mankind and advance civilization. Their work has begun to show what the possibilities of the Negro mind are. And ever true to our proverbial and African instinct and the warm blood that circulates in our veins, we place upon the brow of these, our noble friends, the garland of our heart’s divinest gratitude.

The New Negro

These simple results that may be seen in the Negro building are from a people just thirty years in freedom. They represent many spheres

of labor and enterprise and show what may be accomplished under a more perfect system of life and labor. They show, moreover, that the Negro has been an apt and faithful student of his teachers in the mechanism of his skill as well as in the intellectual product of his brain. Thirty years, freedom is scarcely enough to take the first steps in the arts of peace. It required centuries for the Anglo-Saxon to reach his present commanding position. The Negro's present days of infancy and of small beginnings are no criterion to measure his future by. The depths from which he has come and the obstacles surrounding him must be remembered when expressing judgment of him; and when superficial writers on the other side of the water, as well as on this side, declare that the Negro can never assimilate to a high civilization or approach the present attainments of the Anglo-Saxon, they discover an immaturity of thought worthy of the schoolboy's effort. This proves that the social problems of any country are to be learned only by long years of contact and of unprejudiced study. A railroad observation in sociology may make fascinating reading, but it lacks the elements of endurance and accuracy and cannot command the respectful notice of more than novelistic readers for one decade. To understand the rapid strides that the Negro has taken one must know the pit from which he was dug, and the rock from which he was hewn. The cold facts of his present standing press out in bold relief with the distinctness of a mosaic and declare that there is a wealth unmeasured in that hidden mine. The first step has been taken and if the South and North will measure to him an equality of opportunity, there will come as the result splendid achievements for society. He longs to have a full chance; he longs to do nobly.

Finally, oh king! a new Negro has come upon the stage of action. As you enter the main entrance of the Negro building, you will observe

the statue of a Negro with broken manacles upon his wrists. This statue was born in the fruitful brain of a Negro, Mr. Hill of Washington. His frame is muscular and powerful; his eye is fixed upon his broken but hanging chain; his brow is knit in deep thought. This is the new Negro. What is he doing? He is thinking! And by the power of thought, he will think off those chains and have both hands free to help you build this country and make a grand destiny of himself. In generous affection for our native soil, in fealty to our institutions, and in a universal love for all men, his spirit is that of his fathers made over. Being to the manor-born, he cannot be alienated in sentiment and patriotic devotion to the institution of the South and the whole country. It must be remembered, however, that this Negro has had born in him the consciousness of a racial personality under the blaze of a new civilization. With this new birth of the soul, he longs for an opportunity to grow into the proportions of a new and diviner manhood that shall take its place in the ranks of one common humanity. This Negro, when educated in all of the disciplines of civilization and thoroughly trained in the arts of civil and moral life, cannot fail to be an invaluable help to our American life. It is his deepest desire to rise and work manfully, and he is willing to bide his time until the American white man shall have that element conquer in him which always conquers, namely, the love of fair play. Having been so generously treated by our Southern friends in this exposition, we shall go forth to prove to them that, in the development of the South and in the protection of our institutions, we are at heart one with them. And in the classic words of Edmund Burke before his constituents in Bristol, England, we pray: "Applaud us when we run; console us when we fall; cheer us when we recover; but let us pass on, for God's sake, let us pass on."

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

Afro-American Education (1900)

That the age of prophecy, like that of chivalry, has passed away was never more signally shown than in the utter breaking down of all the predictions that followed the Afro-American people out of the house of bondage into the home, the church, and the school-house of freedom. It was confidently predicted by his enemies that he was incapable of mastering the common rudiments of education, and the idea that he could master the higher education was laughed out of court. When the war came to a close in 1865 a large portion of the American people regarded the Afro-American people "as less than man, yet more than brute." They had no faith in the possibility of his mental or moral regeneration.

And yet, in those early days when the race was enslaved, there appeared among them men of great piety and learning, who devoted themselves, where they were allowed to do so, to the education of such of their fellows as were classed as "free negroes." Such pioneers in the work of education were Rev. Daniel Alexander Payne of South Carolina, Rev. J. W. Hood of North Carolina, Rev. John Peterson of New York, and George B. Vashin of Missouri—men who illustrated in their lives and work those higher virtues of capacity, industry, devotion to race, which were to have such a splendid army of emulators in the after years and under more favoring conditions.

No sufficient tribute has ever been paid to General O. O. Howard, who laid the foundation of the Afro-American educational work while he had charge of the important work of the Freedmen's Bureau. It is meet that General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, the founder of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, should pay him such a tribute. General Armstrong said:

"General Howard and the Freedmen's Bureau did for the ex-slaves, from 1865 to 1870, a marvelous work, for which due credit has not

been given; among other things, giving to their education an impulse and a foundation, by granting three and a half millions of dollars for schoolhouses, salaries, etc., promoting the education of about a million colored children. The principal negro educational institutions of to-day, then starting, were liberally aided, at a time of vital need. Hampton received over \$50,000 through General Howard for building and improvements."

But it is not alone in the money expended by General Howard as the representative of the Government in the direction indicated by General Armstrong are we indebted to this great soldier and philanthropist; out of his private purse he founded Howard University at the capital of the nation and endowed it with a princely domain, which must to-day be worth \$5,000,000 in the open market. It was through no fault of General Howard's that this endowment was scattered to the winds.

General Armstrong was also one of the pioneers in this educational work, having been placed by General Howard, Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, in charge of ten counties in Eastern Virginia, with headquarters at Hampton, the great "contraband" camp, "to manage negro affairs and to adjust, if possible, the relations of the races." How the Hampton work, one of the best and strongest, was planted, is best told in the language of General Armstrong himself:

"On relieving my predecessor, Captain C. B. Wilder, of Boston, at the Hampton headquarters, I found an active, excellent educational work going on under the American Missionary Association of New York, which, in 1862, had opened, in the vicinity, the first school for freedmen in the South, in charge of an ex-slave, Mrs. Mary Peake. Over 1,500 children were gathering daily; some in old hospital barracks—for here was Camp Hamilton, the base hospital of the Army of the James, where, during the war,

thousands of sick and wounded soldiers had been cared for, and where now over 6,000 lie buried in a beautiful national cemetery. The largest class was in the 'Butler School' building, since replaced by the 'John G. Whittier schoolhouse.'

"Close at hand the pioneer settlers of America and the first slaves landed on this continent; here Powhatan reigned; here the Indian child was baptized; here freedom was first given the slave by General Butler's 'contraband' order; in sight of this shore the battle of the Merrimac and Monitor saved the Union and revolutionized naval warfare; here General Grant based the operations of his final campaign.

"I soon felt the fitness of this historic and strategic spot for a permanent and great educational work. The suggestion was cordially received by the American Missionary Association, which authorized the purchase, in June, 1867, of 'Little Scotland,' an estate of 125 acres (since increased to 190), on Hampton River, looking out over Hampton Roads. Not expecting to have charge, but only to help, I was surprised one day by a letter from Secretary E. P. Smith of the A.M.A., stating that the man selected for the place had declined, and asking me if I could take it. I replied 'Yes.' Till then my own future had been blind; it had only been clear that there was a work to do for the ex-slaves, and where and how it should be done.

"A day-dream of the Hampton school nearly as it is had come to me during the war a few times; once in camp during the siege of Richmond, and once one beautiful evening on the Gulf of Mexico, while on the wheel-house of the transport steamship Illinois en route for Texas with the Twenty-fifth Army (Negro) Corps, for frontier duty on the Rio Grande River, whither it had been ordered, under General Sheridan, to watch and if necessary defeat Maximilian in his attempted conquest of Mexico.

"The thing to be done was clear: To train selected Negro youth who should go out at once and teach and lead their people, first by example, by getting land and homes; to give them not a dollar that they could not earn for themselves; to teach respect for labor; to replace stupid drudgery with skilled hands; and, to these ends,

to build up an industrial system, for the sake not only of self-support and intelligent labor, but also for the sake of character. And it seemed equally clear that the people of the country would support a wise work for the freedmen. I think so still."

They have done it. From the small seed planted at Hampton, and as an outgrowth of the work of the Freedmen's Bureau, schools of elementary and higher education rapidly sprang up in every state. The enthusiasm with which these schools were filled, not only by the young, but by the adults, astonished not only the people of the North, but those of the South. Many who watched the phenomenon, and who had their doubts about the capacity of the Afro-American people to receive mental discipline and to continue in well doing, said that when the novelty should wear off these schoolhouses would be emptied of their eager disciples. But they were not. Each succeeding year has seen the grand army of schoolchildren grow larger and larger and more earnest in enthusiasm; and the numerous academies, seminaries, institutes, and colleges have been and are overcrowded.

In the early stages of the work there were very few Afro-Americans competent to teach and there were no funds to carry on the work, as the common school system in the Southern states had not been inaugurated; it was to come later, after the work of foundation-laying had been done under the inspiration of the Freedmen's Bureau and the organized missionary associations of the North. But where were the teachers to come from? Unfortunately, I think, as events have demonstrated, the whites were indisposed to undertake this necessary work, and were in many instances hostile to those who did do it. There are few brighter pages in the missionary history of the world than that which records the readiness and willingness with which the white men and women of the Northern states went into the South, into its large cities and its waste places, and labored year in and year out, to lay the foundation of the Afro-American's religious and educational character, and the unparalleled financial support which was given them, and is continued to this day, by the philanthropic people of the North.

It is estimated that in the maintenance of the educational work among the Afro-American people of the South the philanthropists of the North, directly and through organized associations like the American Missionary Association and the Peabody Fund, have expended annually an average of one million dollars since 1867, making a grand total of \$32,000,000. Fully a hundred colleges, institutes, and the like have been established and maintained, and are to-day doing a marvelous work. A majority of these schools have white management, but all of them are represented in their faculties by their graduates. A great many of them are managed in all their departments by Afro-Americans.

As has been said, these schools of higher learning are maintained, for the most part, by the organized charities and individual philanthropists of the North. There are two funds set apart for this work, besides the Peabody Fund, of which the whites receive a large share—the John F. Slater Fund and the Hand Fund, of a million dollars each, the income of which is applied to helping these Afro-American schools.

Mention should be made here of the fact that Hon. Jonathan C. Gibbs, one of the first Afro-American graduates of Dartmouth College, was one of the state superintendents of education of Florida in the Reconstruction era, and died while holding that position. His son, Hon. Thomas V. Gibbs, died in 1898, after having done much as its secretary and treasurer, in connection with President T. DeS. Tucker, to place the State Normal and Agricultural College, at Tallahassee on a prosperous foundation.

With the inauguration of the public school system in the Southern states the voluntary schools were gradually absorbed and their Northern teachers displaced by those they had prepared. The extent and importance of their work may be judged by the fact that when they entered the field in 1866-67 there were comparatively few Afro-American teachers in the South, whereas to-day there are no fewer than 25,000 employed in the public schools. Baltimore, I believe, is the only Southern city in which white teachers are now employed in these schools. Any unbiased person must admit that this is not

only a creditable but a remarkable showing, one alike creditable to the race and to those who lavished upon it time and money to effect it.

Most of the Southern states maintain normal and agricultural schools for the education of Afro-American youths. Alabama not only does this, but makes a generous appropriation for the work of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Prof. Richard R. Wright, president of the State Normal College, at College, Ga., is perhaps the best known of the presidents of these State institutions. The one in North Carolina, presided over by James B. Dudley, at Greensboro, also has a good reputation. In South Carolina, ex-congressman Thomas E. Miller has charge of the State School at Orangeburgh. A very excellent work is being done by Prof. S. G. Atkins, at the Slater Academy, at Winston, N.C., one of the few schools of its kind in the South supported in large part by the native whites.

The African Methodist Episcopal and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Churches maintain a large number of schools. The main school of the former is located at Wilberforce, Ohio, with S. T. Mitchell as president. Prof. W. S. Scarborough, who has written a Greek grammar and many treatises on Greek subjects, is connected with the school—Wilberforce University. The main school of the latter is located at Salisbury, N.C., W. H. Goler being president. The school was built up in its earlier stages by Rev. Joseph C. Price, who had the reputation in his lifetime of being one of the most eloquent men in the Republic. The Baptist denomination also maintains a large number of schools.

Among the schools of higher learning which have an assured standing may be mentioned Lincoln University, in Chester County, Pa.; Howard University, Washington, D.C.; Shaw University, Raleigh, N.C.; Claflin University, Orangeburgh, S.C.; Atlanta and Clark Universities, Morris Brown College, Gammon Theological Seminary and Spelman Seminary, all of Atlanta; Fisk, Roger Williams, and Central Tennessee Colleges at Nashville, Tenn.; Knoxville College, Knoxville, Tenn.; Berea College, where both races are educated, at Berea, Ky.

Among the normal and industrial schools Hampton Institute and its offspring, the Tuskegee Institute, at Tuskegee, Ala., head the list; the Calhoun School, at Calhoun, Ala.; the Mt. Meigs School, at Mt. Meigs, Ala.; the Gloucester School, at Gloucester, Va., with the state industrial schools in most of the Southern states.

The educational work in the Southern states is accomplishing wonders in the moral and intellectual uplift of the people, which has already been felt in the life of the South, and must be felt in larger measure in the years to come. There

has been a marked tendency of late years to make the education conform more to the industrial lines laid by General Armstrong. This is a healthy sign, as the more practical education is the better, especially as the tendency of modern industrialism is more and more towards specialization in all departments of learning and activity of whatever sort; and this is said without intending in the least to depreciate or underrate what is regarded as the higher education. All education is good, but assuredly that is the best which enables a man to fit in most readily with the conditions of life in which he finds himself.

N.B. WOOD

Heroes and Martyrs (1900)

On a marble monument at Canton Centre, New York, is to be seen this inscription: "In memory of Captain John Brown, who died in the Revolutionary War, at New York, September 3rd, 1776. He was the fourth generation from Peter Brown, who landed from the Mayflower at Plymouth, Massachusetts, December 22, 1620."

With such ancestors, the subject of this sketch could hardly fail to be a liberty-loving, slavery-hating patriot. John Brown, known in history as "Ossawatomie Brown," was born in Torrington, Connecticut, May 9th, 1800. He was nearly six feet tall, slender, wiry, and of dark complexion. His brow was prominent, with slightly Roman nose, which gave him quite a commanding appearance. He had great self-possession, conscientiousness and strong will-power. He was quick in his motions and elastic in his tread.

When Congress gave the Free State settlers of Kansas no protection, but was in reality trying to drag the territory into the Union with a slave constitution, many anti-slavery men rushed into Kansas, determined to maintain their rights and dispute every inch of ground, even if it led to a border war, as indeed was the inevitable result. Among the champions of freedom who went to Kansas were John Brown and

his sons. He was not in sympathy with either of the anti-slavery or political parties then in existence, but with his friends and followers formed a little party of his own which advocated carrying the war into the enemies' ranks, and aggressive measures for the freedom of slaves. In a speech at Ossawatomie about this time, he said: "Talk is a national institution, but it does no good to the slaves." He also said to a personal friend: "Young men must learn to wait. Patience is the hardest lesson to learn. I have waited twenty years to accomplish my purpose." These are the words of a practical, judicious leader, who had deep convictions of duty, a strong hold on truth, and "a conscience void of offense towards God and man." In short, he was a born ruler and leader of men, but had the misfortune to be a little in advance of public sentiment on the question of how to get rid of the hydra-headed monster, slavery.

One of Captain Brown's most successful expeditions was that in which he liberated eleven slaves in Missouri, conducted them through Iowa and Illinois to Canada, that haven of escaped slaves.

I think it was in 1847 that John Brown accepted an invitation to visit Boston from George L. Stearns, who proffered to pay his expenses.

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I think it was in 1847 that John Brown accepted an invitation to visit Boston from George L. Stearns, who proffered to pay his expenses.

A full account of this visit was given by Mrs. Stearns in a letter. It was arranged for him to meet certain friends of freedom on Sunday, as this was the only time convenient to all parties. It was feared Brown would not approve of this, but he said in his characteristic way: "Mr. Stearns, I have a little ewe-lamb that I want to pull out of the ditch, and the Sabbath will be as good a day as any to do it." Mr. Stearns' oldest son, then a boy eleven years old, was greatly fascinated by this strange, kind-hearted man, and after obtaining his father's permission, he brought out his spending money and gave it to Brown, saying: "Captain Brown, will you buy something with this money for those poor people in Kansas, and sometime will you write to me and tell me what sort of a little boy you were?" "Yes, my son, I will, and God bless you for your kind heart," he answered.

One of his sayings in Boston is quoted by Mrs. Stearns in the same letter, as follows: "Gentlemen, I consider the Golden Rule and the Declaration of Independence one and inseparable; and it is better that a whole generation of men, women and children should be swept away, than that this crime of slavery should exist one day longer." She also tells of her baby boy, little three-year-old Carl, coming into the room as Captain Brown was talking; and how he stood and looked at him intently with his beautiful, beaming eyes; but as the good man was simply irresistible to children, the little boy was soon on his knee playing with his beard or nestling his head in his bosom. We read, "A man may smile and smile and be a villain still"; but my observation teaches me that one who loves and is beloved by children is apt to be a candid and a noble man. Captain Brown had the same experience with the children of Frederick Douglass, when boarding in the family at Rochester, January, 1858. One of them still says: "The sun seemed to rise and set with me in John Brown." He even demonstrated his love for children by his request concerning the kind of mourners he wanted at his funeral, as mentioned in his last letter, which we will read farther on.

In the latter part of 1847 John Brown and Frederick Douglass spent the night together at

Springfield, Massachusetts. The conversation which then took place between them is quoted from Frederick May Holland's work. In it Douglass tells his own story as follows: "He touched my vanity at the outset in this wise: 'I have,' he said, 'been looking over your people during the last twenty years, watching and waiting for heads to rise above the surface, to whom I could safely impart my views and plans. At times I have been almost discouraged, but lately I have seen a good many heads popping up, and whenever I see them, I try to put myself in communication with them.' John Brown's plan, as it was then formed in his mind, was very simple and had much to commend it. It did not, as some suppose, directly contemplate a general uprising among the slaves, and a general slaughter of the slave masters, but it did contemplate the creation of an armed force, which should constantly act against slavery in the heart of the South. He called my attention to a large map upon the wall, and pointed out to me the far-reaching Alleghanies, stretching away from New York into the Southern States. 'These mountains,' he said, 'are the basis of my plans. God has given the strength of these hills to freedom. They were placed here by the Almighty for the emancipation of your race. They are full of natural forts, where one man for defense will be equal to a hundred for attack. They are full of good hiding places, where a large number of brave men could be concealed and for a long time baffle and elude pursuit. I know these mountains well, and could take a body of men into them there, despite all the efforts Virginia could make to dislodge and drive me out of them. My plan, then, is this: to take about twenty-five brave men into those mountains, and begin my work on a small scale, supply them with arms and provisions, and post them in companies of five on a line of twenty-five miles. These shall for a time busy themselves in gathering recruits from the neighboring farms, seeking and selecting the most daring and restless spirits first.' In this part of the work, he said, the utmost care was to be taken to avoid treachery and discovery. Only the most conscientious and skillful of his men were to be detailed for this perilous duty. With care and enterprise,

he thought, he could soon gather a force of one hundred hearty men, who would be content to lead the free and adventurous life to which he proposed to train them. When once properly drilled, and each man had found the place for which he was best suited, they would begin the work in earnest. They would run off the slaves in large numbers. They would retain the strong and brave and send the weak ones to the North by the Underground Railroad. His operations would be enlarged with the increasing number of his men, and they would not be confined to one locality. He would approach the slaveholders in some cases at midnight, and tell them they must give up their slaves, and also let them have their best horses upon which to ride away. Slavery, he said, was a state of war, in which the slaves were unwilling parties, and that they therefore had a right to anything necessary to their peace and freedom. He would shed no blood, and would avoid a fight, except when he could not escape from it and was compelled to do it in self-defense. He would then, of course, do his best. This movement, he said, would weaken slavery in two ways. First, by making slave property insecure, it would make such property undesirable. Secondly, it would keep the anti-slavery agitation alive, and public attention fixed upon the subject, and thus finally lead to the adoption of measures for the abolishing of the slave system altogether. He held that the anti-slavery agitation was in danger of dying out, and that it needed some such startling measures as he proposed, to keep it alive and effective. Slavery, he said, had nearly been abolished in Virginia by the Nat Turner insurrection; and he thought his plan of operation would speedily abolish it in both Maryland and Virginia. He said his trouble was to get the right kind of men with which to begin the work, and the means necessary to equip them. And here he explained the reason for his simple mode of living, his plain dress, his leather stock. He had adopted this economy in order to save money with which to arm and equip men to carry out his plan of liberation. This was said by him in no boastful terms. On the contrary, he said he had already delayed his work too long, and that he had no room to boast either his zeal or his

self-denial. From eight o'clock in the evening till three o'clock in the morning, Captain John Brown and I sat face to face, he arguing in favor of his plan, and I finding all the objections I could against it. Now mark! This conversation took place fully twelve years before the blow was struck at Harper's Ferry, and his plan was even then more than twenty years old. He had, therefore, been watching and waiting all these years for suitable heads to rise up, or 'pop up,' to use his expression, among the sable millions, to whom he could safely confide his plan, and thus nearly forty years had passed between this man's thoughts and his act."

The last interview between John Brown and Frederick Douglass took place in an old stone quarry near Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, August 20th, 1859. There were only four men present at this council of war, if it might be so termed; Douglass and a colored man named Shields Green, who had recently escaped from slavery in South Carolina, John Brown, and his secretary Mr. Kagai. Douglass now learned for the first time that Brown had changed his plan, and meditated an attack on Harper's Ferry at once and running the risk of getting to the mountains afterwards. With his usual far-seeing sagacity, Douglass told Brown he was running into a steel trap, and urged him to desist, as it could result only in ruin to himself, and injury to the cause they both loved. But it was unavailing; the man of iron will had made up his mind, and nothing could turn him from his purpose. When Douglass was about to separate from him, having declined to join him in his undertaking, Brown made one more pathetic appeal, and putting his arms around him in a manner more than friendly, he said: "Come with me, Douglass; I will defend you with my life. I want you for a special purpose. When I strike, the bees will begin to swarm and I shall want you to help me hive them."

Alas! how sadly mistaken he was in his theory remains to be seen.

John Brown purchased or leased a small farm about six miles from Harper's Ferry, on the Maryland side, July, 1859, and established here his headquarters and arsenal. He had one hundred and two Sharp's rifles, sixty-eight pistols,

fifty-five bayonets, twelve artillery swords, four hundred and eighty-three pikes, one hundred and fifty broken handles of pikes, sixteen picks, forty shovels, besides quite a number of other appurtenances of war.

Captain Brown expected to make his attack on Harper's Ferry on the night of October 24th, 1859; but while in Baltimore in September, he was under the impression that there was a conspiracy in his camp. Fearing he would be betrayed and his plans frustrated, he determined, without informing his Northern friends, to strike the first blow on the night of October 17th.

The story is soon told. He was made a prisoner October 19th, and remained until November 7th without a change of clothing or medical aid. Forty-two days from the time of his imprisonment he was hanged, after a mock trial, by Governor Wise of Virginia. That this so-called raid was ill-timed and premature, all will agree; but the motive which inspired him to action was certainly a desire to imitate the example of Him who came "to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

Whittier very pathetically describes the scene:

"John Brown of Ossawatomie, they led him
out to die;
And lo! a poor slave mother with her little
child pressed nigh;
Then the bold blue eye grew tender, and the
old harsh face grew mild,
As he stooped between the jeering ranks
and kissed the negro's child."

He had gone into Virginia to save life, not to destroy it. This is proven by a statement made before the fight at Harper's Ferry: "And now, gentlemen, let me press this one thing on your minds. You all know how dear life is to you, and how dear your lives are to your friends, and in remembering that, consider that the lives of others are as dear to them as yours are to you. Do not, therefore, take the life of any one if you can possibly avoid it; but if it is necessary to take life in order to save your own, then make sure work of it." After the fight at Harper's Ferry he also said: "I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite

slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection. The design on my part was to free the slaves."

Congressman Vallandigham of Ohio, who examined him in court, said afterwards in a speech: "It is in vain to underrate either the man or the conspiracy. Captain John Brown is as brave and resolute a man as ever headed an insurrection, and in a good cause, and with a sufficient force, would have been a consummate partisan commander. He has coolness, daring, persistency, stoic faith and patience, and a firmness of will and purpose unconquerable! He is furtherest possible removed from the ordinary ruffian, fanatic, or madman."

South Carolina, Missouri, and Kentucky each sent a rope to hang him. But the one from Kentucky proving the strongest, was selected and used. It seems a little paradoxical that Kentucky, the home of Henry Clay, the "Great Compromiser" of slavery, and the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln, the great emancipator of slavery, should furnish the rope to hang John Brown, the forerunner of Lincoln, and one of the noblest and best men of any age or country.

His last letter was written to Mrs. George L. Stearns, his Boston friend at whose home he was entertained, and is as follows:

"Charlestown, Jefferson Co., Va., 29th
Nov., 1859.

MRS. GEORGE L. STEARNS,
Boston, Mass.

MY DEAR FRIEND:—No letter I have received since my imprisonment here has given me more satisfaction or comfort than yours of 8th inst. I am quite cheerful, and never more happy. Have only time to write you a word. May God forever reward you and all yours. My love to all who love their neighbors. I have asked to be spared from having any mock or hypocritical prayers made over me when I am publicly murdered, and that my only religious attendants be poor little, dirty, ragged, bareheaded and barefooted slave boys and girls, led by some old gray-headed slave mother.

Farewell, farewell. Your friend,

JOHN BROWN.

Mr. Stearns helped to go through the formality of a defense, but it was in vain.

A well-organized plan was made to rescue him, conducted by the brave Colonel James Montgomery of Kansas, but the prisoner sent word to them that his sense of honor to his jailer, Captain Acvis, prevented him from walking out should the door be left open.

A satchel belonging to Captain Brown was found when he was taken prisoner, containing letters which implicated Frederick Douglass. Warned by his friends, Douglass escaped first to Canada and from there to England. Buchanan's marshals were hot on his trail, coming to Rochester six hours after he left. Governor Wise made requisition on the executives of New York and Michigan, but the bird had flown. To show the temper of the governor when he found his prey had escaped, I will quote from his speech made in Richmond. December 21, of the same year. He said, with tremendous applause: "Oh, if I had had one good, long, low, black, rakish, well-armed steamer in Hampton Roads, I would have placed her on the Newfoundland Banks, with orders, if she found a British packet with that Negro on board, to take him. And by the eternal gods, he should have been taken—taken with very particular instructions not to hang him before I had the privilege of seeing him well hung."

It seems that the death of John Brown and his followers had not mollified the rage of governor and people. It might be said of Brown that, like Samson, he accomplished more in his death than during his life, for he lighted the torch of freedom, which was never extinguished. For though John Brown's body lay mouldering in the tomb, his soul went marching on, until freedom was proclaimed to four millions of slaves.

Calvin Fairbank

The subject of this sketch is living at Angelica, New York, now upwards of eighty years of age. Although broken in health, he still takes great interest in passing events and keeps up an extensive correspondence with his friends. We have

exchanged several letters with him and are glad to give him his true place in history by the side of Garrison, Brown, and Lovejoy. Some years ago he wrote an interesting history of his life, and has recently published another book giving an exceedingly interesting account of "How the Way was Prepared" for the emancipation of slaves. He is a hero who has spent long years in jail in testimony of his devotion to the cause of human freedom. His career, one of daring and suffering, almost surpassing belief, has been unique and without parallel. The story of his life is best told in his own words and way:

"I was born in Pike, New York, eighty years ago. In my childhood my father was a farmer, but later he became a lumberman, engaged with an uncle of mine in clearing up a tract of timber land near Olean, the lumber from which they floated down the Alleghany and Ohio rivers and sold in the Cincinnati markets. My father and mother were Methodists, and one of the most vivid recollections of my childhood is of going with them when I was about twelve years old to attend a quarterly meeting held in another town a dozen miles or so from Hume, N.Y., where we then lived. We remained over night, and as the large attendance at the meeting had filled every house in the town, I, being a boy, was sent to sleep at the home of an ex-slave family, the head of which had made his escape from Virginia some years before. Child though I was, the stories of the suffering and misery endured by slaves which the old Negro told me that night, as we sat together on the stone hearth in front of the open fireplace, settled the course of my after-life. I resolved, if I lived, to help right the great wrongs with which I had thus been made acquainted, and though it was not until many years later that I came to know of the existence of the Underground Railroad and the American Anti-Slavery Society, my resolution grew stronger as I grew older, and only needed fitting opportunity to bear fruit. The opportunity came in the spring of 1837, just before I was twenty-one years of age, when my father sent me down the river to Cincinnati in charge of a raft of lumber. It was a morning in April, sharp, crisp, and clear, and we were rounding a bend in the Ohio River just below

Wheeling when I caught sight of a strapping darky, an ax flung over his shoulder, jogging along on the Virginia bank of the river, singing as he went:

De cold, frosty morning make a niggah feel
good,
Wid de ax on de shoulder he go jogging to
de wood

"Halloo, there! where are you going?" I called to him. "Gwine choppin' in de woods!" "Chopping for yourself?"

"Han't got no self? 'Slave, are you?' 'Dat's what I is.' 'Why don't you run away?' 'Case I don't know where to go.' 'I'll show you where to go.' 'White man mighty onsartin; niggah more so,' he said, shaking his head doubtfully.

"We talked for some time, I all the while urging him to make the break for the North, whither his wife had already escaped. Finally he asked where I was from, and when I told him from New York state my reply seemed to settle it, for he dropped his ax and jumped onto the raft. I pushed off and we swung over to the Ohio side. As we touched the shore the darky, whose name was Johnson, danced a jig for joy. I directed him to the house of a man named Snyder, who lived nearby and who, I had been told, kept a station on the Underground Railroad, and continued on my way down the river. When I came back I learned that Johnson had remained in hiding for some time with the Snyders and had finally gone, no one knew where. I had now got my hand in as a slave stealer, and was anxious for more work to do. On the same trip down the river, near the mouth of the Little Miami, I helped across the Ohio a family of seven, Stewart by name, four men and three women, all of them over six feet tall.

"After I had marketed my lumber at Cincinnati I took passage on a steamer for Pittsburgh. The steamer stopped at Maysville, Kentucky, to take on freight, and while it was loading I went for a walk about the town. On one of the back streets I met an extremely pretty girl of sixteen or seventeen who seemed in deep distress. I asked her what was the matter and she told me that she was a slave—you would not have known it from her color—and was trying to es-

cape from her master, a man who lived a few miles out in the country from town, and who also was her father. I took the girl back to the steamer and introduced her to my sister, explaining to the clerk and captain that I had met her in Maysville by appointment. No questions were asked, and we made the trip to Pittsburgh in safety. She was exceedingly bright and a skilled musician, and, I remember, made a deep impression on some of the male passengers, one of whom went so far as to ask the privilege of corresponding with her. She settled in New York, finally married well, and is now living in San Francisco in more than comfortable circumstances.

"In June, 1838, I was again in Cincinnati selling lumber, and while there heard of a slave family of fourteen, a few miles below the city, in Kentucky, who were anxious to escape. I engaged a scow and with a Negro named Casey paddled them across the river to the Ohio side. We were closely followed by their owner and a posse of officers, but succeeded in throwing them off the scent. Next day Henry Boyd, a wealthy Cincinnati colored man, guided the runaways in safety to Lawrenceburg, Indiana, whence they were sent further North. This made twenty-three slaves I helped to liberty before I was as many years old.

"I was anxious for a better education than the common schools I had thus far attended afforded me, and to secure it entered the seminary at Lima, N.Y., in 1839. Later I became a student at Oberlin College, Ohio, from which institution I graduated in 1844. While a student at Oberlin I made the acquaintance of Gerrit Smith, Joshua R. Giddings, Theodore Parker, and other abolition leaders, and became thoroughly imbued with their ideas, coming to hold with Smith that the Federal constitution, instead of countenancing slavery, positively forbade it. During my college vacations, in order to obtain money with which to continue my studies, I taught school in Lexington, Kentucky. One of the first friends I made in Lexington was Cassius M. Clay. He was then, as now, a large-hearted, noble-minded man, and an attachment sprang up between us which to-day is as warm as ever. In those days he was editing

the True American, the only anti-slavery paper published in the South. His boldness in attacking the lion in its very den, as it were, produced the most violent opposition, and upon a number of occasions I was among those who guarded his printing plant from destruction by mobs. Once, I remember, I manned for two days and nights a cannon loaded with grape and canister posted in front of his office door. There were one or two more cannons about the premises, and a mob, had it visited us, would have received a warm reception.

"One day in August, 1841, word came to me that an escaped slave, named Coleman, with his wife and three children, were in hiding in Lexington. The poor creatures had made their way from East Tennessee, but their owner was hot on their track, and they were afraid to go further without a guide. I left my school in charge of another, and started with them toward the Ohio River at night and on foot. We traveled for six nights, lying in hiding during the day. We finally reached the Ohio, opposite Ripley, and crossed the river in a skiff. Just after we had crossed I saw a Negro boy run along the Kentucky shore and disappear. I suspected he was trying to escape, and went back to help him. I found him behind a log in the swamp, and got away with him, though men with bloodhounds were hunting the boy at the time.

"In April 1842, I was in Covington, Kentucky, and while there was told of the case of Emily Ward, a handsome girl of eighteen, two-thirds white, who had been sold and was about to be taken South to become the mistress of her purchaser. She was kept in an attic facing the river. I went at nightfall, and attracting her attention by tossing pebbles against the windows, threw up to her, tied to a stone, a note telling her I had come to help her escape. By the same means I got up to her first a cord with a bundle of men's clothes fastened to it, and finally a stout rope. She put on the clothes, and crawling through a rear window of the room in which she was locked, slid down the rope to the ground. When we were a few feet away from the house we met her master, who apologized for unintentionally brushing against me in the darkness. The girl's case was known to every one in Covington, and

I did not dare to hire a boat to take us across to Cincinnati for fear of detection; so we got on board a raft, eight by twenty rods, containing one million feet of boards and one hundred thousand shingles, worked by twelve men besides myself, the pilot. Once in Cincinnati, we were safe. I took Emily to the house of Levi Coffin, Superintendent of the Underground Railroad in that department, and turned her over to him. He found her a comfortable home and she did well.

"Five days after helping Emily Ward to escape I again crossed the Ohio at night on a log. This time I had for a companion John Hamilton, a mulatto. He was a man of superior natural ability and made his mark. After the war he returned South and became a state senator in South Carolina, only to be murdered by the Ku-Klux. This was my last log trip, but within a week I rescued the Stanton family, father, mother and six children. They had been sold and were about to be sent to a Louisiana sugar plantation. I packed them in the bottom of a load of straw bought just out of Covington ostensibly for livery use, and drove them in safety to Cincinnati, where Levi Coffin sent them North over the Underground Railroad.

"In August of the same year I spent several weeks in Montgomery County, Kentucky, as the guest of Richard McFarland. A girl of sixteen was anxious to escape and applied to me for help. Starting on a clear, moonlight night, we drove before noon next day to Lexington, a distance of ninety miles. On the way we were overhauled by a brother of McFarland, who was searching for a lost slave. When I heard the man's name my heart rose in my mouth, but by putting on a bold front I succeeded in getting off without disclosing the identity of myself and companion. My scruples against so gross a breach of hospitality as stealing the property of my host were fully overcome by the fact that both the girl and her mother were the children of their master. Kate was a pretty blonde, with blue eyes and flaxen hair, showing not the slightest trace of Negro blood. From Lexington I took her to Cincinnati and gave her into the care of Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the *National Era*, one of the noblest and bravest soldiers

in the abolition army. Later, Kate's mother, brother, and sister escaped. The children were all educated by Mr. Bailey and are still living in prosperous circumstances.

"The most remarkable incident of this period of my life occurred in March, 1843. One day in the latter part of that month, while looking through the jail at Lexington, my attention was attracted to one of the prisoners, a young woman of exquisite figure and singular beauty. I asked the jailer who she was, and to my surprise, for she looked pure Caucasian, he told me that she was a slave girl named Eliza and the daughter of her master, who a few days later was to sell her upon the block for the New Orleans market, impelled by the jealousy of his wife because the slave girl was superior to her own daughters. Then I talked with the girl; I found that she was intelligent as well as beautiful, and I resolved to exert every effort to save so magnificent a creature from so sad a fate. I told her I would go to Cincinnati and do my best to raise the money with which to purchase her freedom; if I obtained it I would be back before the sale came off; if I did not return she would at least have the sorry satisfaction of knowing that I had done all I could. I hurried to Cincinnati and sought out that old hero and apostle of freedom, Levi Coffin. He gave me prompt and generous assistance, and in a short time we raised seven hundred dollars. I then laid the case before Salmon P. Chase, afterwards senator, secretary of the treasury, and chief justice, who gave me two hundred more and went with me to see Nicholas Longworth. The latter was worth millions, but we were afraid nothing would come of our appeal to him, but decided to make it, as it cost us nothing. 'Mr. Longworth,' said Chase, 'do you consider yourself a Christian?'

"'I am not a very good one,' was the reply.

"Well, we have got a case here that appeals to both humanity and Christianity. Mr. Fairbank will tell you about it.' I told the story. Longworth listened in silence, and when I was through drew his check-book from a drawer and began filling out a check. A moment later Longworth wheeled around and handed me a check for one thousand dollars. A number of well-to-do Negroes raised and gave me several

hundred dollars more, and when I went back to Lexington, the day before the time appointed for the sale, I carried two thousand two hundred and seventy-five dollars. Moreover, in my pocketbook was an agreement signed by Chase, Longworth, and William Howard, another rich Cincinnatian, empowering me to draw upon them, if necessary, to the extent of twenty-five thousand. The sale took place and was attended by fully two thousand people, drawn there by descriptions of the girl's comeliness and rumors of the effort that was to be made to save her. The best people of the town were there, and a number of strangers from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia were also present, curious, and horror-stricken. But one man appeared to bid against me, a Frenchman from New Orleans, who I was told made it his business to attend sales of young girls and purchase them for a fate worse than death. Eliza, when placed upon the block, seemed ready to drop from fear and shame. The auctioneer began his work by pointing out her beauties, concluding with, 'What am I offered for her?' 'Five hundred,' I cried. The New Orleans man instantly raised my bid, until I raised his last bid to thirteen hundred, when he turned to me with an ugly look and said: 'How high are you going to bid?' 'Higher than you do, Monsieur,' I replied. He turned away and raised my bid, and we kept bidding until he turned to me and asked: 'How high are you going?' 'None of your business, sir, but you haven't enough money to buy this girl.' The auctioneer grew impatient and cried, 'Give, give,' Finally he dropped his hammer and tearing open Eliza's waist, exposed a bust as perfect as ever artist sculptured. 'Look, gentlemen,' he cried. 'Who is going to lose a chance like this. Here's a girl fit to be the mistress of a king.' 'Too bad!' 'What a shame!' ran through the crowd at sight of this indignity; but only to be followed by greater exposure of the poor girl's person. The hammer fell at fourteen hundred and eighty dollars, and the girl was mine. An instant later she tottered back into the arms of her aunt in a deep swoon. 'She is yours, young man,' said the auctioneer. 'What are you going to do with her?' 'Free her, sir,' and my answer awoke a cheer, which, rising to a Kentucky shout, rent the air.

As soon as they could be made out, I handed Eliza the papers which formally set her free. Four days after the sale I took Eliza to Cincinnati, where she became a member of the family of Gamaliel Bailey. Under his care she received a finished education, married well, and to-day is a cheerful, charming matron. Only the members of her immediate family know the history of her early years; so you will understand why I do not give her full name.

"Lewis Hayden, who served as a member of the Massachusetts general court and in the legislature of the same state, and who was long ago one of the honored citizens of Boston, was when a young man a slave, the property of Baxter and Grant, owners of the Brennan House, in Lexington. Hayden's wife, and his son, a lad of ten years, when I first knew them, were the slaves of Patrick Baine. On a September evening in 1844, accompanied by Miss D. A. Webster, a young Vermont lady who was associated with me in teaching, I left Lexington with the Haydens in a hack, crossed the Ohio on a ferry the next morning, changed horses, and drove to an Underground Railroad depot at Hopkins, Ohio, where we left Hayden and his family. When Miss Webster and I returned to Lexington, after two days' absence, we were both arrested, charged by their master with helping Hayden's wife and son to escape. We were jointly indicted, but Miss Webster was tried first and sentenced to two years' imprisonment in the penitentiary at Frankfort.

"My cell-mate in the jail in which I was confined before my trial was Richard Moore, a young mulatto, a slave under sentence of death for the murder of his mistress, a Mrs. Turner. The thing seemed impossible, but I determined to attempt his and my own escape. A week or so before the time set for his execution I suggested a plan for four or five slaves to break jail, and in this way secured two bars of iron, which I hid away. Early on the Tuesday night previous to the Friday upon which Moore was to hang, we attacked the wall of our cell. All night we worked without rest; the palms of my hands were worn to the tendons. We had reached the last boulder on the outside of the four-foot wall when the city clock struck five. We were half an

hour too late. 'I am a dead man,' said Moore, and fell almost to the floor. When what we had done was discovered we were handcuffed together, and remained so day and night until Moore was executed. Do you wonder that I have never forgotten this experience?

"While my case was still pending I learned that the governor was inclined to pardon Miss Webster, but first insisted that I should be tried. When called up for trial, in February 1845, I pleaded guilty and received a sentence of fifteen years. A little later Miss Webster received her pardon. I served four years and eleven months, was released August 23, 1849, by Governor John J. Crittenden, the able and patriotic man who afterwards saved Kentucky to the Union. His action was prompted by petitions in my behalf from all parts of the North. I returned to the North immediately after my release, and did what I could do to prevent the passage of the Fugitive Slave bill. After it became a law by the signature of President Fillmore, I resisted its execution whenever and wherever possible.

"An incident which happened soon after I returned north showed me that my labors for the slaves had not been in vain. In the autumn of 1849 I was in Detroit, Michigan. In talking over my early experiences one day with General Lewis Cass I told him of Sam Johnson, the first Negro whom I had freed.

"'Why,' said the General, 'Johnson lives just out of this city. He has told me the same story a dozen times.' The general informed me that Johnson drove into the city almost daily, and next morning I waited at the place to which I had been directed for his appearance. He finally came, seated in a wagon loaded with grain and drawn by a six-horse team. 'Whose team is that?' I asked. 'Mine,' was the reply. 'Do you know that I am your master?' I continued. 'Hain't got no master,' said he gloomily. Then recognizing who I was, he leaped from his seat with a joyful, 'Blessed if you hain't de chap dat sot me free,' and caught me in his arms. He took me to his home, a few miles from Detroit, and I found him to be a well-to-do farmer, owning a well-stocked farm of one hundred and sixty acres, with his wife and children about him. Living near the Johnsons, and like them,

contented and comfortable, I found the Stewart and Coleman families, for whom I had also lighted the path to freedom.

"My father had died of cholera at Lexington in 1849, while seeking to secure my release, and in October 1851, I went south to get the body and bring it back to our old home here in New York. While waiting in Louisville for the cooler weather which would permit a fulfillment of my mission, I rescued a woman named Julia and her child. Crossing the Ohio in a skiff at night, I took them to an underground depot at Buckrams, Indiana. I saw the mother afterward at Windsor, Canada, where she had married well. Two weeks later I carried off Tamor, a bright mulatto girl of twenty belonging to A. L. Shotwell of Louisville. I knew the undertaking was an extremely dangerous one and I laid my plans carefully. The girl met me one evening at a certain gate, dressed for the occasion. We walked through the busiest part of the city to the banks of the Ohio, which we crossed in a leaky skiff, which I propelled with a piece of board while Tamor kept the skiff from sinking by constant bailing with a large cup which we had brought along for the purpose. Resting as we might, during the night, chased from one retreat to another, I drove with her early next morning to a railroad station twenty-four miles from the river, and took her on the cars to Salem, Indiana, where I left her with a friend. This was the last slave whom I was ever able to help off. In fifteen years I had, unaided and alone, freed forty-seven slaves, besides lending assistance in many other cases.

"The freeing of Tamor again cost me my own liberty. One week afterwards I was kidnaped from Indiana soil, and without process of law taken to Louisville and lodged in jail. I was tried in February 1852, the owner of Tamor appearing as my prosecutor, and though the evidence against me was of the flimsiest character, my reputation as slave-stealer secured my conviction. My sentence was fifteen years at hard labor in the state prison. My friends did little for me, and that was one reason why I fared so hard. They were afraid, so intense was the feeling against me in Louisville, that if they succeeded in securing my acquittal by a jury, a mob

would take it up and lynch me. My own mind, however, was at rest on that point. I would have taken part in any lynching that might have been attempted and looked out for myself.

"I returned to the prison at Frankfort in March, 1852. Captain Newton Craig, the warden under whom I had served my first term, was still in charge. What was known as the lease system was then in vogue, the prison being leased to the warden for a certain sum a year, the warden looking to the labor of the prisoners for his profit. The prison during all the years that it was my home was in a horrible condition, unspeakably filthy and miserably ventilated. During my first imprisonment Craig had treated me kindly, but his bearing when I came before him for the second time plainly told me that my lot was to be a hard one. After being locked up for two days I was brought before the warden in the prison chapel, the governor and other prominent citizens being present, and denounced for what I had done. 'Mr. Davis,' said the warden, 'take Fairbank to the hackling house and kill him.' To the hackling house I accordingly went. This was where the hemp, after being broken, was hackled. After a month's work in the hackling shop I was sent to the spinning shop, and finally to the weaving shop, where I remained for ten and a half years. While in the hackling shop I received my first flogging with the rawhide on the bare back, the blows cutting deep into the quivering flesh.

"Zeb Ward became warden of the prison in 1854. He leased it at six thousand a year and made one hundred thousand out of the lease in four years. To do this he literally killed two hundred and fifty out of three hundred and seventy-five prisoners. Ward was one of the strangest men I ever knew, physically handsome, socially magnetic, but utterly devoid of heart or conscience. He was a gambler, libertine, and murderer under cover of the law. When he took the keys of the prison he said: "Men, I'm a man of few words and prompt action. I came here to make money, and I'll do it if I kill you all."

"He was as good as his promise. During his wardenship and that of J. W. South, who succeeded him in 1858, I received on my bared

body thirty-five thousand stripes, laid on with a strap of half-tanned leather a foot and a half long, often dipped in water to increase the pain. All the floggings I received under Ward were for failure to perform the tasks set for me to do, generally weaving hemp—two hundred and eighty yards a day being what I was expected to perform, an utter impossibility. I was whipped, bowed over a chair or some other object, often seventy lashes four times a day, every ten blows inflicting pain worse than death. Once I received one hundred and seven blows at one time, particles of flesh being thrown upon the wall several feet away. My weight, which was one hundred and eighty pounds when I entered the prison, was several times reduced to one hundred and eighteen pounds. I have seen new men in the hackling house fall at their work, weak from flogging, and when taken to the hospital die before morning from pneumonia and the strap. A remarkable constitution and great muscular strength were the only thing that saved my life. As it was, I was an old man at forty.

"But there was an occasional ray of sunshine in my prison life. Interest in my case constantly increased, and at last public opinion set in in my favor.

"In February 1858, having been pressed for three years to do so, I stood in the prison chapel and addressed an audience of several thousand people, including the governor and other state officials. In the course of my sermon—I had been ordained a minister just before my second arrest—I told them that war was inevitable, and that when it came slavery would be swept away like chaff. Lincoln was elected president, and in less than five years war followed.

"In September and October 1862, General Bragg held Frankfort for six weeks, and during that period three times rebel soldiers came to kill me. Once with a rope in hand they came upon me in the prison yard and asked me where they 'could find that damned nigger-stealer, Fairbank.' I sent them another way, then hurried to Warden Whitesides, a kindly and humane man, who took charge of the prison in 1862, and he hid me. On their second visit we got word of their coming and I was in hiding when they arrived. Their last visit was unex-

pected, and they found me in the prison kitchen. Brought to bay, I had to fight for my life. I caught up an ax and planting myself in the doorway, said: 'Come on, boys; you are not afraid of me!' None of them seemed inclined to attack me first, and finally the whole party, several hundred strong, marched out.

"The freedom for which I had waited so long came two years later. Among those whose friendship I gained during my confinement was Richard T. Jacobs, a wealthy planter of strong anti-slavery tendencies, who had married a daughter of Thomas H. Benton. Jacobs often talked about me with his brother-in-law, John C. Fremont, and the latter in turn told my story to President Lincoln, who, as after events showed, was deeply impressed by it. Early in 1864 General Speed S. Fry was sent from Washington to Kentucky with orders to enroll all Negroes whom he found fit for military service. Thomas E. Bramlette, then governor of Kentucky, attempted to prevent General Fry from carrying out his orders, as President Lincoln had expected he would, and was ordered to Washington. Jacobs, who was lieutenant governor, became acting governor. On his first day in office General Fry said to him: 'Governor, the President thinks it would be well to make this Fairbank's day.'

"He called upon me that day and told me that he was going to turn me loose. Counting my previous imprisonment, I had spent seventeen years and four months of the best part of my life in prison. On the evening after my release I enjoyed at the Capital Hotel in Frankfort a cordial reception by the people of the city and distinguished persons from other parts of Kentucky, which I shall ever remember with pleasure as a reunion after victory. Twenty-four hours late I crossed the Ohio, and do not believe me sentimental when I tell you that when I found myself once more on the free soil of the Buckeye State I knelt down and kissed the ground.

"In the following June occurred the event anticipation of which had strengthened and encouraged me through all those dark and dreary years. Previous to my second imprisonment I had been betrothed to Mandana Tileston

of Williamsburg, Massachusetts. True as the magnet to the poles, when misfortune again befell me she left her New England home, engaged as a teacher, first in Hamilton and then at Oxford, Ohio, waited and watched over the border, supplied me with every comfort within her power, worked and petitioned for my release without ceasing, and faithful to the last, refused honorable alliances to wait the uncertain fate of a prisoner. It was a happy day indeed when we were married."

William Lloyd Garrison

*"Seven Grecian cities fought for Homer dead,
Through which the living Homer begged his
bread."*

If we estimate his life by labours performed, sufferings, amounting almost to martyrdom, endured; unwavering devotion to the principles of equal rights to all, William Lloyd Garrison was certainly the greatest of anti-slave leaders. He was born in Newburyport, Mass., December 10th, 1805. His mother's maiden name was Fanny Lloyd; and his father, Abijah Garrison, though a sea captain, possessed some literary ability and ambition.

It is a little remarkable that the house in which our hero was born was overshadowed by the church under whose altar the remains of George Whitefield were buried. Thus at the very spot where the life's work of this great advocate of slavery ended, God in his providence raised up a greater and more zealous advocate of anti-slavery, to rouse the people from the lethargy into which Whitefield and his disciples wooed them.

In 1808 Abijah deserted his wife and children, never returning, leaving them to struggle for existence as best they could. William Lloyd, or Lloyd as his mother called him, was apprenticed when quite young to learn the shoemaker's trade. Not liking the work, he was next set to learn cabinet making. This proving uncongenial, his mother secured him a place in a printing office, where he mastered the business in happy contentment.

When but a youth, he wrote for *The Newburyport Herald*, and Boston papers; then at the end of his apprenticeship, became the editor of a new paper in Newburyport, called *The Free Press*.

This paper was noted for its high moral tone, but like the most of such "felt wants," its existence was brief. We next find him in Boston, editor of *The National Philanthropist*, said to be the first paper started to advocate the doctrine of total abstinence from intoxicating drinks. The motto of the paper was this truism, "Moderate drinking is the down-hill road to drunkenness," which was at once expressive and original.

While editing this paper he became acquainted with Benjamin Lundy, and they felt mutual affinity of kindred spirits from the first.

In 1828 Mr. Garrison became editor of *The Journal of the Times*, in Bennington, Vermont, a paper established to support John Quincy Adams for the presidency. He earned his salary by ably supporting Mr. Adams, but he also earned adverse criticism by being the champion of temperance, peace, and the emancipation of slaves.

Among his exchanges was Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. The reading of this little monthly paper intensified his hatred of slavery; so he wrote a petition to Congress for its abolition in the District of Columbia. Having obtained a large number of signatures by sending it to the different postmasters of Vermont, he sent it to Congress, where it caused no little commotion on being read. In the fall of 1829, Mr. Garrison went into partnership with his Quaker friend Lundy; so *The Genius of Universal Emancipation* was enlarged and issued weekly at Baltimore, Md. But a difficulty presented itself to the success of the paper under their joint management. Mr. Lundy favored a gradual emancipation, while Mr. Garrison advocated immediate emancipation. At last, at the suggestion of Lundy, each wrote from his own standpoint, signing his initials to the articles.

The rage of the slave-holders knew no bounds when Garrison demolished their sophistries and subterfuges, by which they eased conscience, with an invincible logic, and he

insisted with voice of thunder that it was their duty to "break every yoke and let the oppressed go free."

About this time a vessel belonging to Francis Todd of Garrison's native town, Newburyport, took on a cargo of eighty slaves at Baltimore for New Orleans. He at once denounced it in his paper, saying it was not one whit better than if the slaves had been brought from Africa; and the law denounced foreign slave-trade as piracy. For this he was arrested and fined fifty dollars, in default of which he was sent to jail. To show that his brave spirit was neither crushed nor daunted by imprisonment, he spent his time in writing against slavery, and inscribing sonnets on the walls of his cell. One of them was as follows:

Prisoner! within these gloomy walls close
pent,
Guiltless of horrid crime or venal
wrong—
Bear nobly up against the punishment,
And in thy innocence to be great and
strong!
Perchance thy fault was love to all mankind;
Thou didst oppose some vile, oppressive
law,
Or strive all human fetters to unbind,
Or wouldest not bear the implements of
war;—
What then? Dost thou so soon repent the
deed?
A martyr's crown is richer than a king's!
Think it an honor with the Lord to bleed,
And glory midst in tensest sufferings!
Though beat, imprisoned, put to open
shame,
Time shalt embalm and magnify thy name.

John G. Whittier, the rising young Quaker poet, had recently succeeded George D. Prentice as editor of *The New England Review*, at Hartford, Connecticut, after Prentice had gone to Kentucky to write the life of Henry Clay and edit *The Louisville Daily Journal*.

He was a friend to Mr. Garrison, who had published some of his maiden poems while editing *The Free Press*, and an admirer of Henry Clay. Young Whittier knew that Mr. Clay was a slave-holder, but he also believed him a true

friend of freedom, judging from his effort to check the spread of slavery and to ultimately abolish it in Kentucky. So he wrote the great statesman on behalf of the "guiltless prisoner," at Baltimore, begging him to pay his fine and "let the captive go free." Mr. Clay responded promptly, asking for particulars and indicating an intention of complying with the request. While matters were thus pending, Arthur Tappan, a wealthy merchant in New York, paid the fine and costs; so the prisoner was released.

The partnership between Mr. Garrison and Mr. Lundy was now dissolved, with the most cordial feeling of friendship, which existed ever afterwards.

Seeing the apathy in regard to slavery, even in liberty-loving Massachusetts, Garrison resolved to start a paper to be called *The Liberator*, right under the shadow of Bunker Hill, and near Faneuil Hall, the "Cradle of Liberty."

The first number of this paper appeared in January, 1831, containing this expressive motto, "Our Country is the World, Our Countrymen are all Mankind." At the expiration of four months *The Liberator* appeared with an engraved head including a pictorial representation of an auction, with a bill tacked up offering for sale "slaves, horses and other cattle." Near by is a whipping-post at which a Negro slave is receiving punishment. In the background is seen the capitol at Richmond, with a flag floating over the dome inscribed with the word "Liberty." Even Garrison's friends trembled at his fearless denunciation of slavery. One even suggested that he change the name of his paper to *The Safety Lamp*; but his only reply was, "I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice; I am in earnest; I will not equivocate; I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch; I will be heard."

The following outrage on free speech is quoted from the Columbia, S.C., *Telescope* of this period: "Let us declare, through the public journals of our country, that the question of slavery is not and shall not be open to discussion—that the very moment any private individual attempts to lecture us upon its evils and immorality, in the same moment his tongue shall be cut out and cast upon the dunghill."

New Orleans offered twenty thousand dollars to any man or set of men who would seize Arthur Tappan of New York, Garrison's benefactor. While in the year 1831, the Legislature of Georgia, the governor, Wilson Lumpkin, concurring, passed a resolution offering a reward of five thousand dollars for the arrest, prosecution, and conviction under the laws of that state, of William Lloyd Garrison, editor of *The Liberator*.

The record of it is found in the laws of Georgia for 1831, page 255. This of course was simply a bribe to any ruffian to seize and kidnap these brave defenders of Liberty.

On January 6, 1832, in the midst of a tempest of wind and hail, "The New England Anti-Slavery Society" was organized, in the basement of the African Baptist church in Belknap Street, Boston. Of those present only twelve persons, all white, signed the constitution, as follows:

William Lloyd Garrison, Oliver Johnson, Robert B. Hall, Arnold Buffum, William J. Snelling, John E. Fuller, Moses Thacher, Joshua Coffin, Stillman B. Newcomb, Benjamin C. Bacon, Isaac Knapp, Henry K. Stockton. These might be called the "Twelve Apostles of Abolition," but with this humble origin the society grew into a mighty influence against slavery. This was the first association organized on the principle of immediate emancipation. Arnold Buffum was chosen president, and William L. Garrison corresponding secretary.

The Quakers were in the main the friends of the oppressed, and opposers of slavery, but even this sect was by no means a unit in this particular, as the following colloquy shows: "Well, Perez, I hope thee's done running after the Abolitionists," said a leading Friend to one of his humbler brethren. "Verily I have," said Perez; "I've caught up with and gone just a little ahead of them."

Henry Clay, and many statesmen and divines of national reputation, favored the idea of colonizing the Negroes in Africa, and a strong organization known as "The American Colonization Society" was formed. Mr. Garrison, having received protests against this society from a number of prominent colored men of many Northern cities, published their protest, together

with his own views, in a large pamphlet in the spring of 1832, called "Thoughts on African Colonization." In it he shows ten objections to the said society: 1. It is pledged not to oppose the system of slavery. 2. It apologizes for slavery and slave-holders. 3. It recognizes slaves as property. 4. It increases the value of slaves. 5. It is the enemy of immediate abolition. 6. It is nourished by fear and selfishness. 7. It aims at the utter expulsion of the blacks. 8. It is the disparager of the free blacks. 9. It denies the possibility of elevating the blacks in this country. 10. It deceives and misleads the nation."

The society never fully recovered from this pamphlet, which showed them up in their true light. This colonization society, while claiming to be in the interest of the Negro, never thought of consulting a colored man, bond or free, any more than a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals would consult the animals they are trying to protect. In sending the "niggers" from a civilized to a barbarous land, it was—

Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs but to "go" and die.

Mr. Garrison crossed the ocean no less than five times, his first trip occurring in the spring of 1833. In London he was invited to an honorary seat in conference on the slavery question, where he mingled with such men as Wilberforce, Brougham, Macaulay, O'Connell, Burton, and Clarkson. He put into their hands his "Thoughts on African Colonization," and brought home a "Protest" against this colonization scheme, signed by four of the great names I have mentioned and others of equal weight.

He was sent as a delegate to the Anti-Slavery Conference of London in 1840; but when he learned that the conference refused to receive the lady delegates on their credentials, he and those who came with him took seats in the gallery as spectators.

Mr. Garrison made his third voyage in 1846, this time by invitation of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, who desired him to lecture against the Free Church, for collecting money from the Southern slave-holders.

His fourth visit to Europe was made in May, 1867, two years after the close of the war of the rebellion. He joined his children in Paris, and after attending the Exposition, went to London, where a great public breakfast was held in his honor, at St. James' Hall. Among those present were Mr. F. H. Morse, the American consul in London, John Bright, John Stewart Mill, and other members of Parliament. John Bright presided, and made the first speech. He crossed the Atlantic for the fifth and last time in company with his son Frank in 1877.

The Boston Mob, of "gentlemen of property and standing," occurred October twenty-first, 1835. The occasion of it was an advertised meeting of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery society, to take place at Anti-Slavery Hall, 46 Washington Street.

The mayor of Boston took no steps to prevent or disperse the mob other than by being present and commanding the ladies to retire. Seeing they could hope for no protection, they adjourned to meet again at the home of one of their number. The mayor now advised Garrison to escape by a window at the rear of the building. This he attempted to do, but was seized by the mob and dragged through some of the prominent streets of Boston with a rope about his body, amid the jeering and curses of men thirsting for his blood. At last the two strong men who supported him on either side, and a few friends and policemen, with superhuman effort forced their way with him into the city hall. From here he was committed to jail ostensibly as a disturber of the peace. After being hustled into a carriage in waiting at the door, which the mob tried in vain to upset or capture, he was driven by a circuitous route to the jail and locked behind the prison bars. Was he crushed and discouraged? No, a thousand times no! It is true a new suit of clothes was torn to shreds; it is true he was buffeted and bruised; it is true he barely escaped with his life; but he slept as sweetly that night as if he had been in the bosom of his family. The next morning he wrote on the walls of his cell the following lines:—

"William Lloyd Garrison was put into this cell on Wednesday afternoon, Oct. 12th, 1835, to save him from the violence of a 'respectable'

and influential mob who sought to destroy him for preaching the abominable and dangerous doctrine that, 'all men are created equal,' and that all oppression is odious in the sight of God.

"Reader, let this inscription remain till the last slave in this despotic land be loosed from his fetters."

When peace within the bosom reigns,
and conscience gives the approving
voice,

Thought, bound, the human form in
chains,
Yet can the soul aloud rejoice.

Tis true my footsteps are confined.
I cannot roam beyond this cell,
But what can circumscribe the mind?
To chain the winds attempt as well!

Confine me as a prisoner—but bind me
not as a slave.

Punish me as a prisoner—but hold me not
as a chattel.

Torture me as a man—but drive me not as
a beast.

Doubt my sanity—but acknowledge my
immortality.

Mr. Garrison, like the immortal Bunyan, seemed to have his loftiest inspiration when behind the prison bars. Like flowers which exude their fragrance only when crushed or bruised, persecution drove him to poetry. Garrison was released from prison in the afternoon of the next day, and at the request of the city authorities, took his wife, who was in critical health, and left the city for a few days, until the excitement abated. But he lived to edit *The Liberator*, until his demands were granted, and four million slaves were made free. This having been accomplished, in part through the influence of his paper, he deemed it unwise "to run the mill after the grist was out," and the last issue was published the last week in December 1865, making the paper cover the full period of thirty-five years. But he continued the same kind friend to the freedmen he had been to the slave, until his labor ended with his life in New York City, Saturday night about eleven o'clock of May 24th, 1879, in the seventy-fourth year of his age.

Elijah Parish Lovejoy

Perhaps with the exception of John Brown's attack at Harper's Ferry, or the bombardment of Fort Sumter, no event in connection with slavery produced more widespread excitement North and South than the murder of Lovejoy at Alton, Illinois, in November 1837.

Before describing this startling event, it is well to consider something of the man, and the circumstances which led up to his untimely and cruel murder.

He was born in Albion, Maine, in November 1802, and was thirty-five years of age when killed by the mob. His father, Daniel Lovejoy, was a Congregational minister and a graduate of the well-known college at Waterville, Maine.

When Elijah was a young man there was a great tide of emigration from New England to the mighty West; drifting with this tide, he came to St. Louis, where after teaching school for a time, he became editor of a Whig paper called *The St. Louis Times*. The ready pen and stirring style of the young editor soon brought the paper into prominence, and made it a great exposé of Whig sentiment in Missouri and Illinois, and he bid fair to make his mark as a politician and moulder of public sentiment.

In 1832 he experienced a remarkable conversion to the Christian faith, and became deeply impressed with the duty of preaching the gospel. Yielding to this conviction, he at once went east and entered the Princeton Theological Seminary, and the next year, 1833, was licensed to preach. A few months after this he returned to St. Louis, where he was known as a ready writer, and soon secured a position as editor of *The St. Louis Observer*, the leading organ of the Presbyterians of Missouri and Illinois. His was a remarkable career at this time, when we consider that he was not converted until 1832, when he was thirty years of age, and became a minister, and an influential religious editor the next year; thus obtaining at a single bound, among the cultured and conservative Presbyterians, that which with them was often the work of a lifetime.

His biographer, Henry Tanner, who was with him at the time of his death, describes

Mr. Lovejoy as being "of medium height, broadly built, muscular, of dark complexion, black eyes, with a certain twinkle betraying his sense of the humorous, and with a countenance expressing great kindness and sympathy." He said further, "There probably had not lived in this century a man of greater singleness of purpose in bearing witness to the truth, more courageous in maintaining principle in the face of passionate opposition."

When we read quotations from *The St. Louis Observer* of this period we are astonished that such mild editorials should so provoke the wrath of the pro-slavery people. But they were evidently determined to nip in the bud, and crush out in its incipiency, any agitation of the slavery question, knowing their position was untenable, and could not stand the light of investigation.

As a summary of his views at this time, I would say he favored the idea of gradual emancipation of slaves, to be followed up by colonization. Surely this was a very mild view of the situation, when we consider that many of the Southern slave-holders themselves advocated the same measure. But his heart was grieved at the brutal treatment many slaves of this period received at the hands of masters and overseers. Here he thought the reform should be thorough and immediate. "For," said he, "it is fearfully true that many professed Christians habitually treat their slaves as though they had no immortal souls, and it is high time such a practice as this were abolished." But Garrison and his associates were throwing red-hot shot into the pro-slavery ranks. *The Liberator* and *Emancipator* were read in St. Louis and enraged the advocates of slavery. In their excitement they regarded all Abolitionists as one and the same in their views, and persistently ignored Mr. Lovejoy's plea for "cool and temperate argument, supported by facts," and the following editorial from his pen: "It has been with pain that we have seen, recently, the heated and angry meetings and discussions which have taken place amongst our eastern brethren of the abolition and colonization parties.

The excitement increased during the summer of 1835, until the slave-holders of St. Louis were

not willing to have the subject discussed, however mildly. The articles of Mr. Lovejoy, although written in a kind, Christian spirit, became very offensive to them. The slave-holders were ready to tar and feather him, as an Abolitionist, while the rabble termed him an amalgamationist. Yet nothing was farther from his views.

It soon became evident that the main issue between Lovejoy and his enemies was freedom of speech and the freedom of the press. He resolved to defend this at all hazards, and they were equally determined to suppress it.

Seeing he could have no protection in St. Louis, from insult and threatened mob violence, Mr. Lovejoy now determined to move his paper to the then thriving city of Alton, Illinois, just above St. Louis on the river. Alas! As is so often the case, he escaped Scylla only to wreck on Charybdis, as we shall see.

The *St. Louis Observer* of June 21, 1836, announced the editor's intention, but before the move could be made, some ruffians forced an entrance into his office and destroyed much of the property, including some of the editor's furniture, which was broken up and thrown into the river. The remnant, including the press, was shipped to Alton, where it remained on the landing during Sunday, and was broken to pieces and thrown into the river before Monday morning. But a public meeting was promptly held, in which the citizens denounced those who destroyed the press and raised money to buy a new one. The new press was soon received and the first number of *The Alton Observer* was issued September 8, 1836.

For nearly a year Lovejoy enjoyed a period of comparative tranquility, but it was only the calm before the storm. Many Southerners and proslavery men came to the thriving young city. These could not tolerate even the mild anti-slavery tone of the *Observer*, and used their influence with the "lewd fellows of the baser sort," who were to be found in every western city, especially river towns. Then, too, the great dailies of St. Louis continued to harass him, and insist that "something must be done" to rid the country of this pestilential fellow, who actually taught that all men were created equal. This actually caused a mob at Alton on August 21, 1836.

The mob first attempted to assault Mr. Lovejoy on the street about nine o'clock at night, while returning home from the drug-store with some medicine for his sick wife. Having surrounded him, the cry was, "Rail him, rail him," "Tar and feather him!" Turning to the leaders, he said in calm tone, "I have one request to make of you, and then you can do with me what you please. My wife is at home sick in bed; send one of your number to take this medicine to her, and let it be done without alarming her." This they promised to do, and one of the men started with the medicine at once. But the calm demeanor of Lovejoy, together with the self-sacrificing spirit in reference to his sick wife, touched the hearts of some of them and he was permitted to go home undisturbed. But the same night they destroyed his second press, type, and other material; yet money was quickly raised, partly from different states, and partly from friends of free speech at Alton; and a third press was on hand September 21, 1837. It was taken to a warehouse and stored.

The mayor, John M. Krum, offered to guard it, and did so by placing one constable at the door of the warehouse until about midnight. But, as might have been expected, the officer had hardly gone, when about a dozen ruffians broke in the warehouse door, dragged the press to the river and after demolishing it, threw the fragments into that common receptacle of Lovejoy's property, the river. About ten days after this event, Mr. Lovejoy, with his wife and babe, were spending some time with his wife's mother at St. Charles, Missouri. He had preached morning and evening on that peaceful Sabbath, and about nine o'clock was enjoying a conversation with his friend Rev. Mr. Campbell, when a knock was heard at the door. On opening it, he saw a number of men on the portico and in the yard. The two leaders, formerly from Virginia and Missouri, rushed into the house and attempted to pull him out. But with the help of his heroic wife, her mother, and sister, the two men were driven from the room. The drunken mob again returned to the charge, and rushing into the room, they attempted to drag him out, and might have succeeded, had it not been for his friend Campbell.

It required the utmost exertion of their united efforts to force the mob from the room and clear the house. The fiends even made a third attempt to force an entrance, after which it was thought best for Lovejoy to leave the house that night. Groping through the darkness to a house of a friend, he procured a horse and arrived at Alton the next day.

Money for a fourth press was raised, it is thought by friends of free speech in Ohio, and was shipped from Cincinnati to Alton. It was received by the friends of Mr. Lovejoy, about midnight of November 6, 1837, and stored in the warehouse of Godfrey and Gilman, the leading firm in the city. Mr. Gilman, one of the owners of the warehouse called for volunteers to guard it during the night; nineteen responded, among them Mr. Lovejoy. The mob soon began to gather, when two of their number, Keating and West, were unwisely admitted inside the building to confer with Mr. Gilman. Of course they saw how few were on guard and immediately demanded the surrender of the press, threatening to blow or burn up the building in case of refusal. Most of those in the warehouse were anxious to fire on the mob from the window as soon as they got in range, hoping to repulse them at once. But Captain Long would not let them fire until the mob was close up to the building and had fired into the door. He then ordered one of his men to return the fire; he did so and killed one of the mob, a man named Bishop. This caused a cessation of hostilities for a moment, but the mob was soon reinforced by a lot of ruffians who had been drinking to stimulate their courage. They now made a desperate charge, shouting "Fire the building, and shoot every Abolitionist as he tries to escape!" An effort was now made to fire the building. For this purpose a long ladder was placed on the side where there were no windows. Soon a man mounted the ladder with a lighted torch and attempted to set fire to the shingles, which fortunately were damp with a heavy dew, and slow to kindle into a flame. Captain Long now called for volunteers to fight their way to the ladder and throw it down. Amos B. Roff, Royal Weller, and Elijah P. Lovejoy,

against the protest of his friends, promptly attempted this fatal mission. As they stepped from the door into the bright moonlight a perfect fusillade was fired at them from a pile of lumber near by. Roff and Weller were both wounded, but the fire seemed to be concentrated upon Mr. Lovejoy, who must have been recognized in the bright moonlight. He received five balls in his body, but had strength enough to run back into the house and up the stairs, crying as he went, "I am shot! I am shot! I am dead!"

These were his last words; his friends laid him on the floor, where he instantly expired.

The mob then seized the fourth press and destroyed it. The citizens of Alton generally appeared to sympathize with the mob; for when Mrs. Graves, the wife of the Presbyterian pastor, in his absence, rang the bell of her church, not far off, until she exhausted herself, not one of the citizens appeared to defend a minister who was about to be murdered. It seems, too, that Mr. Lovejoy rather expected to be murdered, as was seen by, perhaps, the last public speech he made after being mobbed at St. Charles. At his own request he was buried at Alton. Thus lived and died one of the noblest and bravest defenders of free speech and civil liberty the century has produced. Mob law was thus triumphant, but it was a dear-bought victory for Alton. She could destroy four presses for Mr. Lovejoy, but she could not destroy that mighty palladium of liberty throughout the Union. All the invective of contemporary journalism was hurled at Alton. Commerce shunned it as a plague-spot, and emigrants avoided it as a valley of death. A store built by Mr. Tanner at a cost of twenty-five thousand was sold by him for less than half that amount, and offered back to him for two thousand.

Many of her best and wealthiest citizens moved away. Her empty warehouses crumbled into the river, or became the haunts for bat and owl.

As a city, it seemed to be under the bane of Him who came "to proclaim liberty to the captives," saying also, "Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm."

FANNIE BARRIER WILLIAMS

The Club Movement among Colored Women of America (1900)

Afro-American women of the United States have never had the benefit of a discriminating judgment concerning their worth as women made up of the good and bad of human nature. What they have been made to be and not what they are, seldom enters into the best or worst opinion concerning them.

In studying the status of Afro-American women as revealed in their club organizations, it ought to be borne in mind that such social differentiations as "women's interests, children's interests, and men's interests" that are so finely worked out in the social development of the more favored races are but recent recognitions in the progressive life of the Negro race. Such specializing had no economic value in slavery days, and the degrading habit of regarding the Negro race as an unclassified people has not yet wholly faded into a memory.

The Negro as an "alien" race, as a "problem," as an "industrial factor," as "ex-slaves," as "ignorant," etc., are well known and instantly recognized; but colored women as mothers, as home-makers, as the center and source of the social life of the race have received little or no attention. These women have been left to grope their way unassisted toward a realization of those domestic virtues, moral impulses, and standards of family and social life that are the badges of race respectability. They have had no special teachers to instruct them. No conventions of distinguished women of the more favored race have met to consider their peculiar needs. There has been no fixed public opinion to which they could appeal; no protection against the libelous attacks upon their characters, and no chivalry generous enough to guarantee their safety against man's inhumanity to woman. Certain it is that colored women have been the least known, and the most ill-favored class of women in this country.

Thirty-five years ago they were unsocialized, unclassed, and unrecognized as either maids

or matrons. They were simply women whose character and personality excited no interest. If within thirty-five years they have become sufficiently important to be studied apart from the general race problem and have come to be recognized as an integral part of the general womanhood of American civilization, that fact is a gratifying evidence of real progress.

In considering the social advancement of these women, it is important to keep in mind the point from which progress began, and the fact that they have been mainly self-taught in all those precious things that make for social order, purity, and character. They have gradually become conscious of the fact that progress includes a great deal more than what is generally meant by the terms culture, education, and contact.

The club movement among colored women reaches into the sub-social condition of the entire race. Among white women clubs mean the forward movement of the best women in the interest of the best womanhood. Among colored women the club is the effort of the few competent in behalf of the many incompetent; that is to say that the club is only one of many means for the social uplift of a race. Among white women the club is the onward movement of the already uplifted.

The consciousness of being fully free has not yet come to the great masses of the colored women in this country. The emancipation of the mind and spirit of the race could not be accomplished by legislation. More time, more patience, more suffering, and more charity are still needed to complete the work of emancipation.

The training which first enabled colored women to organize and successfully carry on club work was originally obtained in church work. These churches have been and still are the great preparatory schools in which the primary lessons of social order, mutual trustfulness, and united effort have been taught. The churches,

have been sustained, enlarged, and beautified principally through the organized efforts of their women members. The meaning of unity of effort for the common good, the development of social sympathies grew into woman's consciousness through the privileges of church work.

Still another school of preparation for colored women has been their secret societies. "The ritual of these secret societies is not without a certain social value." They demand a higher order of intelligence than is required for church membership. Care for the sick, provisions for the decent burial of the indigent dead, the care for orphans, and the enlarging sense of sisterhood all contributed to the development of the very conditions of heart that qualify women for the more inclusive work of those social reforms that are the aim of women's clubs. The churches and secret societies have helped to make colored women acquainted with the general social condition of the race and the possibilities of social improvement.

With this training the more intelligent women of the race could not fail to follow the example and be inspired by the larger club movement of the white women. The need of social reconstruction became more and more apparent as they studied the results of women's organizations. Better homes, better schools, better protection for girls of scant home training, better sanitary conditions, better opportunities for competent young women to gain employment, and the need of being better known to the American people appealed to the conscience of progressive colored women from many communities.

The clubs and leagues organized among colored women have all been more or less in direct response to these appeals. Seriousness of purpose has thus been the main characteristic of all these organizations. While the National Federation of Woman's Clubs has served as a guide and inspiration to colored women, the club movement among them is something deeper than a mere imitation of white women. It is nothing less than the organized anxiety of women who have become intelligent enough to recognize their own low social condition and strong enough to initiate the forces of reform.

The club movement as a race influence among the colored women of the country may be fittingly said to date from July 1895, when the first national conference of colored women was held in Boston, Mass. Prior to this time there were a number of strong clubs in some of the larger cities of the country, but they were not affiliated and the larger idea of effecting the social regeneration of the race was scarcely conceived of.

Among the earlier clubs the Woman's League of Washington, D.C., organized in 1892, and the Woman's Era Club of Boston, organized in January 1893, were and are still the most thorough and influential organizations of the kind in the country.

The kind of work carried on by the Washington League since its organization is best indicated by its standing committees, as follows:

Committee on Education.
Committee on Industries.
Committee on Mending and Sewing.
Committee on Free Class Instruction.
Committee on Day Nursery.
Committee on Building Fund.

These various activities include sewing schools, kindergartens, well-conducted night schools, and mother's meetings, all of which have been developed and made a prominent part of the educational and social forces of the colored people of the capital. The league has made itself the recognized champion of every cause in which colored women and children have any special interests in the District of Columbia.

The league is also especially strong in the personnel of its membership, being made up largely of teachers, many of whom are recognized as among the most cultured and influential women of the Negro race in this country.

Mrs. Helen Cook, of Washington, was the first president elected by the league, and still holds that position. Mrs. Cook belongs to one of the oldest and best-established colored families in the country. She has had all the advantages of culture, contact, and experience to make her an ideal leader of the leading woman's organization of the colored race.

The Woman's League claims to have originated the idea of a national organization of colored woman's clubs. In its annual report for 1895 there occurs the following language:

"The idea of national organization has been embodied in the Woman's League of Washington from its formation. It existed fully developed in the minds of the original members even before they united themselves into an association which has national union for its central thought, its inspiring motive, its avowed purpose—its very reason for being."

Having assumed a national character by gaining the affiliations of such clubs as the Kansas City League, the Denver League, and associations in Virginia, South Carolina, and Pennsylvania, the Washington League was admitted into the membership of the National Council of Women of the United States.

The league is very tenacious of its name and claim as the originator of the idea of nationalizing the colored women's clubs of America, but its claim has always been challenged with more or less spirit by some of the clubs composing the National Association.

The New Era Club of Boston was organized in February 1893. The desire of the cultured and public-spirited colored women of that city to do something in the way of promoting a more favorable public opinion in behalf of the Negro race was the immediate incentive to this organization. The club began its work of agitation by collecting data and issuing leaflets and tracts containing well-edited matter in reference to Afro-American progress. Its most conspicuous work has been the publication of *The Woman's Era*, the first newspaper ever published by colored women in this country. This paper gained a wide circulation and did more than any other single agency to nationalize the club idea among the colored women of the country. The New Era Club has sustained its reputation as the most representative organization of colored people in New England. It has taken the initiative in many reforms and helpful movements that have had a wide influence on race development. This club has been especially useful and influential in all local affairs that in any way effect the colored people. Deserving young men

and women struggling to obtain an education, and defenseless young women in distress have always been able to find substantial assistance in the New Era Club.

This Boston organization embraces a membership of about one hundred women, many of whom are prominent in the ranks of New England's strongest women.

Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin has been the president of the Era Club all the time since its organization. She is an active member in many of the influential women's organizations in Massachusetts. She is a woman of rare force of character, mental alertness, and of generous impulses. She has played a leading part in every movement that has tended to the emancipation of colored women from the thraldom of past conditions. Her husband, the late Judge Ruffin, held the first position of a judicial character ever held by a colored man in New England.

These two clubs, located respectively in Washington and Boston, were worthy beginnings of the many local efforts that were destined to grow and spread until there should be such a thing in the United States as a national uprising of the colored women of the country pledged to the serious work of a social reconstruction of the Negro race.

But these two clubs were not the only examples of the colored woman's capacity for organization. The following clubs were thoroughly organized and actively engaged in the work of reform contemporaneously with the clubs of Boston and Washington:

The Harper Woman's Club of Jefferson City, Mo., was formed in 1890 and had established a training school for instruction in sewing; a temperance department and mothers' meetings were also carried on. The Loyal Union of Brooklyn and New York was organized in December 1892. It had a membership of seventy-five women and was engaged largely in agitating for better schools and better opportunities for young women seeking honorable employment; the I.B.W. Club of Chicago, Ill., organized in 1893; the Woman's Club of Omaha, Neb., organized February 1895; the Belle Phoebe League of Pittsburgh, Pa., organized November 1894; the Woman's League of Denver; the Ph[i]llis

Wheatley Club of New Orleans; the Sojourner Club of Providence, R.I., and the Woman's Mutual Improvement Club of Knoxville, Tenn., organized in 1894.

It will thus be seen that from 1890 to 1895 the character of Afro-American womanhood began to assert itself in definite purposes and efforts in club work. Many of these clubs came into being all unconscious of the influences of the larger club movement among white women. The incentive in most cases was quite simple and direct. How to help and protect some defenseless and tempted young woman; how to aid some poor boy to complete a much-coveted education; how to lengthen the short school term in some impoverished school district; how to instruct and interest deficient mothers in the difficulties of child training are some of the motives that led to the formation of the great majority of these clubs. These were the first out-reachings of sympathy and fellowship felt by women whose lives had been narrowed by the petty concerns of the struggle for existence and removed by human cruelty from all the harmonies of freedom, love, and aspirations.

Many of these organizations so humble in their beginnings and meager in membership clearly needed behind them the force and favor of some larger sanction to save them from timidity and pettiness of effort. Many of them clearly needed the inspirations, the wider vision, and supporting strength that come from a national unity. The club in Mississippi could have a better understanding of its own possibilities by feeling the kinship of the club in New England or Chicago, and the womanhood sympathy of these Northern clubs must remain narrow and inefficient if isolated in interest from the self-emancipating struggles of Southern clubs.

As already noted, some of the more progressive clubs had already conceived the idea of a national organization. *The Woman's Era* journal of Boston began to agitate the matter in the summer of 1894, and requested the clubs to express themselves through its columns on the question of holding a national convention. Colored women everywhere were quick to see the

possible benefits to be derived from a national conference of representative women. It was everywhere believed that such a convention, conducted with decorum and along the lines of serious purpose, might help in a decided manner to change public opinion concerning the character and worth of colored women. This agitation had the effect of committing most of the clubs to the proposal for a call in the summer of 1895. While public-spirited Afro-American women everywhere were thus aroused to this larger vision in plans for race amelioration, there occurred an incident of aggravation that swept away all timidity and doubt as to the necessity of a national conference. Some obscure editor in a Missouri town sought to gain notoriety by publishing a libelous article in which the colored women of the country were described as having no sense of virtue and altogether without character. The article in question was in the form of an open letter addressed to Miss Florence Belgarnie of England, who had manifested a kindly interest in behalf of the American Negro as a result of Miss Ida B. Wells' agitation. This letter is too foul for reprint, but the effect of its publication stirred the intelligent colored women of America as nothing else had ever done. The letter, in spite of its wanton meanness, was not without some value in showing to what extent the sensitiveness of colored women had grown. Twenty years prior to this time a similar publication would scarcely have been noticed, beyond the small circles of the few who could read, and were public-spirited. In 1895 this open and vulgar attack on the character of a whole race of women was instantly and vehemently resented, in every possible way, by a whole race of women conscious of being slandered. Mass meetings were held in every part of the country to denounce the editor and refute the charges.

The calling of a national convention of colored women was hastened by this coarse assault upon their character. The Woman's Era Club of Boston took the initiative in concentrating the wide spread anxiety to do something large and effective, by calling a national conference of representative colored women. The conference was appointed to meet in Berkeley Hall,

Boston, for a three days' session, July 29, 30, and 31, 1895.

In pursuance to this call the 29th day of July, 1895, witnessed in Berkeley Hall the first national convention of colored women ever held in America. About one hundred delegates were present from ten states and representatives of about twenty-five different clubs.

The convention afforded a fine exhibition of capable women. There was nothing amateurish, uncertain, or timid in the proceedings. Every subject of peculiar interest to colored women was discussed and acted upon as if by women disciplined in thinking out large and serious problems. The following named women were elected as officers of the conference:

Mrs. Josephine St. P. Ruffin, president; vice president, Mrs. Helen Cook, of Washington, and Mrs. Booker T. Washington; secretary, Miss Eliza Carter.

The sanity of these colored women in their first national association was shown in the fact that but little time was spent in complaints and fault-finding about conditions that were inevitable. Almost for the first time in the history of Negro gatherings, this Boston conference frankly studied the status of their own race and pointed out their own shortcomings. They set for themselves large and serious tasks in suggestions of plans and work to redeem the unredeemed among them. The convention did credit to itself by sending far and wide a warning note that the race must begin to help itself to live better, strive for a higher standard of social purity, to exercise a more helpful sympathy with the many of the race who are without guides and enlightenment in the ways of social righteousness.

Of course the Missouri editor was roundly scored in resolutions that lacked nothing of the elements of resentment, but the slanderous article against colored women that was the immediate incentive to the calling of the conference, became of the least importance when the women came together and realized the responsibility of larger considerations. They very soon felt that a national convention of responsible women would be a misplacement of moral force, if it merely exhausted itself in replying to a slanderous publication. The convention, therefore,

easily shaped itself toward the consideration of themes and policies more in keeping with its responsibilities to the thousands of women and interests represented.

The chief work of the convention was the formation of a National organization. The name adopted was "The National Association of Colored Women."

The importance of this Boston conference to the club movement among colored women can scarcely be overestimated. The bracing effect of its vigorous proceedings and stirring addresses to the public gave a certain inspiration to the women throughout the whole country. The clubs that already existed became stronger and more positive and aggressive in their helpful work.

The national association has steadily grown in power and influence as an organized body, composed of the best moral and social forces of the Negro race. It has held three National conventions since its organization, in 1895: At Washington, D.C., in 1896; Nashville, Tenn., in 1897; and Chicago, in 1899. At the Chicago convention one hundred and fifty delegates were present, representing clubs from thirty states of the Union. The growing importance of the national organization was evidenced by the generous notices and editorial comments in the press of the country. Fraternal greetings were extended to the Chicago convention from many of the prominent white clubs of the city. It is not too much to say that no national convention of colored people held in the country ever made such a deep impression upon the public and told a more thrilling story of the social progress of the race than the Chicago convention. The interest awakened in colored women, and their peculiar interests, was evidenced in many ways. The national association has made it possible for many bright colored women to enjoy the fellowship and helpfulness of many of the best organizations of American women. It has certainly helped to emancipate the white women from the fear and uncertainty of contact or association with women of the darker race. In other words the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs is helping to give respect and character to a race of women who

had no place in the classification of progressive womanhood in America. The terms good and bad, bright, and dull, plain and beautiful are now as applicable to colored women as to women of other races. There has been created such a thing as public faith in the sustained virtue and social standards of the women who have spoken and acted so well in these representative organizations. The national body has also been felt in giving a new importance and a larger relationship to the purposes and activities of local clubs throughout the country. Colored women everywhere in this club work began to feel themselves included in a wider and better world than their immediate neighborhood. Women who have always lived and breathed the air of ample freedom and whose range of vision has been world-wide, will scarcely know what it means for women whose lives have been confined and dependent to feel the first consciousness of a relationship to the great social forces that include whole nationalities in the sweep of their influences. To feel that you are something better than a slave, or a descendant of an ex-slave, to feel that you are a unit in the womanhood of a great nation and a great civilization, is the beginning of self-respect and the respect of your race. The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs has certainly meant all this and much more to the women of the ransomed race in the United States.

The national association has also been useful to an important extent in creating what may be called a race public opinion. When the local

clubs of the many states became nationalized, it became possible to reach the whole people with questions and interests that concerned the whole race. For example, when the national association interested itself in studying such problems as the Convict Lease System of the Southern states, or the necessity of kindergartens, or the evils of the one-room cabin, it was possible to unite and interest the intelligent forces of the entire race. On these and other questions it has become possible to get the cooperation of the colored people in Mississippi and Minnesota and of New York and Florida. Such co-operation is new and belongs to the new order of things brought about by nationalized efforts.

Through the united voice of the representative colored women of the country the interests of the race are heard by the American women with more effect than they were in other days. There is certainly more power to demand respect and righteous treatment since it has become possible to organize the best forces of all the race for such demands.

The influence of the national association has been especially felt in the rapid increase of women's clubs throughout the country, and especially in the South. There are now about three hundred of such clubs in the United States. There is an average membership of about sixty women to each club. Some have an enrollment of over two hundred women and there are but few with less than twenty-five. Wherever there is a nucleus of intelligent colored women there will be found a woman's club.

FANNIE BARRIER WILLIAMS

The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation (1894)

Less than thirty years ago the term progress as applied to colored women of African descent in the United States would have been an anomaly. The recognition of the term today as appropriate is a fact full of interesting significance. That the discussion of progressive womanhood in this

great assemblage of the representative women of the world is considered incomplete without some account of the colored women's status is a most noteworthy evidence that we have not failed to impress ourselves on the higher side of American life.

had no place in the classification of progressive womanhood in America. The terms good and bad, bright, and dull, plain and beautiful are now as applicable to colored women as to women of other races. There has been created such a thing as public faith in the sustained virtue and social standards of the women who have spoken and acted so well in these representative organizations. The national body has also been felt in giving a new importance and a larger relationship to the purposes and activities of local clubs throughout the country. Colored women everywhere in this club work began to feel themselves included in a wider and better world than their immediate neighborhood. Women who have always lived and breathed the air of ample freedom and whose range of vision has been world-wide, will scarcely know what it means for women whose lives have been confined and dependent to feel the first consciousness of a relationship to the great social forces that include whole nationalities in the sweep of their influences. To feel that you are something better than a slave, or a descendant of an ex-slave, to feel that you are a unit in the womanhood of a great nation and a great civilization, is the beginning of self-respect and the respect of your race. The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs has certainly meant all this and much more to the women of the ransomed race in the United States.

The national association has also been useful to an important extent in creating what may be called a race public opinion. When the local

clubs of the many states became nationalized, it became possible to reach the whole people with questions and interests that concerned the whole race. For example, when the national association interested itself in studying such problems as the Convict Lease System of the Southern states, or the necessity of kindergartens, or the evils of the one-room cabin, it was possible to unite and interest the intelligent forces of the entire race. On these and other questions it has become possible to get the cooperation of the colored people in Mississippi and Minnesota and of New York and Florida. Such co-operation is new and belongs to the new order of things brought about by nationalized efforts.

Through the united voice of the representative colored women of the country the interests of the race are heard by the American women with more effect than they were in other days. There is certainly more power to demand respect and righteous treatment since it has become possible to organize the best forces of all the race for such demands.

The influence of the national association has been especially felt in the rapid increase of women's clubs throughout the country, and especially in the South. There are now about three hundred of such clubs in the United States. There is an average membership of about sixty women to each club. Some have an enrollment of over two hundred women and there are but few with less than twenty-five. Wherever there is a nucleus of intelligent colored women there will be found a woman's club.

FANNIE BARRIER WILLIAMS

The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation (1894)

Less than thirty years ago the term progress as applied to colored women of African descent in the United States would have been an anomaly. The recognition of the term today as appropriate is a fact full of interesting significance. That the discussion of progressive womanhood in this

great assemblage of the representative women of the world is considered incomplete without some account of the colored women's status is a most noteworthy evidence that we have not failed to impress ourselves on the higher side of American life.

Less is known of our women than of any other class of Americans.

No organization of far-reaching influence for their special advancement, no conventions of women to take note of their progress, and no special literature reciting the incidents, the events, and all things interesting and instructive concerning them are to be found among the agencies directing their career. There has been no special interest in their peculiar condition as native-born American women. Their power to affect the social life of America, either for good or for ill, has excited not even a speculative interest.

Though there is much that is sorrowful, much that is wonderfully heroic, and much that is romantic in a peculiar way in their history, none of it has yet been told as evidence of what is possible for these women. How few of the happy, prosperous, and eager living Americans can appreciate what it all means to be suddenly changed from irresponsible bondage to the responsibility of freedom and citizenship!

The distress of it all can never be told, and the pain of it all can never be felt except by the victims, and by those saintly women of the white race who for thirty years have been consecrated to the uplifting of a whole race of women from a long-enforced degradation.

The American people have always been impatient of ignorance and poverty. They believe with Emerson that "America is another word for opportunity," and for that reason success is a virtue and poverty and ignorance are inexcusable. This may account for the fact that our women have excited no general sympathy in the struggle to emancipate themselves from the demoralization of slavery. This new life of freedom, with its far-reaching responsibilities, had to be learned by these children of darkness mostly without a guide, a teacher, or a friend. In the mean vocabulary of slavery there was no definition of any of the virtues of life. The meaning of such precious terms as marriage, wife, family, and home could not be learned in a schoolhouse. The blue-back speller, the arithmetic, and the copy-book contain no magical cures for inherited inaptitudes for the moralities. Yet it must ever be counted as one of the

most wonderful things in human history how promptly and eagerly these suddenly liberated women tried to lay hold upon all that there is in human excellence. There is a touching pathos in the eagerness of these millions of new home-makers to taste the blessedness of intelligent womanhood. The path of progress in the picture is enlarged so as to bring to view these trustful and zealous students of freedom and civilization striving to overtake and keep pace with women whose emancipation has been a slow and painful process for a thousand years. The longing to be something better than they were when freedom found them has been the most notable characteristic in the development of these women. This constant striving for equality has given an upward direction to all the activities of colored women.

Freedom at once widened their vision beyond the mean cabin life of their bondage. Their native gentleness, good cheer, and hopefulness made them susceptible to those teachings that make for intelligence and righteousness. Sullenness of disposition, hatefulness, and revenge against the master class because of two centuries of ill-treatment are not in the nature of our women.

But a better view of what our women are doing and what their present status is may be had by noticing some lines of progress that are easily verifiable.

First it should be noticed that separate facts and figures relative to colored women are not easily obtainable. Among the white women of the country, independence, progressive intelligence, and definite interests have done so much that nearly every fact and item illustrative of their progress and status is classified and easily accessible. Our women, on the contrary, have had no advantage of interests peculiar and distinct and separable from those of men that have yet excited public attention and kindly recognition.

In their religious life, however, our women show a progressiveness parallel in every important particular to that of white women in all Christian churches. . . .

While there has been but little progress toward the growing rationalism in the Christian

creeds, there has been a marked advance toward a greater refinement of conception, good taste, and the proprieties. It is our young women coming out of the schools and academies that have been insisting upon a more godly and cultivated ministry. It is the young women of a new generation and new inspirations that are making tramps of the ministers who once dominated the colored church, and whose intelligence and piety were mostly in their lungs. . . .

Another evidence of growing intelligence is a sense of religious discrimination among our women. Like the nineteenth-century woman generally, our women find congeniality in all the creeds, from the Catholic creed to the no-creed of Emerson. There is a constant increase of this interesting variety in the religious life of our women.

Closely allied to this religious development is their progress in the work of education in schools and colleges. For thirty years education has been the magic word among the colored people of this country. That their greatest need was education in its broadest sense was understood by these people more strongly than it could be taught to them. It is the unvarying testimony of every teacher in the South that the mental development of the colored women as well as men has been little less than phenomenal. In twenty-five years, and under conditions discouraging in the extreme, thousands of our women have been educated as teachers. They have adapted themselves to the work of mentally lifting a whole race of people so eagerly and readily that they afford an apt illustration of the power of self-help. Not only have these women become good teachers in less than twenty-five years, but many of them are the prize teachers in the mixed schools of nearly every Northern city.

These women have also so fired the hearts of the race for education that colleges, normal schools, industrial schools, and universities have been reared by a generous public to meet the requirements of these eager students of intelligent citizenship. As American women generally are fighting against the nineteenth-century narrowness that still keeps women out of the higher institutions of learning, so our

women are eagerly demanding the best of education open to their race. They continually verify what President Rankin of Howard University recently said, "Any theory of educating the Afro-American that does not throw open the golden gates of the highest culture will fail on the ethical and spiritual side."

It is thus seen that our women have the same spirit and mettle that characterize the best of American women. Everywhere they are following in the tracks of those women who are swiftest in the race for higher knowledge.

To-day they feel strong enough to ask for but one thing, and that is the same opportunity for the acquisition of all kinds of knowledge that may be accorded to other women. This granted, in the next generation these progressive women will be found successfully occupying every field where the highest intelligence alone is admissible. In less than another generation American literature, American art, and American music will be enriched by productions having new and peculiar features of interest and excellence.

The exceptional career of our women will yet stamp itself indelibly upon the thought of this country.

American literature needs for its greater variety and its deeper soundings that which will be written into it out of the hearts of these self-emancipating women.

The great problems of social reform that are now so engaging the highest intelligence of American women will soon need for their solution the reinforcement of that new intelligence which our women are developing. In short, our women are ambitious to be contributors to all the great moral and intellectual forces that make for the greater weal of our common country.

If this hope seems too extravagant to those of you who know these women only in their humbler capacities, I would remind you that all that we hope for and will certainly achieve in authorship and practical intelligence is more than prophesied by what has already been done, and more that can be done, by hundreds of Afro-American women whose talents are now being expended in the struggle against race resistance.

The power of organized womanhood is one of the most interesting studies of modern sociology. Formerly women knew so little of each other mentally, their common interests were so sentimental and gossipy, and their knowledge of all the larger affairs of human society was so meager that organization among them, in the modern sense, was impossible. Now their liberal intelligence, their contact in all the great interests of education, and their increasing influence for good in all the great reformatory movements of the age has created in them a greater respect for each other, and furnished the elements of organization for large and splendid purposes. The highest ascendancy of woman's development has been reached when they have become mentally strong enough to find bonds of association interwoven with sympathy, loyalty, and mutual trustfulness. To-day union is the watchword of woman's onward march.

If it be a fact that this spirit of organization among women generally is the distinguishing mark of the nineteenth-century woman, dare we ask if the colored women of the United States have made any progress in this respect? . . .

Benevolence is the essence of most of the colored women's organizations. The humane side of their natures has been cultivated to recognize the duties they owe to the sick, the indigent, and ill-fortuned. No church, school, or charitable institution for the special use of colored people has been allowed to languish or fail when the associated efforts of the women could save it. . . .

The hearts of Afro-American women are too warm and too large for race hatred. Long suffering has so chastened them that they are developing a special sense of sympathy for all who suffer and fail of justice. All the associated interests of church, temperance, and social reform in which American women are winning distinction can be wonderfully advanced when our women shall be welcomed as co-workers, and estimated solely by what they are worth to the moral elevation of all the people.

I regret the necessity of speaking to the question of the moral progress of our women, because the morality of our home life has been commented upon so disparagingly and meanly

that we are placed in the unfortunate position of being defenders of our name.

It is proper to state, with as much emphasis as possible, that all questions relative to the moral progress of the colored women of America are impertinent and unjustly suggestive when they relate to the thousands of colored women in the North who were free from the vicious influences of slavery. They are also meanly suggestive as regards thousands of our women in the South whose force of character enabled them to escape the slavery taints of immorality. The question of the moral progress of colored women in the United States has force and meaning in this discussion only so far as it tells the story of how the once-enslaved women have been struggling for twenty-five years to emancipate themselves from the demoralization of their enslavement.

While I duly appreciate the offensiveness of all references to American slavery, it is unavoidable to charge to that system every moral imperfection that mars the character of the colored American. The whole life and power of slavery depended upon an enforced degradation of everything human in the slaves. The slave code recognized only animal distinctions between the sexes, and ruthlessly ignored those ordinary separations that belong to the social state.

It is a great wonder that two centuries of such demoralization did not work a complete extinction of all the moral instincts. But the recuperative power of these women to regain their moral instincts and to establish a respectable relationship to American womanhood is among the earlier evidences of their moral ability to rise above their conditions. In spite of a cursed heredity that bound them to the lowest social level, in spite of everything that is unfortunate and unfavorable, these women have continually shown an increasing degree of teachableness as to the meaning of woman's relationship to man.

Out of this social purification and moral uplift have come a chivalric sentiment and regard from the young men of the race that give to the young women a new sense of protection. I do not wish to disturb the serenity of this conference

by suggesting why this protection is needed and the kind of men against whom it is needed.

It is sufficient for us to know that the daughters of women who thirty years ago were not allowed to be modest, not allowed to follow the instincts of moral rectitude, who could cry for protection to no living man, have so elevated the moral tone of their social life that new and purer standards of personal worth have been created, and new ideals of womanhood, instinct with grace and delicacy, are everywhere recognized and emulated.

This moral regeneration of a whole race of women is no idle sentiment—it is a serious business; and everywhere there is witnessed a feverish anxiety to be free from the mean suspicions that have so long underestimated the character strength of our women.

These women are not satisfied with the unmistakable fact that moral progress has been made, but they are fervently impatient and stirred by a sense of outrage under the vile imputations of a diseased public opinion. . . .

It may now perhaps be fittingly asked, What mean all these evidence of mental, social, and moral progress of a class of American women of whom you know so little? Certainly you cannot be indifferent to the growing needs and importance of women who are demonstrating their intelligence and capacity for the highest privileges of freedom.

The most important thing to be noted is the fact that the colored people of America have reached a distinctly new era in their career so quickly that the American mind has scarcely had time to recognize the fact, and adjust itself to the new requirements of the people in all things that pertain to citizenship. . . .

It seems to baffle the understanding of the ordinary citizen that there are thousands of men and women everywhere among us who in twenty-five years have progressed as far away from the non-progressive peasants of the "black belt" of the South as the highest social life in New England is above the lowest levels of American civilization.

This general failure of the American people to know the new generation of colored people, and to recognize this important change in them,

is the cause of more injustice to our women than can well be estimated. Further progress is everywhere seriously hindered by this ignoring of their improvement.

Our exclusion from the benefits of the fair-play sentiment of the country is little less than a crime against the ambitions and aspirations of a whole race of women. The American people are but repeating the common folly of history in thus attempting to repress the yearnings of progressive humanity.

In the item of employment colored women bear a distressing burden of mean and unreasonable discrimination. . . .

It is almost literally true that, except teaching in colored schools and menial work, colored women can find no employment in this free America. They are the only women in the country for whom real ability, virtue, and special talents count for nothing when they become applicants for respectable employment. Taught everywhere in ethics and social economy that merit always wins, colored women carefully prepare themselves for all kinds of occupation only to meet with stern refusal, rebuff, and disappointment. One of countless instances will show how the best as well as the meanest of American society are responsible for the special injustice to our women.

Not long ago I presented the case of a bright young woman to a well-known bank president of Chicago, who was in need of a thoroughly competent stenographer and typewriter. The president was fully satisfied with the young woman as exceptionally qualified for the position, and manifested much pleasure in commending her to the directors for appointment, and at the same time disclaimed that there could be any opposition on account of the slight tinge of African blood that identified her as a colored woman. Yet, when the matter was brought before the directors for action, these mighty men of money and business, these men whose prominence in all the great interests of the city would seem to lift them above all narrowness and foolishness, scented the African taint, and at once bravely came to the rescue of the bank and of society by dashing the hopes of this capable yet helpless young woman. . . .

Can the people of this country afford to single out the women of a whole race of people as objects of their special contempt? Do these women not belong to a race that has never faltered in its support of the country's flag in every war since Attucks fell in Boston's streets?

Are they not the daughters of men who have always been true as steel against treason to everything fundamental and splendid in the Republic? In short, are these women not as thoroughly American in all the circumstances of citizenship as the best citizens of our country?

If it be so, are we not justified in a feeling of desperation against that peculiar form of Americanism that shows respect for our women as servants and contempt for them when they become women of culture? We have never been taught to understand why the unwritten law of chivalry, protection, and fair play that are everywhere the conservators of women's welfare must exclude every woman of a dark complexion.

We believe that the world always needs the influence of every good and capable woman, and this rule recognizes no exceptions based on complexion. In their complaint against hindrances to their employment colored women ask for no special favors. . . .

Another, and perhaps more serious, hindrance to our women is that nightmare known as "social equality." The term equality is the most inspiring word in the vocabulary of citizenship. It expresses the leveling quality in all the splendid possibilities of American life. It is this idea of equality that has made room in this country for all kinds and conditions of men, and made personal merit the supreme requisite for all kinds and conditions of men, and made personal merit the supreme requisite for all kinds of achievement.

When the colored people became citizens, and found it written deep in the organic law of the land that they too had the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, they were at once suspected of wishing to interpret this maximum of equality as meaning social equality.

Everywhere the public mind has been filled with constant alarm lest in some way our women shall approach the social sphere of the dominant race in this country. Men and women,

wise and perfectly sane in all the things else, become instantly unwise and foolish at the remotest suggestion of social contact with colored men and women. At every turn in our lives we meet this fear, and are humiliated by its aggressiveness and meanness. If we seek the sanctities of religion, the enlightenment of the university, the honors of politics, and the natural recreations of our common country, the social equality alarm is instantly given, and our aspirations are insulted. "Beware of social equality with the colored American" is thus written on all places, sacred or profane, in this blessed land of liberty. The most discouraging and demoralizing effect of this false sentiment concerning us is that it utterly ignores individual merit and discredits the sensibilities of intelligent womanhood. The sorrows and heartaches of a whole race of women seem to be matters of no concern to the people who so dread the social possibilities of these colored women.

On the other hand, our women have been wonderfully indifferent and unconcerned about the matter. The dread inspired by the growing intelligence of colored women has interested us almost to the point of amusement. It has given to colored women a new sense of importance to witness how easily their emancipation and steady advancement is disturbing all classes of American people. It may not be a discouraging circumstance that colored women can command some sort of attention, even though they be misunderstood. We believe in the law of reaction, and it is reasonably certain that the forces of intelligence and character being developed in our women will yet change mistrustfulness into confidence and contempt into sympathy and respect. It will soon appear to those who are not hopelessly monomaniacs on the subject that the colored people are in no way responsible for the social equality nonsense. We shall yet be credited with knowing better than our enemies that social equality can neither be enforced by law nor prevented by oppression. Though not philosophers, we long since learned that equality before the law, equality in the best sense of that term under our institutions, is totally different from social equality.

We know, without being exceptional students of history, that the social relationship of the two races will be adjusted equitably in spite of all fear and injustice, and that there is a social gravitation in human affairs that eventually overwhelms and crushes into nothingness all resistance based on prejudice and selfishness.

Our chief concern in this false social sentiment is that it attempts to hinder our further progress toward the higher spheres of womanhood. On account of it, young colored women of ambition and means are compelled in many instances to leave the country for training and education in the salons and studios of Europe. On many of the railroads of this country women of refinement and culture are driven like cattle into human cattle-cars lest the occupying of an individual seat paid for in a first-class car may result in social equality. This social quarantine on all means of travel in certain parts of the country is guarded and enforced more rigidly against us than the quarantine regulations against cholera.

Without further particularizing as to how this social question opposes our advancement, it may be stated that the contentions of colored women are in kind like those of other American women for greater freedom of development. Liberty to be all that we can be, without artificial hindrances, is a thing no less precious to us than to women generally.

We come before this assemblage of women feeling confident that our progress has been along high levels and rooted deeply in the essentials of intelligent humanity. We are so essentially American in speech, in instincts, in sentiments, and destiny that the things that interest you equally interest us.

We believe that social evils are dangerously contagious. The fixed policy of persecution and injustice against a class of women who are weak and defenseless will be necessarily hurtful to the cause of all women. Colored women are

becoming more and more a part of the social forces that must help to determine the questions that so concern women generally. In this Congress we ask to be known and recognized for what we are worth. If it be the high purpose of these deliberations to lessen the resistance to woman's progress, you can not fail to be interested in our struggles against the many oppositions that harass us.

Women who are tender enough in heart to be active in humane societies, to be foremost in all charitable activities, who are loving enough to unite Christian womanhood everywhere against the sin of intemperance, ought to be instantly concerned in the plea of colored women for justice and humane treatment. Women of the dominant race can not afford to be responsible for the wrongs we suffer, since those who do injustice can not escape a certain penalty.

But there is no wish to overstate the obstacles to colored women or to picture their status as hopeless. There is no disposition to take our place in this Congress as faultfinders or suppliants for mercy. As women of a common country, with common interests, and a destiny that will certainly bring us closer to each other, we come to this altar with our contribution of hopefulness as well as with our complaints. . . .

If the love of humanity more than the love of races and sex shall pulsate throughout all the grand results that shall issue to the world from this parliament of women, women of African descent in the United States will for the first time begin to feel the sweet release from the blighting thrall of prejudice.

The colored women, as well as all women, will realize that the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is a maxim that will become more blessed in its significance when the hand of woman shall take it from its sepulture in books and make it the gospel of every-day life and the unerring guide in the relations of all men, women, and children.

JOHN HENRY ADAMS, JR.

Rough Sketches: A Study of the Features of the New Negro Woman (1904)

One day while standing in the centre of the business section of Atlanta, there approached me, a bright eyed, full-minded youth of some nine years of respectable rearing. Both of us looked with eyes and soul upon the passing mixed panorama of men and women and children, and horses, and vehicles, and up to the modern ten and fourteen stories of stone, brick-and-steel structures out of whose windows, here and there, poked curious heads peering tamely upon the seeming confusion below. I saw an uncommon life picture pass slowly through the gang-way of humming electric cars, and rattling drays and of shifting humanity. Alford Emerson Clark, my innocent companion, saw it also; and the throng of hurrying black and white folks paused in contemptible curiosity as the rubber-tired wheels of the open carriage rolled silently along the Peachtree thorough-fare. In the carriage sat two-ladies, one white, one colored, engaged in a happy, spirited conversation all the while unconscious of the Southern social monster which argues the inferiority of the Negro to the white folk.

Two opposing worlds riding happily, peacefully, aye, lovingly together in the worst of Negro-hating cities. Is it real? Is it natural? Is it right? What a healthy breath passed over me; and I smiled and went on with my jolly companion to the outer South end of the city.

The picture continued to press upon young Alford's mind, and with the peculiar vigor of youth, he had stopped to quander over the outward aspect of the situation. Said he, "which one is the better looking, the colored lady or the white?" Expressing my inability to decide pending a close scrutiny of the two, I asked which did he think is the better in appearance. "The colored woman of course," he replied, as though he were greatly surprised at my not having a reason to say the same thing. Asking him for his

reason, Alford looking me straight in the face said, "why the other woman is white." White? Well, what has that to do with a woman's real physical charm, either adding to or detracting from her? thought I to myself. To the black man a white face means little or nothing. To the white man it means his tradition, his civilization, his bond and recognition in the present age, and his safe guard in the future. Alford saw beneath the first skin surface down to the last layer of race greatness,—the preserving and honoring of race identity and distinction. He saw in that colored woman that which he could not see in the white woman so long as "white" in America stands for hope and black for despair.

The white woman's beauty was real, pure, substantial, but it came to thoughtful Alford with no meaning. The black woman's beauty was real, pure, substantial, but it came with a life, a soul, which had touched his and which he not only understood but which inspired him to love.

I looked into his rich brown eyes, into his sun-lit smiling face and caught the gilded thread wire that, from his heart, followed the trail of Negro womanhood into all the ends of the earth. I fixed tight hand on it. I felt the fast beating of over nine million human hearts, as but the beating of one woman's heart when all hope seems lost, as they struggle with an inspiration which has too many times found its bed in the bosom of American prejudice. Still holding on to the gilded wire and placing my head close against his throbbing breast, there was something within, with the silence of maddened power which seemed to say: Ye gods of the earth! this woman—mine, whom you have fettered with the chains of caste, whom you have branded with the red iron of infamy, whom you have degraded with the finger of your own lustful body, shall be free. God made it fast and eternal. This beauty which you have used to

tame your generations shall be yours no more, and this person that has served your rawest purposes shall not enter again into your halls.

Some day however these Negro restrictive laws, these phantasms and prejudices shall be beat and bent and tuned to the music of a more perfect civilization in which men shall love to do honor to all women for the sake of their sacred mission and meaning in the shaping of human destiny. There is an inseparable linking between mother and mother, be one white and one black; and the final triumph of civilization shall be when womanhood is a unit in all things for good and when manhood is a common factor in her defense.

We present the colored woman today as she impresses herself in the world as a growing factor for good and in her beauty, intelligence, and character for better social recognition. Here she is in characteristic pose, full of vigor, tender in affection, sweet in emotion, and strong in every attribution of mind and soul.

Look upon her, ye worlds' and, since there is none better, swear by her. If there is none purer,

none nobler, which have stamped pre-eminence in the very countenance of man, woman and child, cast your glittering swords, and sheaths, and armor, at her untarnished feet and pledge the very life that you enjoy to the defense of her life. Look upon her ye nations! Measure her by all the standards of human-perfection. Weigh her upon the scales that were employed in the weighing of queens and noble-men's wives and daughters. And, if, after the test has been exhausted in the finding of her real merits, she is found to have not only the physical beauty, not only the intellectual graces but also the moral stamina, the purity of heart, the loftiness of purpose and the sober consciousness of true womanhood the same as her white or red or olive sisters, then let all men whose blood finds eternal unity in the brotherhood of America's prescribed, whose traditions reach back into two hundred and fifty years of mean slavery, and worse—of enforced ignorance;—I say; let all men, even they that be not of us, who love woman for woman's sake, fling their full lives to the uncertain wind when her honor is at stake.

JOHN HENRY ADAMS, JR.

Rough Sketches: The New Negro Man (1904)

To find the new Negro man, one must take the narrow, rugged, winding path as it leads from the humble one-room log cabin, through the corn fields and cotton field, pass the country school shanty on to the quiet village in the dale. There, the broader pathway leads from the rough frame cottage, through the smoky, dismal quarters of hirelings; pass the shopping district to the humble academy over on the hill; then take right angles down by the Sunday meeting house to the signal railway station. Tell the conductor you want to get off at Atlanta. Arriving there, take the electric car for any one of the Negro institutions of higher learning, thence to the Negro modern home locality on the broad and sunny avenue, where on either side the playing of innocent colored children, dressed in white

laundried jackets and dresses, out upon the green lawns amid blossoming flowers, reveals the meaning of progress peculiar to the black folk. Stop there long enough to realize the gravity and force of the character whose real self you are yet to know as he toils earnestly for place and power in the world, and as he clings to the higher self-assertion of the man with a soul.

Now venture on. Here is the real new Negro man. Tall, erect, commanding, with a face as strong and expressive as Angelo's Moses and yet every whit as pleasing and handsome as Reuben's favorite model. There is that penetrative eye about which Charles Lamb wrote with such deep admiration, that broad forehead and firm chin. On the floor and the tables of his office lie the works of a ready craftsman, a master mechanic.

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Some day however these Negro restrictive laws, these phantasms and prejudices shall be beat and bent and tuned to the music of a more perfect civilization in which men shall love to do honor to all women for the sake of their sacred mission and meaning in the shaping of human destiny. There is an inseparable linking between mother and mother, be one white and one black; and the final triumph of civilization shall be when womanhood is a unit in all things for good and when manhood is a common factor in her defense.

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JOHN HENRY ADAMS, JR.

Rough Sketches: The New Negro Man (1904)

To find the new Negro man, one must take the narrow, rugged, winding path as it leads from the humble one-room log cabin, through the corn fields and cotton field, pass the country school shanty on to the quiet village in the dale. There, the broader pathway leads from the rough frame cottage, through the smoky, dismal quarters of hirelings; pass the shopping district to the humble academy over on the hill; then take right angles down by the Sunday meeting house to the signal railway station. Tell the conductor you want to get off at Atlanta. Arriving there, take the electric car for any one of the Negro institutions of higher learning, thence to the Negro modern home locality on the broad and sunny avenue, where on either side the playing of innocent colored children, dressed in white

laundried jackets and dresses, out upon the green lawns amid blossoming flowers, reveals the meaning of progress peculiar to the black folk. Stop there long enough to realize the gravity and force of the character whose real self you are yet to know as he toils earnestly for place and power in the world, and as he clings to the higher self-assertion of the man with a soul.

Now venture on. Here is the real new Negro man. Tall, erect, commanding, with a face as strong and expressive as Angelo's Moses and yet every whit as pleasing and handsome as Reuben's favorite model. There is that penetrative eye about which Charles Lamb wrote with such deep admiration, that broad forehead and firm chin. On the floor and the tables of his office lie the works of a ready craftsman, a master mechanic.

Scattered harmoniously on the walls hang framed specimens of well-designed office buildings and expensive residences, and over on his desk are filed a dozen or more bids, which at one time or another had made vain competition seem as but a cotton thread hanging to his coat sleeve. Such is the new Negro man, and he who finds the real man in the hope of deriving all the benefits to be got by acquaintance and contact does not run upon him by mere chance, but must go over the paths by some kind of biography, until he gets a reasonable understanding of what it actually costs of human effort to be a man and at the same time a Negro.

Again, to find the new Negro man, you must equip yourself for the tedious study rising out of his singular environment. You must be prepared to comprehend the awkward and oftentimes ugly circumstances, which surround him in his very inception, before he knew what he was, and long before he knows of the "Veil" of which Mr. Du Bois speaks so touchingly in his "Souls of Black Folk."

Here, drawn near the bosom of his good black mother, whose face is lighted with joy and hope and anxiety that only a mother feels, is the bouncing, laughing, little creature whose future days are as dark as his skin and whose very life is as uncertain as an approaching storm. Look into his face and then into the mother's face. Observe that interlacing of love and prospect and adventure as it weavens about the two, the life-long singleness of heartbeats and sorrows and sufferings. What promise does that devoted mother foresee in that black infant face? Listen to the musings of that mother: "Where will twenty, forty, sixty years find this 'jewel' spending the love and sacrifice which my heart gives freely, fully, wholly to it?"

The boy grows, develops, enters school, begins the routine of office boy, learns companionship, discerns a little of the outer world, begins a study of the greater inner world—himself discovers his likes and dislikes, goes pleasure seeking, and now he has reached his fifteenth year, the beginning of the critical period of a boy's life. Now his mind gets a breath of the intense vigor of his body. Something, he knows not what, moves mad with passion and fire

through his veins. The boy's quiet is replaced by amazing wonder at the beauty and significance of the objects beyond the mist and haze of his understanding. Question after question come and go unanswered. These are the harrows of his age.

At sixteen, seventeen, on to his twentieth year, the young man contends with temptations such as only the Negro boy meets. The opportunity to work, but a work and an employer whose sole aims are to keep him working at his beginning point; the opportunity to idle, with but the chaingang as the highest form of recompense; the pleasure of friends, who are as vagabond as the days are long; the modern dive with all its gilded hallucination, doors wide open, tables strewn with gobblers and beer growlers, and the breath of lounging, half-drunken women that contaminates the very atmosphere: the billiard room filled with old and hardened gamblers; and lastly, but of as grave disaster as either of the already named clamps of degradation, is the regular "hang-out corner" the temptation of the new young Negro.

Steadily, persistently, earnestly the young man clings to his aspiration to be a man. His college books, his Bible lessons, his mother's ringing words of love-truth, his pastor's soul-inspiring sermons, and the passing lectures and educative entertainment, all instruct him as to the best uses of his time, as to the ultimate meaning of his life, and the real mission of man in this wilderness of love and labor.

The young man stands at last an achiever, and speaks the parting college words from the flower-dressed platform of his dear Alma Mater to the hundreds of admiring friends, who gather to place their benediction of success upon his brow. Nearest his feet sits that failing form of woman, upon whose heart the rich words of her son fall like drops of refreshing rain, after the burning rays of years of anticipation had crisped and withered the beauty and splendor of her face and body. Thrilled to the highest note, with tears streaming silently down her furrowed cheeks, her soul whispers in perfect ecstasy, "Thank God—my son—my son."

This is not the end, but rather the commencement of methodic, painstaking, fundamental

living. The desire of success has been greatly enlarged in the black man's soul. A half-dozen years and that black man has woven himself into the industrial fibre of his locality, has gone where there seemed to be no water and brought forth the sparkling flow to which his people may go and quench their longing thirst. And he has set the standard of man in his community not upon a man's ability to think or work, be that ever so vital, but rather upon the purpose and end of the man's thinking or working.

This is the new Negro man as followed from the cradle through boyhood and college days on to the larger life, where men are known according as they do less theorizing and more actual, practical work; according as they turn their vast learning and wealth into simple, kindly helps to the poor, distressed, and suffering; and in proportion as they make the play and music and revelry of the high head the common enjoyment of all.

The new Negro man is facing a brighter sun than ever his father knew, in spite of the dark prophecies and hopeless pessimism which greet him on every side. The Negro father, on the one hand, irresponsibly hedged in with ignorance too dense to admit of much foresight, sees nothing for the son but a perpetuation of his own social, political, and material advancement to the abnormal state of affairs now existing, but goes more often far contrary to what he really thinks is the best and right in the long run

in the preparation of his son for life's work, in the hope of at least meeting present exigencies.

On the other hand, most of the newspapers and the evil men behind them paint the new Negro out of the pigments of senseless antipathy, call him a brute and, fixing suspicion on him, seek to revert the cast of manhood into cowardly, cringing and wilful serfdom. Here then, is no encouragement. What of the new Negro man's future? The future is the man's, and he is relying on the strong arm of merit which providence has developed so as to cope with all human means and needs.

The new Negro man as represented in the accompanying sketches sees nothing but vital principles to sustain him in his struggle for place and power, and, like Socrates, would prefer the hemlock, or its equivalent, to all the vain pleasures outside of death than give over a single unit of right. He will do this not for his own sake merely, but for the sake of humanity, even the sake of the human who would decry principle to raise temporarily himself. The present fight is a fight for manhood—not man. Man dies. Manhood lives forever.

"I can die!" says that brave young man in Attick's review. "I can die for principle,—die loving and kissing my enemy."

This is the new Negro man's day. Let him be found always studying, thinking, working, for the social hour, when dancing, and merry-making are to enter, has not come. Gird up your loins, young man, and hurry.

RAY STANNARD BAKER

An Ostracised Race in Ferment: The Conflict of Negro Parties and Negro Leaders Over Methods of Dealing with Their Own Problem (1908)

One of the things that has interested me most of all in studying Negro communities, especially in the North, has been to find them so torn by cliques and divided by such wide differences of opinion.

No other element of our population presents a similar condition; the Italians, the Jews, the Germans and especially the Chinese and Japanese are held together not only by a different language, but by ingrained and ancient

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No other element of our population presents a similar condition; the Italians, the Jews, the Germans and especially the Chinese and Japanese are held together not only by a different language, but by ingrained and ancient

national habits. They group themselves naturally. But the Negro is an American in language and customs; he knows no other traditions and he has no other conscious history; a large proportion, indeed, possess varying degrees of white American blood (restless blood!) and yet the Negro is not accepted as an American. Instead of losing himself gradually in the dominant race, as the Germans, Irish, and Italians are doing, adding those traits or qualities with which Time fashions and modifies this human mosaic called the American nation, the Negro is set apart as a peculiar people.

With every Negro, then, an essential question is: "How shall I meet this attempt to put me off by myself?"

That question in one form or another—politically, industrially, socially—is being met daily, almost hourly, by every Negro in this country. It colours his very life.

"You don't know, and you can't know," a Negro said to me, "what it is to be a problem, to understand that everyone is watching you and studying you, to have your mind constantly on your own actions. It has made us think and talk about ourselves more than other people do. It has made us self-conscious and sensitive."

It is scarcely surprising, then, that upon such a vital question there should be wide differences of opinion among Negroes. As a matter of fact, there are almost innumerable points of view and suggested modes of conduct, but they all group themselves into two great parties which are growing more distinct in outline and purpose every day. Both parties exist in every part of the country, but it is in the North that the struggle between them is most evident. I have found a sharper feeling and a bitterer discussion of race relationships among the Negroes of the North than among those of the South. If you want to hear the race question discussed with fire and fervour, go to Boston!

For two hundred and fifty years the Negro had no thought, no leadership, no parties; then suddenly he was set free, and became, so far as law could make him, an integral and indistinguishable part of the American people. But it was only in a few places in the North and among comparatively few individuals that he ever

approximately reached the position of a free citizen, that he ever really enjoyed the rights granted to him under the law. In the South he was never free politically, socially, and industrially, in the sense that the white man is free, and is not so to-day.

But in Boston, and in other Northern cities in lesser degree, a group of Negroes reached essentially equal citizenship. A few families trace their lineage back to the very beginnings of civilisation in this country, others were freemen long before the war, a few had Revolutionary War records of which their descendants are intensely and justly proud. Some of the families have far more white blood than black; though the census shows that only about 40 per cent of the Negroes of Boston are mulattoes, the real proportion is undoubtedly very much higher.

In abolition times these Negroes were much regarded. Many of them attained and kept a certain real position among the whites; they were even accorded unusual opportunities and favours. They found such a place as an educated Negro might find to-day (or at least as he found a few years ago) in Germany. In some instances they became wealthy. At a time when the North was passionately concerned in the abolition of slavery the colour of his skin sometimes gave the Negro special advantages, even honours.

For years after the war this condition continued; then a stream of immigration of Southern Negroes began to appear, at first a mere rivulet, but latterly increasing in volume, until to-day all of our Northern cities have swarming coloured colonies. Owing to the increase of the Negro population and for other causes which I have already mentioned, sentiment in the North toward the Negro has been undergoing a swift change.

How Colour Lines Are Drawn

Now the tragedy of the Negro is the colour of his skin: he is easily recognisable. The human tendency is to class people together by outward appearances. When the line began to be drawn it was drawn not alone against the unworthy

Negro, but against the Negro. It was not so much drawn by the highly intelligent white man as by the white man. And the white man alone has not drawn it, but the Negroes themselves are drawing it—and more and more every day. So we draw the line in this country against the Chinese, the Japanese, and in some measure against the Jews (and they help to draw it). So we speak with disparagement of "dagoes" and "square heads." Right or wrong, these lines, in our present state of civilisation, are drawn. They are here; they must be noted and dealt with.

What was the result? The Northern Negro who has been enjoying the free life of Boston and Philadelphia has protested passionately against the drawing of a colour line: he wishes to be looked upon, and not at all unnaturally, for he possesses human ambitions and desires, solely for his worth as a man, not as a Negro.

In Philadelphia I heard of the old Philadelphia Negroes, in Indianapolis of the old Indianapolis families, in Boston a sharp distinction was drawn between the "Boston Negroes" and the recent Southern importation. Even in Chicago, where there is nothing old, I found the same spirit.

In short, it is the protest against separation, against being deprived of the advantages and opportunities of a free life. In the South the most intelligent and best educated Negroes are, generally speaking, the leaders of their race, but in Northern cities some of the ablest Negroes will have nothing to do with the masses of their own people or with racial movement; they hold themselves aloof, asserting that there is no colour line, and if there is, there should not be. Their associations and their business are largely with white people and they cling passionately to the fuller life.

"When I am sick," one of them said to me, "I don't go to a Negro doctor, but to a doctor. Colour has nothing to do with it."

In the South the same general setting apart of Negroes as Negroes is going on, of course, on an immeasurably wider scale. By disfranchisement they are being separated politically, the Jim Crow laws set them apart socially and physically, the hostility of white labour in some callings pushes them aside in the industrial activities.

But the South presents no such striking contrasts as the North, because no Southern Negroes were ever really accorded a high degree of citizenship.

Two Great Negro Parties

Now, the Negroes of the country are meeting the growing discrimination against them in two ways, out of which have grown the two great parties to which I have referred. One party has sprung, naturally, from the thought of the Northern Negro and is a product of the freedom which the Northern Negro has enjoyed; although, of course, it finds many followers in the South.

The other is the natural product of the far different conditions in the South, where the Negro cannot speak his mind, where he has never realised any large degree of free citizenship. Both are led by able men, and both are backed by newspapers and magazines. It has come, indeed, to the point where most Negroes of any intelligence at all have taken their place on one side or the other.

The second-named party, which may best, perhaps, be considered first, is made up of the great mass of the coloured people both South and North; its undisputed leader is Booker T. Washington.

The Rise of Booker T. Washington

Nothing has been more remarkable in the recent history of the Negro than Washington's rise to influence as a leader, and the spread of his ideals of education and progress. It is noteworthy that he was born in the South, a slave, that he knew intimately the common struggling life of his people and the attitude of the white race toward them. He worked his way to education in Southern schools and was graduated at Hampton—a story which he tells best himself in his book, "Up From Slavery." He was and is Southern in feeling and point of view. When he began to think how he could best help his people the same question came to him that comes to every Negro:

"What shall we do about this discrimination and separation?"

And his was the type of character which answered, "Make the best of it; overcome it with self-development."

The very essence of his doctrine is this:

"Get yourself right, and the world will be all right."

His whole work and his life have said to the white man:

"You've set us apart. You don't want us. All right; we'll be apart. We can succeed as Negroes."

It is the doctrine of the opportunist and optimist: peculiarly, indeed, the doctrine of the man of the soil, who has come up fighting, dealing with the world, not as he would like to have it, but as it overtakes him. Many great leaders have been like that: Lincoln was one. They have the simplicity and patience of the soil, and the immense courage and faith. To prevent being crushed by circumstances they develop humour; they laugh off their troubles. Washington has all of these qualities of the common life: he possesses in high degree what some one has called "great commonness." And finally he has a simple faith in humanity, and in the just purposes of the Creator of humanity.

Being a hopeful opportunist Washington takes the Negro as he finds him, often ignorant, weak, timid, surrounded by hostile forces, and tells him to go to work at anything, anywhere, but go to work, learn how to work better, save money, have a better home, raise a better family.

What Washington Teaches the Negro

The central idea of his doctrine, indeed, is work. He teaches that if the Negro wins by real worth a strong economic position in the country, other rights and privileges will come to him naturally. He should get his rights, not by gift of the white man, but by earning them himself.

"I noticed," he says, "when I first went to Tuskegee to start the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, that some of the white people about there looked rather doubtfully at me. I thought I could get their influence by telling them how much algebra and history and science

and all those things I had in my head, but they treated me about the same as they did before. They didn't seem to care about the algebra, history, and science that were in my head only. Those people never even began to have confidence in me until we commenced to build a large three-story brick building; and then another and another, until now we have eighty-six buildings which have been erected largely by the labour of our students, and to-day we have the respect and confidence of all the white people in that section.

"There is an unmistakable influence that comes over a white man when he sees a black man living in a two-story brick house that has been paid for."

In another place he has given his ideas of what education should be:

"How I wish that, from the most cultured and highly endowed university in the great North to the humblest log cabin schoolhouse in Alabama, we could burn, as it were, into the hearts and heads of all that usefulness, that service to our brother is the supreme end of education."

It is, indeed, to the teaching of service in the highest sense that Washington's life has been devoted. While he urges every Negro to reach as high a place as he can, he believes that the great masses of the Negroes are best fitted to-day for manual labour; his doctrine is that they should be taught to do that labour better: that when the foundations have been laid in sound industry and in business enterprise, the higher callings and honours will come of themselves.

His emphasis is rather upon duties than upon rights. He does not advise the Negro to surrender a single right: on the other hand, he urges his people to use fully every right they have or can get—for example, to vote wherever possible, and vote thoughtfully. But he believes that some of the rights given the Negro have been lost because the Negro had neither the wisdom nor the strength to use them properly.

Washington's Influence on His People

I have not said much thus far in these articles about Booker T. Washington, but as I have been

travelling over this country, South and North, studying Negro communities, I have found the mark of him everywhere in happier human lives. (Wherever I found a prosperous Negro enterprise, a thriving business place, a good home, there I was almost sure to find Booker T. Washington's picture over the fireplace or a little framed motto expressing his gospel of work and service). I have heard bitter things said about Mr. Washington by both coloured people and white. I have waited and investigated many of these stories, and I am telling here what I have seen and known of his influence among thousands of common, struggling human beings. Many highly educated Negroes, especially, in the North, dislike him and oppose him; but he has brought new hope and given new courage to the masses of his race. He has given them a working plan of life. And is there a higher test of usefulness? Measured by any standard, white or black, Washington must be regarded to-day as one of the great men of this country: and in the future he will be so honoured.

Dr. Du Bois and the Negro

The party led by Washington is made up of the masses of the common people; the radical party, on the other hand, represents what may be called the intellectuals. The leading exponent of its point of view is unquestionably Professor W. E. B. Du Bois of Atlanta University—though, like all minority parties, it is torn with dissension and discontent. Dr. Du Bois was born in Massachusetts of a family that had no history of Southern slavery. He has a large intermixture of white blood. Broadly educated at Harvard and in the universities of Germany, he is to-day one of the able sociologists of this country. His economic studies of the Negro made for the United States Government and for the Atlanta University conference (which he organised) are works of sound scholarship and furnish the student with the best single source of accurate information regarding the Negro at present obtainable in this country. And no book gives a deeper insight into the inner life of

the Negro, his struggles and his aspirations, than "The Souls of Black Folk."

Dr. Du Bois has the temperament of the scholar and idealist—critical, sensitive, unhumorous, impatient, often covering its deep feeling with sarcasm and cynicism. When the question came to him:

"What shall the Negro do about discrimination?" his answer was the exact reverse of Washington's: it was the voice of Massachusetts:

"Do not submit! agitate, object, fight."

Where Washington reaches the hearts of his people, Du Bois appeals to their heads. Du Bois is not a leader of men, as Washington is: he is rather a promulgator of ideas. While Washington is building a great educational institution and organising the practical activities of the race, Du Bois is the lonely critic holding up distant ideals. Where Washington cultivates friendly human relationships with the white people among whom the lot of the Negro is cast; Du Bois, sensitive to rebuffs, draws more and more away from white people.

A Negro Declaration of Independence

Several years ago Du Bois organised the Niagara movement for the purpose of protesting against the drawing of the colour line. It is important, not so much for the extent of its membership, which is small, but because it represents, genuinely, a more or less prevalent point of view among many coloured people.

Its declaration of principles says:

We refuse to allow the impression to remain that the Negro-American assents to inferiority, is submissive under oppression and apologetic before insults. Through helplessness we may submit, but the voice of protest of ten million Americans must never cease to assail the ears of their fellows, so long as America is unjust.

Any discrimination based simply on race or colour is barbarous, we care not how hallowed it be by custom, expediency, or prejudice. Differences made on account of ignorance, immorality, or disease are legitimate methods of fighting evil, and against

them we have no word of protest, but discriminations based simply and solely on physical peculiarities, place of birth, colour of skin, are relics of that unreasoning human savagery of which the world is, and ought to be, thoroughly ashamed.

The object of the movement is to protest against disfranchisement and Jim Crow laws and to demand equal rights of education, equal civil rights, equal economic opportunities, and justice in the courts. Taking the ballot from the Negro they declare to be only a step to economic slavery; that it leaves the Negro defenseless before his competitor—that the disfranchisement laws in the South are being followed by all manner of other discriminations which interfere with the progress of the Negro.

"Persistent manly agitation is the way to liberty," says the declaration, "and toward this goal the Niagara movement has started."

The annual meeting of the movement was held last August in Boston, the chief gathering being in Faneuil Hall. Every reference in the speeches to Garrison, Phillips, and Sumner was cheered to the echo. "It seemed," said one newspaper report, "like a revival of the old spirit of abolitionism—with the white man left out."

Several organisations in the country, like the New England Suffrage League, the Equal Rights League of Georgia, and others, take much the same position as the Niagara movement.

The party led by Dr. Du Bois is, in short, a party of protest which endeavours to prevent Negro separation and discrimination against Negroes by agitation and political influence.

Two Negro Parties Compared

These two points of view, of course, are not peculiar to Negroes; they divide all human thought. The opportunist and optimist, on the one hand, does his great work with the world as he finds it: he is resourceful, constructive, familiar. On the other hand, the idealist, the agitator, who is also a pessimist, performs the function of the critic; he sees the world as it should be and cries out to have it instantly changed.

Thus with these two great Negro parties. Each is working for essentially the same end—better conditions of life for the Negro—each contains brave and honest men, and each is sure, humanly enough, that the other side is not only wrong, but venally wrong, whereas both parties are needed and both perform a useful function.

The chief, and at present almost the only, newspaper exponent of the radical Negro point of view is *The Boston Guardian* published by William Monroe Trotter. Mr. Trotter is a mulatto who was graduated a few years ago with high honours from Harvard. His wife, who is active with him in his work, has so little Negro blood that she would ordinarily pass for white. Mr. Trotter's father fought in the Civil War and rose to be a lieutenant in Colonel Hallowell's Massachusetts regiment. He was one of the leaders of the Negro soldiers who refused to accept \$8 a month as servants when white soldiers received \$13. He argued that if a Negro soldier stood up and stopped a bullet, he was as valuable to the country as the white soldier. Though his family suffered, he served without pay rather than accept the money. It was the uncompromising spirit of Garrison and Phillips.

A Negro Newspaper of Agitation

The Guardian is as violent and bitter in some of its denunciation as the most reactionary white paper in the South. It would have the North take up arms again and punish the South for its position on the Negro question! It breathes the spirit of prejudice. Reading it sometimes, I am reminded of Senator Tillman's speeches. It answers the white publicity given in the South to black crime against white women by long accounts of similar crimes of white men. One of its chief points of conflict is the position of President Roosevelt regarding the Brownsville riot and the discharge of Negro soldiers; the attack on Roosevelt is unceasing, and in this viewpoint, at least, it is supported undoubtedly by no small proportion of the Negroes of the country. Another leading activity is its fight

on Booker T. Washington and his work. Denouncing Washington as a "notorious and incorrigible Jim Crowist," it says that he "dares to assert that the best way to get rights is not to oppose their being taken away, but to get money." Two or three years ago, when Mr. Washington went to Boston to address a coloured audience in Zion Church, Mr. Trotter and his friends scattered cayenne pepper on the rostrum and created a disturbance which broke up the meeting. Mr. Trotter went to jail for the offense. From the *Guardian* of September 2 I cut part of the leading editorial which will show its attitude:

PROPHET OF SLAVERY AND TRAITOR RACE

As another mark of the treacherous character of Booker Washington in matters concerning the race, come his discordant notes in support of Secretary Taft for President of the United States in spite of the fact that every Negro organisation of any note devoted to the cause of equal rights and justice have condemned President Roosevelt for his unpardonable treatment of the soldiers of the 25th Infantry, U.S.A., and Secretary Taft for his duplicity, and declared their determination to seek the defeat of either if nominated for the office of President of the United States, or anyone named by them for said office. Booker Washington, ever concerned for his own selfish ambitions, indifferent to the cries of the race so long as he wins the approval of white men who do not believe in the Negro, defies the absolutely unanimous call of all factions of the race for Foraker. Leader of the self-seekers, he has persistently, but thank heaven unsuccessfully, sought to entangle the whole race in the meshes of subordination. Knowing the race could only be saved by fighting cowardice, we have just as persistently resisted every attempt he has made to plant his white flag on the domains of equal manhood rights and our efforts have been rewarded by the universal denunciation of his doctrines of submission and his utter elimination as a possible leader of his race.

Generally speaking, the radical party has fought every movement of any sort that tends to draw a colour line.

BOSTON HOTEL FOR COLOURED PEOPLE

One of the enterprises of Boston which interested me deeply was a Negro hotel, the Astor House, which is operated by Negroes for Negro guests. It has 200 rooms, with a telephone in each room, a restaurant, and other accommodations. It struck me that it was a good example of Negro self-help that Negroes should be proud of. But upon mentioning it to a coloured man I met I found that he was violently opposed to it.

"Why hotels for coloured men?" he asked. "I believe in hotels for men. The coloured man must not draw the line himself if he doesn't want the white man to do it. He must demand and insist constantly upon his rights as an American citizen."

I found in Boston and in other Northern cities many Negroes who took this position. A white woman, who sought to establish a help and rescue mission for coloured girls similar to those conducted for the Jews, Italians, and other nationalities in other cities, was violently opposed, on the ground that it set up a precedent for discrimination. In the same way separate settlement work (though there is a separate settlement for Jews in Boston) and the proposed separate Y.M.C.A. have met with strong protests. Everything that tends to set the Negro off as a Negro, whether the white man does it or the Negro does it, is bitterly opposed by this party of coloured people.

They fought the Jamestown Exposition because it had a Negro Building, which they called the "Jim Crow Annex," and they fought the National Christian Endeavour Convention because the leaders could not assure Negro delegates exactly equal facilities in the hotels and restaurants. Of course the denunciation of the white South is continuous and bitter. It is noteworthy, however, that even the leaders of the movement not only recognise and conduct separate newspapers and ask Negroes to support them, but that they urge Negroes to stand together politically.

Boston Negroes Seen by a New York Negro Newspaper

But the large proportion of coloured newspapers in the country, the strongest and ablest of which is perhaps *Age*, are supporters of Washington and his ideals. The Boston correspondent of the *Age* said recently:

It is unfortunate in Boston that we have a hall which we can get free of charge: we refer to Faneuil Hall. They work Faneuil Hall for all it is worth. Scarcely a month ever passes by that does not see a crowd of Afro-Americans in Faneuil Hall throwing up their hats, yelling and going into hysterics over some subject usually relating to somebody a thousand miles away, never in relation to conditions right at home. The better element of Negroes and the majority of our white friends in this city have become disgusted over the policy that is being pursued and has been pursued for several months in Boston. Your correspondent can give you no better evidence of the disgust than to state that a few days ago there was one of these hysterical meetings held in Faneuil Hall and our people yelled and cried and agitated for two hours and more. The next day not one of the leading papers, such as the *Herald* and the *Transcript*, had a single line concerning this meeting. A few years ago had a meeting been held in Faneuil Hall under the leadership of safe and conservative Afro-Americans, both of these newspapers and papers of similar character would have devoted from two to three columns to a discussion of it. Now, in Boston, they let such meetings completely alone.

If there ever was a place where the Negro seems to have more freedom than he seems to know what to do with, it is in this city.

In spite of the agitation against drawing the colour line by the radical party, however, the separation is still going on. And it is not merely the demand of the white man that the Negro step

aside by himself, for the Negro himself is drawing the colour line, and drawing it with as much enthusiasm as the white man. A genuine race-spirit or race-consciousness is developing. Negroes are meeting prejudice with self-development.

It is a significant thing to find that many Negroes who a few years ago called themselves "Afro-Americans," or "Coloured Americans," and who winced at the name Negro, now use Negro as the race name with pride. While in Indianapolis I went to a Negro church to hear a speech by W. T. Vernon, one of the leading coloured men of the country, who was appointed Register of the United States Treasury by President Roosevelt. On the walls of the church hung the pictures of coloured men who had accomplished something for their race, and the essence of the speaker's address was an appeal to racial pride and the demand that the race stand up for itself, encourage Negro business and patronise Negro industry. All of which, surely, is significant.

How Negroes Themselves Draw the Colour Line

The pressure for separation among the Negroes themselves is growing rapidly stronger. Where there are mixed schools in the North there is often pressure by Negroes for separate schools. The Philadelphia *Courant*, a Negro newspaper, in objecting to this new feeling, says:

Public sentiment, so far as the white people are concerned, does not object to the mixed school system in vogue in our city half as much as the Afro-American people seem to be doing themselves. We find them the chief objectors.

One reason why the South to-day has a better development of Negro enterprise, one reason why Booker T. Washington believes that the South is a better place for the Negro than the North, and advises him to remain there, is this more advanced racial spirit. Prejudice there, being sharper, has forced the Negro back upon his own resources.

Dr. Frissell of Hampton is always talking to his students of the "advantages of disadvantages."

I was much struck with the remark of a Negro business man I met in Indianapolis:

"The trouble here is," he said, "that there is not enough prejudice against us."

"How is that?" I inquired.

"Well, you see we are still clinging too much to the skirts of the white man. When you hate us more it will drive us together and make us support coloured enterprises."

When in Chicago I heard of an interesting illustration of this idea. With the increasing number of Negro students prejudice has increased in the Chicago medical schools, until recently some of them have, by agreement, been closed to coloured graduate students. Concerning this condition, the Chicago *Conservator*, a Negro newspaper, says: "The cause of this extraordinary announcement is that the Southern students object to the presence of Negroes in the classes. Now it is up to the Negro doctors of the country to meet this insult by establishing a post-graduate school of their own. They can do it if they have the manhood, self-respect, and push. Let Doctors Hall, Williams, Boyd and others get busy."

To this the *New York Age* adds:

"Yes; let us have a school of that sort of our own."

And this is no idle suggestion. Few people have any conception of the growing progress of Negroes in the medical profession. In August 1907, the Coloured National Medical Association held its ninth annual session at Baltimore. Over three hundred delegates and members were in attendance from thirty different states. Graduates were there not only from Harvard, Yale, and other white colleges, but from coloured medical schools like Meharry and Howard University. Negro hospitals have been opened and are well supported in several cities.

National Negro Business League

All over the country the Negro is organised in business leagues and these leagues have formed

a National Business League which met last August in Topeka, Kansas. I can do no better in interpreting the spirit of this work, which is indeed the practical spirit of the Southern party, than in quoting briefly from the address of Booker T. Washington, who is the president of the league:

Despite much talk, the Negro is not discouraged, but is going forward. The race owns to-day an acreage equal to the combined acreage of Holland and Belgium. The Negro owns more land, more houses, more stores, more banks, than has ever been true in his history. We are learning that no race can occupy a soil unless it gets as much out of it as any other race gets out of it. Soil, sunshine, rain, and the laws of trade have no regard for race or colour. We are learning that we must be builders if we would succeed. As we learn this lesson we shall find help at the South and at the North. We must not be content to be tolerated in communities, we must make ourselves needed. The law that governs the universe knows no race or colour. The force of nature will respond as readily to the hand of the Chinaman, the Italian, or the Negro as to any other race. Man may discriminate, but nature and the laws that control the affairs of men will not and cannot. Nature does not hide her wealth from a black hand.

All along the line one finds this spirit of hopeful progress. A vivid picture of conditions, showing frankly both the weakness and strength of the Negro, is given by a coloured correspondent of the Indianapolis *Freeman*. He begins by telling of the organisation at Carbondale, Ill., of a joint stock company composed of thirty-nine coloured men to operate a dry goods store. The correspondent writes:

The question is, "Will the coloured people support this enterprise with their patronage?" It is a general cry all over the country that coloured people pass by the doors of our merchants and trade with any other

concerns—Jews, Dagoes, Polacks, and what not. This is a very unfortunate fact which stands before us as a living shame. The very people who preach “race union, race support, race enterprise,” are often the first to pass our own mercantile establishments by. The only places where coloured men can prosper in business are where our people are driven out of other people’s places of business and actually forced to patronise our own. A certain cigar manufacturer in St. Louis, a first-class business man, putting out the very best classes of cigars, said, a few days ago, that some of the hardest work he ever did was to get a few of our own dealers to handle his goods. If but one-third of the stores and stands that sell cigars and tobacco in St. Louis alone would buy their goods of him he could in a few more years employ one or two dozen more men and women in his factory. A dry goods company in the same city is suffering from the same trouble. Our people will condescend to look in, but more often their purchases are made at a neighbouring Jew store. There are also in that neighbourhood several first-class, up-to-date, clean and tasty-looking coloured restaurants: but twice as many Negroes take their meals at the cheap-John, filthy, fourth-class chop counters run by other people near by. But, after all, my people are doing better in these matters than they did some time past. It was a most pleasant surprise to learn, the other day, that the coloured undertakers in St. Louis do every dollar’s worth of business for our people in that line. This information was given by a reliable white undertaker and substantiated by the coloured undertakers. The white man was asked what he thought of it. He said he thought it was a remarkable illustration of the loyalty of the Negro to his own people and that they should be commended for it. And then there are two sides to every question. It is too often true that our people run their business on a low order—noisy, uncleanly, questionable, dive-like concerns—therefore do not deserve the patronage of decent people. Too many of

our men do not know anything about business. They don’t believe in investing their money in advertising their business in good first-class periodicals. We must not expect everybody to know where we are or what we have to sell unless we advertise. Many of our nickels would find their way to the cash drawer of a coloured man if we just knew where to find the store, restaurant, or hotel.

Remarkable Development of Negroes

It is not short of astonishing, indeed, to discover how far the Negro has been able to develop in the forty-odd years since slavery a distinct race spirit and position. It is pretty well known that he has been going into business, that he is acquiring much land, that he has many professional men, that he worships in his own churches and has many schools which he conducts—but in other lines of activity he is also getting a foothold. Just as an illustration: I was surprised at finding so many Negro theatres in the country—theatres not only owned or operated by Negroes, but presenting plays written and acted by Negroes. I saw a fine new Negro theatre in New Orleans; I visited a smaller coloured theatre in Jackson, Miss., and in Chicago the Pekin Theatre is an enterprise wholly conducted by Negroes. Williams and Walker, Negro comedians, have long amused large audiences, both white and coloured. Their latest production, “Bandanna Land,” written and produced wholly by Negroes, is not only funny, but clean.

Many other illustrations could be given to show how the Negro is developing in one way or another—but especially along racial lines. The extensive organisation of Negro lodges of Elks and Masons and other secret orders, many of them with clubhouses, might be mentioned. Attention might be called to the almost innumerable insurance societies and companies maintained by Negroes, the largest of which, the True Reformers, of Richmond, has over 50,000 members, and to the growth of Negro newspapers and magazines (there are now over

two hundred in the country), but enough has been said, perhaps, to make the point that there has been a real development of a Negro spirit and self-consciousness. Of course these signal successes loom large among the ten million of the country and yet they show the possibilities: there is this hopeful side of Negro conditions in this country as well as the dark and evil aspects of which we hear all too much.

Out of this ferment of racial self-consciousness and readjustment has grown, as I have shown, the two great Negro parties. Between them and within them lie the destinies of the race in this country, and to no small extent

also the destiny of the dominant white race. It is, therefore, of the highest importance for white men to understand the real tendencies of thought and organisation among these ten million Americans. For here is vigour and ability, and whatever may be the white man's attitude toward the Negro, the contempt of mere ignorance of what the Negro is doing is not only short-sighted but positively foolish. Only by a complete understanding can the white man who has assumed the entire responsibility of government in this country meet the crises, like that of the Atlanta riot, which are constantly arising between the races.

WILLIAM PICKENS

The New Negro (1916)

*What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not
sink i' the scale.*

—From Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra"

The "new Negro" is not really new: he is the same Negro under new conditions and subjected to new demands. Those who regret the passing of the "old Negro" and picture the "new" as something very different, must remember that there is no sharp line of demarcation between the old and the new in any growing organism like a germ, a plant, or a race. The present generation of Negroes have received their chief heritage from the former and, in that, they are neither better nor worse, higher nor lower than the previous generation. But the present Negro is differently circumstanced and must be measured by different standards. He has not less fidelity to duty than had the old Negro: the present Negro soldier is just as true to his uniform, his flag, and his country as was the old Negro slave to his master's family. He is not more indolent: certainly the present Negro does a great deal more of voluntary work than did the

Negro slave. He is not as much more criminal than the old Negro as his criminal *record* would seem to indicate: the present Negro gets into jail for offenses and charges for which the slave received thirty-nine *unrecorded* lashes. Besides, a repressive attitude toward a man in freedom subjects him to worse temptations than a bond-slave is subjected to. Furthermore and quite as important as anything else, there has been some change of attitude in the white people among whom the Negro lives: there is less acquaintanceship,—less sympathy and toleration than formerly.

The average white man of the present generation who sees the Negro daily, perhaps knows less of the Negro than did the similarly situated white man of any previous generation since the black race came to America. This lack of knowledge has a fearful influence on the judgment: it is both history and psychology that where knowledge is wanting, imagination steps in. What naive explanations men once gave of natural phenomena, what odd shapes they ascribed to the earth, and what erroneous proportions and fanciful relations they imagined among the heavenly bodies. The most serious handicap to the creation of a wholesome public

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opinion on matters affecting the Negro, is the ignorance of the better class of white people concerning the better class of colored people who live in their community. They often know the other classes: the servants through their kitchens and the criminals through the newspapers. In a large Southern city lived the most experienced Negro banker in the United States, with his bank, for twenty-five or thirty years; but, excepting the few bankers and others with whom he came into business contact, practically the whole group of intelligent white people in that city were ignorant of the fact that this Negro existed. In another Southern town of seven thousand people, half white and half colored, an elderly, cultured, Christian white woman, who had lived there all her life, did not know that the Negroes were not given a public school building by her municipality, and had supposed that a primary school for Negroes which had been maintained by a missionary society for thirty or forty years, was the Negro public school. From an old Maryland community a young Negro went out, got an education in some of the best schools, took a course in theology at Yale, and then returned to that community to pastor a church. He worked with great energy, aroused his people to build a fine new church, and awakened so much enthusiasm in the colored masses that finally some inklings of his success trickled in behind the ivied walls of an old mansion where lived two wealthy white ladies of the "good old days," when the Negro was so much better than he is now, as they could well testify from the superb character of the "black mammy," now dead and gone, but who had been for many years an indispensable part of their household conveniences. Hearing of the fine new building, for the first time in their lives they decided to attend the dedication of a Negro church. On learning the name and antecedents of the young pastor they found him to be the son of their bemoaned "black mammy"—him whom they supposed had long since gone to the dogs, whither their daily newspapers were saying all the young and aspiring Negroes were bound. The mother had been a "member" of their family, but the son

had struggled against poverty and prejudice, had got his education and done his work without any encouragement from them, without even so much as their confidence or their knowledge. How can a people so hedged about by tradition and handicapped by prejudice "know the Negro" as he now is, even though they be good people and knew him as he once was?

Not only does this ignorance of the Negro prevent many white people from sympathizing with his condition and struggles, but it does a mischief more positive than that: it prepares them to believe any charge of crime or viciousness or depravity which may be brought against the race. They will not analyze the evidence. If it is said that in proportion to their population there are four or five times as many blacks as whites in a Southern penitentiary, men will conclude at once, without thought or investigation, that such is the ratio of the criminality of the Negro and the white man. They overlook the multitude of other differences which may account for this difference in criminal statistics: the poverty, the ignorance, the homelessness and helplessness, and the very sort of prejudice which they themselves are substituting for thought. The ease with which a Negro can be lynched in the South should make them know how much more easily he can get into the penitentiary. Another thing that largely accounts for the Negro's superior numbers among the prisoners: most Southern states allow the discretion of the court a very wide latitude as to the number of years for which the condemned is to be sentenced. The law is often like this: a fine of so many dollars, or ten years in prison, or both. The Negro usually gets the limit, perhaps "both." To make an extreme but simplifying case, suppose one Negro and one white man commit a certain crime every year; if the white criminal is either fined or given only one year in prison, while the colored criminal is given ten years, in the tenth year when the visitor goes to that prison he will find nine or ten Negroes there for a certain crime, but only one white man. The easy-going investigator might conclude that the Negro is ten times as criminal in that respect as is the white man, while as a

matter of fact both races would have committed exactly the same number of crimes. The long-term sentences of Negroes cause them to *accumulate* in prison. There are much more scientific ways of explaining the Negro's situation in this country than by reference to an unprovable something like innate depravity.

One of the greatest handicaps under which the new Negro lives is the handicap of the lack of acquaintanceship between him and his white neighbor. Under the former order, when practically all Negroes were either slaves or servants, every Negro had the acquaintance of some white man; as a race he was better known, better understood, and was therefore the object of less suspicion on the part of the white community. But under the present order there are many Negroes who are independent, in occupation or in fortune, doing business for themselves, rendering professional service to their own race or living independently at home. These Negroes, unknown to the white mass, are the objects of its special suspicions and distrust, for they are "something new under the sun." When riots break out, this unknown Negro, well-to-do and equally well-behaved, the one who ought to be safest, is the one most liable to attack by the mob. This is because ignorance and prejudice have made the very things which pass for virtues in white men, seem like vices in the Negro; pride, ambition, self-respect, un-satisfaction with the lower positions of life, and the desire to live in a beautiful house and to keep his wife and children at home and out of "service." There can be no sympathy where there is no knowledge, and the Negro of this class, being rather a stranger to his white neighbors, is regarded as a bad example to those humbler and more helpless Negroes who are servants. This is not so in every case, but this is the rule, and the rule is the thing. And we are not talking hearsay but speaking out of the experiences of our life-time.

If prejudice could only reason, it would dispel itself. If it could think, its thoughts might run like this: If it be true that the Negro is innately low and criminal in his instincts, then the Negro must be the same in all places,—but the Negroes of other countries do not bear this

reputation; those of Brazil and the rest of South America, of Central America, of the West Indies and of Mexico, are not distinguished as criminals. There are great numbers of Negroes in parts of these countries, and being in many of them unrestricted as to the position to which they may aspire in society and state, they would have a better chance to demonstrate any essential inferiority in those lands than in the United States. The truth is that if the Negro be inferior, in the United States he has never yet had a chance to prove his inferiority. But prejudice does not investigate or reason.—What we are trying to do in this essay, concerning the new Negro, is to tell what *is*, and not what *ought to be*, though the latter would make a more pleasing story than the former.

Another thing which gets the better of our normal psychology and causes us to believe almost any wild report about the Negro, is the free and superior advertising given Negro crime above that accorded to any other form of Negro achievement. Booker T. Washington used to tell with great amusement how he entered a little town and spoke to a large gathering, making as good a speech as he was capable of. The next morning he picked up the town paper, expecting to see himself and the meeting given considerable and prominent space, but found only an inch or so of recognition on the last page. He had made a successful speech, but the whole front page was given to a Negro who at the same time had made an *unsuccessful* attempt to snatch a woman's purse. An unsophisticated outsider, reading that paper, would have concluded that the constructive work which such Negroes as Booker Washington are doing, is of small consequence as compared with the failing efforts of a Negro criminal. Again, when a white person commits a crime, the papers say simply that a burglar was caught, a man shot a woman, or a highwayman has been sentenced,—not *white* burglar, not *white* man and woman, and not *white* highwayman. In the case of colored people, however, it is reported as *Negro* thief, *Negro*, loafer, *black* brute, *Negress*. This forms in us an association of ideas: *black* and *Negro* are made to suggest *crime*. The one term calls up

the other in the public mind; they are tied together by as definite a law as the law of gravitation. If the word *white* were written with every Caucasian criminal, it would be as bad for the word *white*,—or worse. We might say that we also give the Negro credit for his good deeds by attaching the word *black* or *colored*. But do we, with the same emphasis and persistence with which we link him with his bad deeds? Booker T. Washington was given an inch on the last page, and the Negro purse-snatcher was given the whole of the front page. I know a black Negro who did well in a Northern university, and I have his picture from some newspapers wherein they deliberately lightened his complexion, straightened his hair, peaked his nose and labeled him thus as a mulatto. And often we refuse to mention the racial identity at all when the Negro's deed is good. While we write, every newspaper in the United States is mentioning the good work of the Tenth Cavalry in Mexico, but very few of the dailies take time to say that the Tenth Cavalry is a regiment of black men. When the Negro soldiers were discharged for shooting up Brownsville, Tex., not a newspaper in the whole Republic failed to mention the race to which they belonged. Suppose we pursued the same policy with respect to the red-heads among us: whenever a black-haired, brown-haired or gray-haired person committed a crime, we should say simply that a man or woman did this or that, but when the hair was red, should say red-headed burglar, red-headed embezzler, red-headed murderer, red-headed rapist,—very soon the red-haired would be marked as criminals among us and we should be prejudiced at the very sight of them.

It is an interesting inquiry as to how the Negro stands to-day as a patriot. In that regard he is still one of the soundest classes in America, but he does not stand to-day where he used to stand. He still loves America, his native land,—it is the only country he has or knows anything about,—but he is more prone to-day to identify "the country" with the powers who happen, for the time being, to have control thereof. One hears expressions from individual Negroes now which were not to be heard

twenty years ago: that the United States needs humiliation; that it would "help the Negro if any foreign power should humble this country"; that the Negro has "nothing to fight for" in the United States, and "nothing to defend"; that he (the individual who may be speaking) "would not volunteer"; that it would be "inconsistent for the Negro to fight the Japanese, who have done nothing to him, and in behalf of American white people"; that no foreign conqueror could possibly "make conditions any worse for the Negro here"; and many other expressions which show that the Negro is beginning to look for deliverance from abroad rather than at home. This is a small and at present impotent beginning, but it is foreboding. And it is too bad that some American newspapers and congressmen are seconding these thoughts of the Negro by proclaiming a "white man's country" and a "white man's war," and by obstructing the enlistment of patriotic colored people in the army and navy. How different is the present Negro spirit from that of 1898 when his youth, wherever admitted, rose as one man to meet the Spaniard; from many of his Southern schools the whole male student body who could qualify as soldiers went into the camps. That is not because the Negro was not mistreated or oppressed at that time, but because he still looked upon "Uncle Sam" as being some personality separate and apart from the oppressor. He then regarded the oppressor as a merely local character; but he looked up to the great Nation with hope and confidence, as the embodiment of rigid justice and high ideals. He thought that the spirit of the Emancipator and of the defenders of the Union still ruled in the highest councils of the land, and he swore by "Uncle Sam." He hoped, too, to better his local conditions by this opportunity to show his patriotism at San Juan Hill and in the Philippines. But since that time one or two weak Republican administrations and a very hostile Democratic term have made him identify his former ideal of the nation with the oppressor himself. This impression has been deepened especially by lynchings, segregation, and discrimination in the North, from which he once expected ultimate justice. We fear that the extent and importance

of this new feeling is not generally understood by white people. The foundation of preparedness should be laid in the mind and the heart. As we write, the newspapers are full of comments on the fact that a little black boy of Des Moines, Iowa, refused under threats to salute the American flag, on the ground that it meant nothing to him and his. Some are advocating punishment for this lad as the remedy. That reminds us of the "remedy" offered by the little boy who, when he was frankly told by the little girl that she did *not* love him, replied, as he sailed into her with his fists: "When I get through beatin' the stuffin' out o' you, I bet you'll love me!" He was adopting the method which would not only fail to change indifference into love but would finally arouse hatred and hostility. The Negro will not fail to love the flag and be its staunchest defender, if it means to him a reasonable measure of protection for life, liberty, and property and civil and political rights. If these things are denied him, no amount of preaching or cussing or killing will make him love America. He could be compelled for the time being to employ the weapons of the weak,—pretense and cunning.

But the colored soldier and the masses of the race are still loyal. There is no hyphen in the short word *Negro*; he is every inch American; he is not even Afro-American. One Negro regiment beat all records by not having a single desertion in twelve months. Nobody has any doubt as to what the Negro soldiers are doing in Mexico now; that they can be relied on implicitly to carry out orders and serve the interests of the American people. During our strained relations with various European nations there have been frequent expressions of doubt as to the loyalty of many elements of our population, but never one word of doubt as to the Negro's loyalty has parted the lips of even his fondest enemies. He is loyal and is understood to be loyal, but a continuous adverse pressure will finally break even the strongest bar,—or bend it.

At present the Negro would stand fast and firm by America against any European state; but on the other hand when the Negro goes into any European state he finds himself better

treated and freer from insult than in any state of the American Union. How long will his loyalty last under that test? The Negro abroad in any of the other really civilized countries of the world, is practically never insulted or treated as an inferior unless he runs into a party of his own white fellow-citizens from the United States. There are Americans, of course, to whom this inconsistent attitude towards one of the most loyal classes of all our citizenry is a shame and a distaste.

Naturally it proves disagreeable, at first, for many American white people to turn from the old to the new Negro: from the patient, unquestioning, devoted semi-slave to the self-conscious, aspiring, proud young man. It always shocks our psychology to have our old and accustomed ideals contradicted. The changes from tallow candles to oil lamps, to gas lights, and to electric bulbs must have been unpleasant experiences for many of the older members of the community. The older folk did not want to put pipe organs and other musical instruments into the church service. It is a plain matter of psychology: the old ideal was being smashed by something new, which is disagreeable even when the something new is something better. Nearly all concede that there are good Negroes, but they are very slow to revise their ideals as to what constitutes a "good" Negro. To some it means the old "uncles" and "aunties" or the present usable servants. It is difficult for them to conceive of an independent, self-respecting, self-directing Negro as good. There is a great motion-picture film, the chief fault of which aside from its perversions of common history, is the fact that it attempts to teach that the Negro is good only as a slave or servant, and that every intelligent and aspiring Negro in society, law, or state is bad and criminal. This hoary prejudice is our great stumbling block: it causes intolerance and opposition to the rising and aspiring but perfectly human and normal younger Negroes. There are white people, apparently fair-minded, who probably wish the Negro well, and who can stand or sit and talk for a long time with a dirty, ignorant, and comical Negro, but who could not have five minutes of patience with one that is clean, intelligent,

and self-respecting. I heard a Negro say that it mystified him how white people would hire as servants in their homes, or nurses for their children, Negro men and girls whom he would not permit to touch his children. In the other direction, too, the thing often runs to the ridiculous: a young Negro was to be ousted by his white associates from a certain position; they admitted that his morals were sound, that his education and general qualifications were all right, that his logic was good and his arguments irrefutable,—but, they explained, when he talks on some phases of the race question he sometimes clinches his teeth. They evidently preferred that when he talked of the great injustices he would *not* do what Horace says the speaker should always do (show the feeling himself which he would arouse in others), but that he would rather show his teeth in the conciliatory, apologetic grin of the old-fashioned Negro.

The greatest risk that the strong have to run is the risk of their morals and ideals. The white people of America are in a position to be greatly tempted to regard the Negro only in the light of his usefulness to them,—only as a utility, and not as a personality to pursue his own ends and fulfil his own destiny. This little drop of selfishness is likely to vitiate a great many efforts “on behalf of the American Negro.” The Negro is beginning to insist, however, that he must be regarded first as a man and only incidentally as a usable article. For example, the Negro really believes in all kinds of education, and especially in those forms of training which will best fit the masses to become independent workers and of the greatest service to themselves and others. But that little drop of gall has caused many of those who are trying to educate him, to view their mission exclusively from the selfish-utilitarian

standpoint. These enthusiasts have themselves put the Negro on the defensive as to his right to pursue other forms of culture. And that is why many of his best friends and the ablest thinkers of his own race have insisted and do insist that the race needs *not only* farm-hands, domestic servants, carpenters and other industrial workers, but also business men, doctors, lawyers, and well-educated preachers. The white people who desire that the Negro be a separate race in America, often fail to see that this very separateness would make it more imperative that the race develop all occupations and professions and advance along all lines. I heard a white speaker, at a great missionary meeting held “on behalf of Negro education,” say: We want the Negroes to produce farmers and other industrial workers,—we already have plenty of lawyers, doctors, historians, and poets. His “we” could not really include the Negro, about whom he was supposed to be speaking, for the Negro has very few lawyers, doctors, historians, and poets,—and the white historian and poet will not really write the Negro’s history or sing his songs.

The new Negro is a sober, sensible creature, conscious of his environment, knowing that not all is right, but trying hard to become adjusted to this civilization in which he finds himself by no will or choice of his own. He is not the shallow, vain, showy creature which he is sometimes advertised to be. He still hopes that the unreasonable opposition to his forward and upward progress will relent. But, at any rate, he is resolved to fight, and live or die, on the side of God and the Eternal Verities.

For thence,—a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks,—
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail.

W.E.B. DuBOIS

Returning Soldiers (1919)

My Mission

I went to Paris because today the destinies of mankind center there. Make no mistake as to this, my readers.

Podunk may easily persuade itself that only Podunk matters and that nothing is going on in New York. The South Sea Islander may live ignorant and careless of London. Some Americans may think that Europe does not count, and a few Negroes may argue vociferously that the Negro problem is a domestic matter, to be settled in Richmond and New Orleans.

But all these careless thinkers are wrong. The destinies of mankind for a hundred years to come are being settled today in a small room of the *Hotel Crillon* by four unobtrusive gentlemen who glance out speculatively now and then to Cleopatra's Needle on the Place de la Concorde.

You need not believe this if you do not want to. They do not care what you believe. They have the POWER. They are settling the world's problems and you can believe what you choose as long as they control the ARMIES and NAVIES, the world supply of CAPITAL and the PRESS.

Other folks of the world who think, believe, and act;—THIRTY-TWO NATIONS, PEOPLES, and RACES, have permanent headquarters in Paris. Not simply England, Italy, and the Great Powers are there, but all the little nations; not simply little nations; but little groups who want to be nations, like the Letts and Finns, the Armenians and Jugo-Slavs, Irish and Ukrainians. Not only groups, but races have come—Jews, Indians, Arabs, and All-Asia. Great churches, like the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic, are watching on the ground. Great organizations, like the American Peace Society, the League to Enforce Peace, the American Federation of Labor, the Woman's Suffrage Association, and a hundred others are represented in Paris today.

In fine, not a single great, serious movement or idea in Government, Politics, Philanthropy, or Industry in the civilized world has omitted to send and keep in Paris its Eyes and Ears and Fingers! And yet some American Negroes, actually asked WHY I went to help represent the Negro world in Africa and America and the Islands of the Sea.

But why did I not explain my reasons and mission before going? Because I am not a fool. Because I knew perfectly well that any movement to bring the attention of the world to the Negro problem at this crisis would be stopped the moment the Great Powers heard of it. When, therefore, I was suddenly informed of a chance to go to France as a newspaper correspondent, I did not talk—I went.

What did I do when I got there? First, there were certain things that I did NOT do. I did not hold an anti-lynching meeting on the Boulevard des Italiens. I would to God I could have, but I knew that France is still under martial law,—*that no meeting can be held today in France, anywhere or at any time, without the consent of the Government: no newspaper can publish a line without the consent of the Censor and no individual can stay in France unless the French consent.*

But it did not follow that because I could not do everything I could do nothing. I first went to the American Peace Commission and said frankly and openly: "I want to call a Pan-African Congress in Paris." The Captain to whom I spoke smiled and shook his head. "Impossible," he said, and added: "The French Government would not permit it." "Then," said I innocently: "It's up to me to get French consent!" "It is!" he answered, and he looked relieved.

With the American Secret Service at my heels I then turned to the French Government. There are six colored deputies in the French Parliament and one is an under-secretary in

the War Department. "Of course, we can have a Pan-African Congress," he said—"I'll see Clemenceau." He saw Clemenceau, and there was a week's pause. Clemenceau saw Pichon, and there was another pause. Meantime, our State Department chuckled and announced that there would be no Congress and refused Negroes passports. England followed suit and refused to allow the Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society even to visit Paris, while the South African natives were not allowed to sail.

But there are six-Negroes in the French House and Clemenceau needs their votes. There were 280,000 black African troops in the war before whom France stands with uncovered head. The net result was that Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France, gave us permission to hold the Pan-African Congress in Paris.

What could a Pan-African Congress do? It could not agitate the Negro problem in any particular country, except in so far as that problem could be plausibly shown to be part of the problem of the future of Africa. The problem of the future of Africa was a difficult and delicate question before the Peace conference—so difficult and so delicate that the Conference was disposed to welcome advice and co-operation.

If the Negroes of the world could have maintained in Paris during the entire sitting of the Peace Conference a central headquarters with experts, clerks and helpers, they could have settled the future of Africa at a cost of less than \$10,000.

As it was the Congress cost \$750. Yet with this meagre sum a Congress of fifty-eight delegates, representing sixteen different Negro groups, was assembled. This Congress passed resolutions which the entire press of the world has approved, despite the fact that these resolutions had two paragraphs of tremendous significance to us:

Wherever persons of African descent are civilized and able to meet the tests of surrounding culture, they shall be accorded the same rights as their fellow citizens; they shall not be denied on account of race or color a voice in their own Government, justice before the courts, and economic and social equality according to ability and desert.

Whenever it is proven that African natives are not receiving just treatment at the hands of any State or that any state deliberately excludes its civilized citizens or subjects of Negro descent from its body politic and cultural, it shall be the duty of the League of Nations to bring the matter to the attention of the civilized world.

Precisely the same principles are being demanded today by the Jews and the Japanese. And despite the enormous, significance of these demands, Colonel House of the American Peace Commission received me and assured me that he wished these resolutions presented to the Peace Conference. Lloyd George wrote me that he would give our demands "his careful consideration." The French Premier offered to arrange an audience for the President and Secretary of the Conference. Portugal and Belgium, great colonial powers, offered complete co-operation.

The League for the Rights of Man, which freed Dreyfus, appointed a special commission to hear not only of the African, but the facts as to the American Negro problem.

We got, in fact, the ear of the civilized world and if it had been possible to stay longer and organize more thoroughly and spread the truth,—what might not have been accomplished?

As it was we have organized the "Pan-African Congress" as a permanent body, with M. Diagne as president and myself as secretary, and we plan an international quarterly *Black Review* to be issued in English, French, and possibly in Spanish and Portuguese.

The world-fight for black rights is on!

Robert R. Moton

Neither R.R. Moton nor W.E.B. DuBois had the slightest idea that the other was planning to sail for France, December 1, until they met in Washington on a quest for passports, November 30. They sailed together on the *Orizaba* and frankly discussed their agreements and disagreements. When they reached France, each went about his own business.

Dr. Moton was sent by the President of the United States and the Secretary of War to see and talk to Negro troops. Dr. DuBois was sent by the N.A.A.C.P. and *The Crisis* to gather the historical facts concerning Negro troops and to call a Pan-African Congress.

On the night before Dr. Moton started out, a colored man of national reputation and unquestioned integrity who had been in France six months took him aside and told him frankly the situation: the rampant American prejudice against black troops and officers and the bitter resentment of the victims. Dr. Moton's letters gave him every opportunity. A special Army Order preceded him which read.

Dr. R. R. Moton, President of Tuskegee University, will be present in the Divisional area for the next few days. The Division Commander directs that commanding officers render all possible assistance in any visit or inspection Dr. Moton desires to make. They will also see that he is accorded every opportunity to make any observation he may wish to make.

What did Dr. Moton do? He rushed around as fast as possible. He took with him and had at his elbow every moment that evil genius of the Negro race, Thomas Jesse Jones, a white man. Dr. Moton took no time to investigate or inquire. He made a few speeches, of which one is reported by a hearer as follows:

The address delivered by Dr. Moton to the men consisted of one or two jokes by a colored preacher, the assurance that the people at home were proud of them, and the manner in which they should act upon their return to the United States dwelling almost entirely upon the phrase "Not to be arrogant." After he had spoken to the men the major informed the officers that Dr. Moton desired to hold secret conference with them. All officers congregated in the office. After being presented to the officers Dr. Moton stated that he had been sent to France by President Wilson and Mr. Baker for the purpose of speaking to the colored

troops. He also stated that he had just left Paris where he had been in conference with President Wilson and had asked the president his views as to the practical application of democracy toward the colored man in the United States, but ending by saying: "I was very much pleased with his reply; but, gentlemen, I cannot quote the President."

After Dr. Moton finished his talk no opportunity was given to the officers to inform him of the conditions that had existed in France, and he did not seek any information relative to same from any of the officers after the conference ended.

Dr. Moton then returned to Paris and met Colonel House, General Pershing, and others. Colonel House told the writer that he urged Dr. Moton to remain in Paris and that if he would, Colonel House would give him an opportunity to appear in person before the Peace Conference to speak for the black world. Dr. Moton refused to stay, but promised to return. He then went to England and secured an audience with Lloyd George, prime minister of England. The destiny of the black race today is in the hands of England and the destiny of England is in the hands of Lloyd George. Yet, Dr. Moton did not keep his appointment; but rushed to catch his boat in order to be present at the Tuskegee Conference. He sailed, with Thomas Jesse Jones still watching him, and did not return to Paris or to the Pan-African Congress, which he said he favored and promised to support.

No one questions the personal integrity of Robert Russa Moton or his kindly disposition, but no one, friend or foe, can look these facts in the face and not feel bitter disappointment.

To Mr. Emmett Scott

The Negro world and you will bear us witness that *The Crisis* and its editor has given you loyal and unselfish co-operation, even at the cost of suspicion and criticism. We have done this,

FIRST, because the war demanded, and had a right to demand, unswerving loyalty and unity on the part of the nation and its constituent groups; and, SECONDLY, because we believed that you were doing all that was possible under very difficult circumstances. A visit to Europe has, however, revealed to the editor a state of affairs in regard to Negro troops which is simply astounding! Some of these facts we are publishing this month and others we shall reveal later. Meantime, we are withholding judgment in your case and simply asking you publicly three questions:

1. *Did you know the treatment which black troops were receiving in France?*
2. *If you did NOT know, why did you not find out?*
3. *If you DID know, what did you do about it?*

The League of Nations

A League of Nations is absolutely necessary to the salvation of the Negro race. Unless we have some supernational power to curb the anti-Negro policy of the United States and South Africa, we are doomed eventually to *fight* for our rights. The proposed internation will have overwhelming influences around it which will oppose the doctrines of "race" antagonism and inferiority. It will from the beginning recognize Negro nations. It will be open to the larger influences of civilization and culture which are ineffective in the United States because of the prevailing barbarism of the ruling classes in the South and their overwhelming political power. What we cannot accomplish before the choked conscience of America, we have an infinitely better chance to accomplish before the organized Public Opinion of the World. Peace for us is not simply Peace from Wars like the past, but relief from the spectre of the Great War of Races which will be absolutely inevitable unless the selfish nations of white civilization are curbed by a Great World Congress in which black and white and yellow sit and speak and act. The refusal to adopt the Japanese race-equality amendment is deplorable, but it is an argument

for and not against a Nation of Nations. It is the Beginning of a mighty End.

History

Most American Negroes do not realize that the imperative duty of the moment is to fix in history the status of our Negro troops. Already subtle influences are preparing a fatal attack. It is repeated openly among influential persons: "The black laborers did well—the black privates can fight—but the Negro officer is a failure." This is not true and the facts exist to disprove it, but they must be marshalled with historical vision and scientific accuracy.

Sensing this some months ago, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People commissioned Dr. DuBois to prepare a history and appropriated \$2,000 toward the expense. Dr. DuBois immediately sought to associate with him—not as subordinates, but on terms of full equality—a board of three or four editors and a large consulting board of colored men. It immediately developed that co-operation was impossible.

A white man, Mr. F.P. Stockbridge of New York had already planned and was preparing a popular history and had secured the co-operation of Mr. Emmett Scott and others. Neither he nor Mr. Scott wished to change their plans and neither would accept co-operation, except upon terms which we deemed impossible. Mr. C.G. Woodson, editor of *The Journal of Negro History*, refused to co-operate except as Editor-in-Chief.

Unity being thus plainly impossible, Dr. DuBois disposed to drop the project as far as he was personally concerned and leave the work to others.

The Executive Officers of the N.A.A.C.P., however, thought it best for Dr. Du Bois to proceed to France and look over the field especially with regard to a Pan-African Congress and the facts obtainable there concerning Negro troops.

The result of this trip is that we are convinced:

1. That the truth concerning Negroes in this war must be told impartially and entirely.

2. That no person in official position dare tell the whole truth.

3. That notwithstanding the unfortunate duplication of effort and multiplying of histories, it is the plain duty of the N.A.A.C.P. and *The Crisis* to compile and publish a complete history of "The Negro in the Revolution of the Twentieth Century."

Such a history is, therefore, projected in three volumes, preceded by a brief forecast. The forecast will be issued as a supplement to the June *Crisis*. It will be a short but complete history of the Negro in the war. It will be followed this year by Volume I of the full history; Volumes II and III will appear in 1920 and 1921.

Every reader of *The Crisis* is asked to help in the compilation of this history. Please write us immediately and let us know what co-operation we may expect.

Rape

The charge of rape against colored Americans was invented by the white South after Reconstruction to excuse mob violence. No such wholesale charge was dreamed of in slavery days and during the war black men were often the sole protection of white women.

After the war, when murder and mob violence was the recognized method of re-enslaving blacks, it was discovered that it was only necessary to add a charge of rape to justify before the North and Europe any treatment of Negroes. The custom became widespread. In vain have Negroes and their friends protested that in less than *one-quarter* of the cases of lynching Negroes has rape been even *alleged* as an excuse. And in the alleged cases guilt has not been even probable in the vast majority of cases.

We do not for a moment deny or seek to deny that Negroes are guilty of rape and of other horrible crimes. What we do deny and what the facts overwhelmingly prove is that *as a race they are less guilty of such crimes* of violence than any other group similarly oppressed by poverty and compulsory ignorance.

Today the nasty and absolutely false charge returns to justify the outrageous treatment of Negroes by Americans in France.

What is the truth?

I have written to twenty-one mayors of towns and cities in all parts of France where Negro troops have been quartered asking them as to the conduct of black troops. These are some of their replies:

Montmorillon (Vienne)

"They have earned our high regard by their discipline and their faultless behavior."

Le Mans (Sarthe)

"They have been accused of no crimes or misdemeanors."

St. Die (Vosges)

"Very excellent conduct."

Bourbonne les Bains (Haute-Marne)

"Pleasant remembrances and irreproachable conduct."

Liverdun (Meurthe-et-Moselle)

"Excellent conduct—no complaints."

Rayon l'Etape (Vosges)

"Fine character and exquisite courtesy."

Fresne (Haute-Marne)

"No complaints concerning their conduct."

Domfront (Orne)

"Won the esteem and sympathy of all the population."

Marbache (Meurthe et Moselle)

"No complaint—well disciplined,"

Bordeaux (Gironde)

"No unfavorable comments."

Serqueux (Haute-Marne)

"Well-conducted—no crimes."

Chamberey (Savoie)

"Proud to welcome them."

Brest (Finistere)

"Not qualified to give information."

St. Nazaire (Loire Inferieure)

"Cannot give any information."

Docelles (Vosges)

"Good conduct, good discipline and fine spirit."

Couprain (Mayenne)

"Perfect propriety without complaint."

Gezoncourt (Meurthe-et-Moselle)

"No complaint as to conduct or morals."

Frouard (Meurthe-et-Moselle)

"Well regulated conduct."

We have, too, official figures covering the Ninety-second Division, consisting of Negro troops, with largely Negro company officers:

Only ONE soldier of the Ninety-second Division in France was convicted of rape, while two others were convicted of intent to rape.

It is doubtful if another division of the U. S. Army in France has a better record.

What was the real animus back of this wholesale accusation? It was the fact that many Americans would rather have lost the war than to see a black soldier talking to a white woman. For instance, the Mayor of Bar-sur-Aube issued this Order, on June 26, 1918:

According to orders given by American Military authorities, it is strongly recommended that no French women receive visits from colored soldiers or talk with them on the streets.

On the other hand, what is the official American opinion of Negro troops?

General Pershing in his address to the Ninety-second Division at Le Mans, France, January 29, 1919, said:

The Ninety-second Division has without a doubt, been a success in its work at the front, and I desire to compliment the officers and men upon the discipline and morale which has existed in this command during its stay in France.

Brigadier-General Hay, 184th Brigade, Ninety-second Division, said:

I have been with colored troops for twenty-five years, and I have never seen a better soldier.

Captain Willis, Supply Officer, 365th Infantry, said:

The troops of the Ninety-second Division are the best disciplined and best saluting soldiers I have seen in France.

Brigadier-General Sherburne said:

The Brigade Commander wishes to record in General Orders the entire satisfaction it has given him to have commanded the first brigade of Negro Artillery ever organized. This satisfaction is due to the excellent record the men have made.

Allen J. Greer, Colonel, General Staff, signs this order of General Ballou:

Five months ago today the Ninety-second Division landed in France.

After seven weeks of training it took over a Sector in the Front Line and since that time some portion of the Division has been practically continuously under fire.

It participated in the last battle of the War with creditable success, continually pressing the attack against highly organized defensive works. It advanced successfully on the first day of the battle, attaining its objectives and capturing prisoners. This in the face of determined opposition by an alert enemy and against rifle, machine guns and artillery fire. The issue of the second day's battle was rendered indecisive by the order to cease firing at eleven a.m., when the Armistice became effective.

A report from the officer in charge of Leave Area, November 6, 1918, says:

Nothing but the highest praise can be given the colored soldier for the manner in which he conducted himself while in France. He conducted himself in a gentlemanly manner in every sector in which the Division operated, and won for himself the love and commendation of the French people.

Returning Soldiers

We are returning from war! *The Crisis* and tens of thousands of black men were drafted into a great struggle. For bleeding France and what she means and has meant and will mean to us and humanity and against the threat of German race arrogance, we fought gladly and to the last drop of blood; for America and her highest ideals, we fought in far-off hope; for the dominant Southern oligarchy entrenched in Washington, we fought in bitter resignation. For the America that represents and gloats in lynching, disfranchisement, caste, brutality, and devilish insult—for this, in the hateful upturning and mixing of things, we were forced by vindictive fate to fight, also.

But today we return! We return from the slavery of uniform which the world's madness demanded us to don to the freedom of civil garb. We stand again to look America squarely in the face and call a spade a spade. We sing: This country of ours, despite all its better souls have done and dreamed, is yet a shameful land.

It lynches.

And lynching is barbarism of a degree of contemptible nastiness unparalleled in human history. Yet for fifty years we have lynched two Negroes a week, and we have kept this up right through the war.

It disfranches its own citizens.

Disfranchisement is the deliberate theft and robbery of the only protection of poor against rich and black against white. The land that disfranches its citizens and calls itself a democracy lies and knows it lies.

It encourages ignorance.

It has never really tried to educate the Negro. A dominant minority does not want Negroes educated. It wants servants, dogs, whores, and monkeys. And when this land allows a reactionary group by its stolen political power to

force as many black folk into these categories as it possibly can, it cries in contemptible hypocrisy: "They threaten us with degeneracy; they cannot be educated."

It steals from us.

It organizes industry to cheat us. It cheats us out of our land; it cheats us out of our labor. It confiscates our savings. It reduces our wages. It raises our rent. It steals our profit. It taxes us without representation. It keeps us consistently and universally poor, and then feeds us on charity and derides our poverty.

It insults us.

It has organized a nation-wide and latterly a world-wide propaganda of deliberate and continuous insult and defamation of black blood wherever found. It decrees that it shall not be possible in travel nor residence, work nor play, education nor instruction for a black man to exist without tacit or open acknowledgment of his inferiority to the dirtiest white dog. And it looks upon any attempt to question or even discuss this dogma as arrogance, unwarranted assumption, and treason.

This is the country to which we Soldiers of Democracy return. This is the fatherland for which we fought! But it is *our* fatherland. It was right for us to fight. The faults of *our* country are *our* faults. Under similar circumstances, we would fight again. But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.

We return.

We return from fighting.

We return fighting.

Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why.

MARCUS GARVEY

The New Negro and the U.N.I.A. (1919)

Newport News, Va., Oct. 25, 1919

Stirring Speech Delivered by Hon. Marcus Garvey in the South

Mr. President, Officers and Members of the Newport News Division of the Universal Negro Improvement Association—Indeed, it is a pleasure to be with you. From the first time I visited your city I became impressed with your earnestness. Ever since I came here and went away, an impression, an indelible impression, was made on me relative to your earnestness in the great onward and upward movement engineered under the leadership of the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

Since I visited you last the Universal Negro Improvement Association has grown financially and otherwise, numerically, to the extent that tonight, this very hour, the Universal Negro Improvement Association is regarded as the strongest Negro movement in the world. [Cheers.] We have been able to force entry into every civilized country where Negroes live, and tonight the colors that you and I are wearing in Newport News are being worn by Negroes all over the world.

U.N.I.A.: Serious Movement

As I have told you in many addresses before, the Universal Negro Improvement Association is a very serious movement. We are for serious business. We are out for the capturing of liberty and democracy. [Cheers.] Liberty is not yet captured, therefore we are still fighting. We are in a very great war, a great conflict, and we will never get liberty, we will never capture democracy, until we, like all the other peoples who have won liberty and democracy, shed our sacred blood. This liberty, this democracy, for which

we Negroes of the world are hoping, is a thing that has caused blood as a sacrifice by every people who possess it today.

The Defeat of Germany

The white man of America who possesses his liberty and his democracy won it through the sacrifice of those thousands of soldiers who fought and fell under the leadership of George Washington. The French people, who are enjoying their liberty and their democracy today, are enjoying it because thousands of Frenchmen fought, bled, and died to make France safe. That America, England, and France have had peace with the world and with themselves is simply through the fact that they have defeated Germany and won for themselves liberty and democracy.

Liberty and Democracy Expensive

Therefore, you will realize that liberty and democracy are very expensive things, and you have to give life for it. And if we Negroes think we can get all these things without the shedding of blood for them we are making a dreadful mistake. You are not going to get anything unless you organize to fight for it. There are some things you can fight for constitutionally, such as your political rights, your civic rights, but to get liberty you have to shed some blood for it. And that is what the Universal Negro Improvement Association is preparing your minds for—to shed some blood so as to make your race a free and independent race. That blood we are not going to shed in Newport News, that blood we are not going to shed in America,

because America will not be big enough to hold the Negro when the Negro gets ready. But that blood we are preparing to shed one day on the African battlefield, because it is the determination of the New Negro to re-possess himself of that country that God gave his forefathers. Africa is the richest continent in the world; it is the country that has given civilization to mankind and has made the white man what he is.

What the White Man Owes the Negro

After the white man is through abusing the Negro, when he gets back his sober senses, he will realize that he owes all he possesses today to the Negro. The Negro gave him science and art and literature and everything that is dear to him today, and the white man has kept them for thousands of years, and he has taken advantage of the world. He has even gone out of his way to reduce the African that gave him his civilization and kept him as a slave for two hundred and fifty years. But we feel that the time has come when we must take hold of that civilization that we once held. The hour has struck for the Negro to be once more a power in the world, and not all the white men in the world will be able to hold the Negro from becoming a power in the next century. Not even the powers of hell will be able-to stop the Negro in his onward and upward movement. With Jesus as our standard bearer the Negro will march to victory.

The Negro Rules

There will be no democracy in the world until the Negro rules. We have given the white man a chance for thousands of years to show his feeling towards his fellow men. And what has he done up to this twentieth century? He has murdered man; he has massacred man; he has deprived man of his rights even as God gave to man. The white man has shown himself an unfit subject to rule. Therefore he has to step off the stage of action.

I believe it is Shakespeare who said:

The Quality of mercy is not strained,
It droppeth like the gentle rain from
heaven
Upon the place beneath;
It is twice blessed;
It blesseth him that gives and him that
takes.

Has the white man any mercy? Not before the black man returns to power will there be any mercy in the world. The Negro has been the savior of all that has been good for mankind.

But the future portends great things. It portends a leadership of Negroes that will draw man nearer to his God, because in the Negroes' rule there will be mercy, love, and charity to all.

Man Created for a Purpose

I want you colored men and women in Newport News to realize that you form a great part in this creation, for God has created you for a purpose; that purpose you have to keep in view; that purpose you must live. God said through the Psalmist that Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto him and that princes shall come out of Ethiopia. I believe fervently that the hour has come for Ethiopia to stretch forth her hands unto God, and as we are stretching forth our hands unto God in New York, in Pennsylvania, in the West Indies, in Central America, and in Africa and throughout the world I trust that you in Newport News are stretching forth your hands unto God.

Endless Chain of Negroes

There is an endless chain of Negroes all over the world, and wherever Negroes are to be found this day they are suffering from the brutality of the white man, and because Negroes are suffering all over the world we feel that the time has come for the four hundred millions of us scattered all over the world to link up our sentiment for one common purpose—to obtain liberty and democracy.

Africa Must Be Restored

I want you to understand that you have an association that is one of the greatest movements in the world. The New Negro, backed by the Universal Negro Improvement Association, is determined to restore Africa to the world, and you scattered children of Africa in Newport News, you children of Ethiopia, I want you to understand that the call is now made to you. What are you going to do? Are you going to remain to yourselves in Newport News and die? Or are you going to link up your strength, morally and financially, with the other Negroes of the world and let us all fight one battle unto victory? If you are prepared to do the latter, the battle is nearly won, because we of the Universal Negro Improvement Association intend within the next twelve months to roll up a sentiment in the United States of America that will be backed up by fifteen million black folks, so that when in the future you touch one Negro in Newport News you shall have touched fifteen million Negroes of the country. And within the next twenty-four months we intend to roll up an organization of nearly four hundred million people, so that when you touch any Negro in Newport News you touch four hundred million Negroes all over the world at the same time.

Liberty or Death

It falls to the province of every black man and every black woman to be a member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, because there is but one purpose before us, which is the purpose of liberty—that liberty that Patrick Henry spoke about in the legislature of Virginia over one hundred and forty years ago. We new Negroes of America declare that we desire liberty or we will take death. [Cheers.] They called us out but a few months ago to fight three thousand miles away in Europe to save civilization, to give liberty and democracy to the other peoples of the world. And we fought so splendidly, and after we died, after we gave up our blood, and some of us survived and returned to

our respective countries, in America, in the West Indies, in Central America, and in Africa, they told us, as they told us in the past, that this country is the white man's country. What is it but menial opportunities for you where you live in contact with white men? Because they have told us that in America, because they have told us that in France, because they have told us under the government of Great Britain that our opportunities are limited when we come in contact with white men, we say the war is not over yet. The war must go on; only that the war is not going on in France and Flanders, but the war will go on in the African plains, there to decide once and for all in the very near future whether black men are to be serfs and slaves or black men are to be free men.

Black Men Are Going to Be Free

We have decreed that black men are going to be free as white men are free or as yellow men are free. We have declared that if there is to be a British Empire, if there is to be a German Empire, if there is to be a Japanese Empire, if there is to be a French Republic, and if there is to be an American Republic, then there must be a black republic of Africa. [Cheers.]

The White Man Hid the Book from the Negro

The New Negro has given up the idea of white leadership. The white man cannot lead the Negro any longer any more. He was able through our ignorance to lead us for over three hundred years since he took us from Africa, but the New Negro has learned enough now. When the white man took the black man from Africa he took him under a camouflage. He said to the Queen of England that he was taking the black man from Africa for the purpose of civilizing and Christianizing him. But that was not his purpose. The white man's purpose for taking the Negro from his native land was to make a slave of him, to have free labor. Some of us were brought to the Southern States of this country,

some of our brothers and sisters were taken to Central America and others were taken to the West Indian Islands, and we labored under the bonds of slavery for 250 years. The white man never schooled us for the 250 years. He hid the book from us, even the very Bible, and never taught the Negro anything.

The Negro Made a Rush for the Book

But God moves in a mysterious way, and he brought about Lincoln and Victoria, and he said, "You must let those people free," and they did let us free. As soon as we were freed we made a rush to get the book, and we did get the book. We got the Bible first, and we began to sing songs and give praise to God, and that is why the Negro shouts so much in church. But after he was through with the first he got hold of the school book and went from his A B C to Z, and what has happened in fifty years? There is not a white man so educated that you cannot find a Negro to equal him. None in France, none in England, none in America to beat the Negro educationally, and because we stand equal with him we say no longer shall the white man lead us, but we shall lead ourselves.

The Negro and the Gun and Powder

If we had not a complete training in knowledge before 1914 in that we only knew the book and were only able to read and write, they of themselves gave us training and placed two million of us in the army and gave us gun and powder and taught us how to use them. That completed the education of the Negro. Therefore, tonight the Negro stands complete in education. He knows how to read his book, he knows how to figure out, and he knows how to use the sword and the gun. And because he can do these things so splendidly, he is determined that he shall carve the way for himself to true liberty and democracy which the white man denied him after he was called out to shed his blood on the battlefields of France and Flanders.

The Black Star Line Steamship Corporation

I did not come down to Newport News to talk to you merely from a sentimental standpoint. I have come to talk to you from a sentimental and business standpoint. We cannot live on sentiment. We have to live on the material production of the world. I am here representing the Black Star Line Steamship Corporation of the world. The purpose of the Black Star Line Steamship Corporation is to float a line of steamships to run between America, Canada, the West Indies, South and Central America, and Africa, carrying freight and passengers, thus linking up the sentiment and wealth of the four hundred million Negroes of the world. Every day I spend away from New York means a financial loss of \$5,000 a day; but I have sacrificed all that to come and speak to you in Newport News, because you in Newport News have a history in connection with the Black Star Line.

First Stock Sold

I want to say to you that on the 31st of this month the *S.S. Frederick Douglass* will sail out of New York harbor, the property of the Black Star Line—the property of the Negro peoples of the world. I also want you to understand that the first stock that was sold in the Black Star Line was sold in the Dixie Theatre in Newport News. [Cheers.] The first five hundred dollars that we sold was sold in Newport News. Therefore, you gave the real start to the Black Star Line, and as you started the Black Star Line we want you to finish the Black Star Line.

So that is why I took the chance of leaving New York to speak to you in Newport News. I telegraphed your President a few days ago and asked him up to a conference to let him see what New York is doing to come back and tell you. The Negroes are alive in New York and they are alive in Philadelphia also. New York is supplying its quota to the Black Star Line and so is Philadelphia. I have taken the chance to

come to Newport News to find out if you are going to supply your quota towards the Black Star Line. I want you to understand that opportunity is now knocking at your door. You know that opportunity knocks but once at every man's door. The Black Star Line is the biggest industrial and commercial undertaking of the Negro of the Twentieth Century. The Black Star Line opens up the industrial and commercial avenues that were heretofore closed to Negroes.

The Negro Must Protect Himself

Every ship, every house, every store the white man builds, he has his gun and powder to protect them. The white man has surrounded

himself with all the protection necessary to protect his property. The Japanese government protects the yellow man, and the English, German, French, and American governments protect the white man, and the Negro has absolutely no protection. And that is why they lynch and burn us with impunity all over the world, and they will continue to do so until the Negro starts out to protect himself. The Negro cannot protect himself by living alone—he must organize. When you offend one white man in America, you offend ninety millions of white men. When you offend one Negro, the other Negroes are unconcerned because we are not organized. Not until you can offer protection to your race as the white man offers protection to his race, will you be a free and independent people in the world.

ANONYMOUS

As to “The New Negro” (1920)

There is a deal of talk going on nowadays about “The New Negro.” Metropolitan journals have discussed the matter pro and con. Guesses have been hazarded as to what “The New Negro” wants and what he will accomplish. But in our journals the discussion has lacked patronage.

As we are on the inside “looking out,” we have considered our duty to “let the metropolitan journals in” on our analysis of the phase of newness as evident in our group since the great world war.

There is no “New Negro.” The reference to the new race consciousness should not be catalogued as “The New Negro.” What has actually happened is, that “The Old Negro” has found himself. Contact with the races who took part in the great conflict opened the eyes of the sleeping Negro. He realized that he was part

and parcel of the great army of democracy—an integral part of the crusaders for humanity’s cause. And with this realization came the consciousness of pride in himself as a man, and an American citizen. He realized that he was an asset.

And it is this consciousness—which brooks no claptrap—that is being mistaken by our white friends for elements of “newness.”

The contribution of “The Old Negro” to American civilization is as important as the race’s recent contribution to the effort to make the world safe for democracy; and realizing this fact we of today have coupled these contributions in a composite whole, and are demanding that for these we be given our rightful place in the civic and political life of this, our country.

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GEROID ROBINSON

The New Negro (1920)

Before the war, the Negroes of the United States suffered more than a full measure of all the wrongs that have led to the double revolt of small nations and suppressed classes in Europe. Individually the Negro workers, who form a very large portion of the coloured population, have borne all the hardships of their economic class, and collectively the race has been subjected to special disabilities, political, economic and social, such as the limitation of the right to vote and to hold office, the denial of justice, the practices of lynching and peonage, the discrimination of white labour unions, segregation in trains and in residential districts, and the limitation of educational opportunities. Now it is perfectly obvious that every sort of discrimination against Negroes, as such, tends to unite them as a racial group, and it is equally obvious that the appearance of economic differences among the Negroes themselves has exactly the opposite effect. During recent years, the development of economic differentiations has been very marked, but there is some evidence that racial animosity is likewise on the increase; and it is precisely this complication of class and race alignments that makes the Negro problem the most uncertain factor in the future of the country.

The people who are attempting to deal with this situation fall naturally into three groups, as determined by the attitude they take toward the questions of race and class. Certain politicians and an increasing number of welfare-workers and educators hold an essentially liberal position, in that they disregard racial and economic divisions and attempt to appeal to black men and white as individual citizens. The second group champions socialism and industrial unionism, and attempts to unite all workers, irrespective of race and colour, upon the basis of common economic interest. The third group considers white Socialists almost as hateful as white Democrats; and against them all it

preaches the doctrine of racial unity, Negro nationalism, and the final overthrow of Caucasian supremacy.

In so far as it may be classed as an attempt at solution, the whole "Black Republican" movement belongs to the category of non-racial, non-economic answers to the Negro problem. Tradition and sentiment have bound the coloured people so completely to the Grand Old Party, that Republican candidates have generally secured the black vote without giving either promise or performance in return. It would be hard to find better proof of this proposition than is contained in the report on a questionnaire sent by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People to seventeen presidential candidates now before the country. In the questionnaire the candidates were asked to state, among other things, whether they would favour the enactment of Federal laws against lynching, and the enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment by the reduction of the representation of States which disfranchise some of their citizens. In reply, Senator Harding stated that it was the business of the national conventions to frame platforms and policies, and Senator Poindexter declared himself "in favour of maintaining the legal rights and opportunities of all citizens, regardless of colour or condition." As for the rest, Citizens Hoover and Johnson were as silent as Generals Wood and Pershing. The point is this: in the Northern States, where the coloured vote counts, the Negroes will vote Republican whatever happens; whereas some of the Northern white men might be frightened into democracy by too much pro-Africanism on the part of the Republican candidate. On the other hand, the coloured vote in the South isn't worth a buffalo nickel to anybody under present conditions, and can hardly be made so at an early date, by any means short of another Civil War.

The mess the Arkansas Republicans have gotten into will show pretty clearly how the black

Republican vote is handled south of the Line. When Negro delegates were denied seats at the State Convention at Little Rock, they bolted and elected their own delegates to the National Convention, and also nominated a Negro candidate for governor. The entire delegations to the Republican National Convention from Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia are being contested; of 122 places in the Convention now in dispute, 118 are from Southern Democratic States, where the fight between the so-called "Lily White" and "Black and Tan" elements is running its usual course. And the saddest part of it is, that all this fuss is being made over the business of nominating a candidate who will promise the southern Negroes nothing, and for whom most of them will not be allowed to vote.

If the Republicans disregard racial and economic lines, the educational-welfare groups go even farther toward universal brotherhood by dropping even political partisanship. Somewhat typical of this attitude are the rejoicings of Robert R. Moton, President of Tuskegee Institute, over the fact that although there are 15,000,000 Negroes in this country, not one of them was ever captured in the Federal dragnets which recently gathered in bolsheviks, anarchists, and other "reds". President Moton's conclusion is that "the loyalty of the Negro race can never be questioned."

The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People fairly represents the co-operation of white and coloured citizens in the liberal "appeal to the conscience of America" on behalf of the civil and political rights of the Negro. The Board of Directors of the association is half white and half coloured, and its membership of 91,000 is about 90 percent coloured. *The Crisis*, a magazine published by this organization, has a circulation of about 100,000 copies per month, some of which go to Africa. The Association has no economic or political programme, and its appeal is quite specifically an appeal to the righteous; nevertheless, its work in general, and its agitation against lynching in particular, have unquestionably been of very considerable value.

The civil-rights programme of the N.A.A.C.P. is supplemented, on the side of industrial welfare, by the work of the National Urban League. It is the aim of this organization to open up new industrial opportunities to Negro workers, and to give attention to conditions of work and recreation in communities where Negroes are employed in considerable numbers. During 1919 the various locals of the League persuaded the managers of 135 industrial plants to employ Negroes for the first time; and during the same period twenty-two welfare workers were placed in plants where Negroes were engaged. The organization has also declared its sympathy with efforts to unionize Negro labour.

At the last National Convention of the American Federation of Labour, it became evident that trade unionism was prepared to give considerable attention to the organization of Negro workers. Forty-six or more of the hundred and thirteen Internationals included in the Federation already admit Negro members, and the Convention for 1919 voted to bring pressure to bear upon the other Internationals by organizing independent locals directly under the Federation wherever the existing unions will not accept coloured applicants. According to a statement made by President Gompers, the A.F. of L. now has two paid organizers and thirteen volunteers at work among the Negroes.

But respectable trade-unionism—like Republican politics, and the liberal appeal to the American conscience—is by no means satisfactory to the leaders of the second major school of thought on the Negro problem. Here, in place of a liberal disregard of class and race lines, we have the preaching of a class-war in which "the workers of the world," irrespective of race and colour, are urged to unite against their oppressors. In politics this group is Socialist; in the field of labour-organization, it inclines to favour the I.W.W rather than the unions of the A.F. of L. The Socialist Party, on its part, has recognized the potential value of the Negro vote, and has included in its national platform a declaration in favour of full political and economic rights for Negroes; this party has also made special provision for the spread of

propaganda among the Negroes, and has employed three organizers for this purpose. No statistics are available as to the number of Negro Socialists in this country; but, according to the statement of an I.W.W. organizer, ten percent of the members of the latter organization are coloured; in other words, the membership of the I. W. W. corresponds pretty closely with the population of the United States in the matter of colour-composition.

The chief organ of the Negro Socialist-syndicalists—a magazine with a circulation of some 20,000 copies a month—is characterized in the following terms by Attorney-General Palmer:

The *Messenger* [he says] . . . is by long odds the most able and the most dangerous of all the Negro publications. It is representative of the most educated thought among the Negroes.

Referring to the Socialist party, and to the National Labour party, which has also adopted a demand in favour of Negro rights, this interesting publication says:

We have constantly maintained that the solution of the Negro problem rests with the alliance of Negroes with radical organizations. . . . Here are two organizations largely composed of white people, who have adopted fundamental methods for the solution of the problems affecting the white and Negro races in the United States. This is not because there is any special love for the Negro on the part of the groups which compose these conventions, but because it is impossible for them to attain the ends and objects at which they are aiming unless these fundamental rights of the Negro are granted to him.

In another number the editor speaks further in the same vein:

We do not depend upon professions of friendship or flowery promises, but only intelligent self-interest. The position of white labour is already changing rapidly in its

relation to Negro labour, not because white labour likes Negro labour any better, but because it realizes that the only way white labour can raise its standard of living is to raise the standard of living of its competitors. This sound position will be taken by white labour as rapidly as it becomes more intelligent and class conscious. . . .

Our political philosophy is Socialism, not State Socialism. For more than two years, now, it has functioned in Russia. . . . The [Negro] Left Wing group holds that the greatest power the Negro possesses is his power to combine with the Socialist present minority and assist it in becoming the majority.

It would appear then that the *Messenger* group is convinced that the solution of the Negro problem is to be found in the solidarity of all workers, white and black. And yet it is very evident that, from time to time, lynchings and race-riots put a rude strain upon the inter-racial creed of these Socialist-syndicalists. Take, for example, this quotation, also from the *Messenger*:

We are . . . urging Negroes and other oppressed groups confronted with lynching or mob violence to act upon the recognized and accepted law of self-defence. . . . The black man has no rights which will be respected unless the black man enforces that respect. It is his business to decide that just as he went 3000 miles away to fight for alleged democracy in Europe and for others, he can lay down his life, honourably and peacefully, for himself in the United States. . . . New Negroes are determined to make their dying a costly investment for all concerned. . . . This new spirit is but a reflex of the Great War.

And it is this spirit that, in time of pressure—in the time of such riots as those of Washington and Chicago—must unite the Negro radicals with the supporters of the third and most startling answer to the race problem—“African nationalism.” Perhaps this expression will always

remain strange to American ears—and then again it may become quite familiar within a few years. For, after all, a rebellious hatred of the white race as a whole is the Negro's easiest reaction to wrongs, most of which certainly seem to fall upon him rather as a black man than as a workingman; this rebellious spirit needs only a common racial objective to give it unity, and that it seems now in a measure to have gotten. The "Negro-First" propaganda is largely the work of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League of the World—an organization which claims a million adherents in the United States, the West Indies, South America, and South Africa, and announces as its final object the establishment of a black empire in Africa. The following quotation from the *Negro World* will give an idea of the nature of this remarkable movement:

Mobs of white men all over the world will continue to lynch and burn Negroes as long as we remain divided among ourselves. The very moment all the Negroes of this and other countries start to stand together, that very time will see the white man standing in fear of the Negro race even as he stands in fear of the yellow race of Japan to-day. The Negro must now organize all over the world, 400,000,000 strong, to administer to our oppressors their Waterloo. . . . Let every Negro all over the world prepare for the new emancipation. The Fatherland, Africa, has been kept by God Almighty for the Negro to redeem, and we, young men and women of the race, have pledged ourselves to plant there the flag of freedom and of empire.

Connected with the U. N. I. A. are the Black Star Steamship Line, capitalized at \$10,000,000, and the Negro Factories Corporation, capitalized at \$1,000,000. Just what these astonishing figures represent in actual cash we have no means of knowing, but this much is certain: the Black Star Steamship Line has already in operation one of the multitude of steamers which—say the prophets of the movement—will some day ply between the Negro lands of the world. To cap the climax, the U. N. I. A. will hold in New York during the month of August

an "International Convention of Deputies" who will elect "His Supreme Highness; the Potentate; His Highness, the Supreme Deputy, and other high officials who will preside over the destiny of the Negro peoples of the world until the African Empire is founded."

However laughable this language may be, there is no doubt that something is happening in the Negro world—something that can not be laughed down, any more than the Germans could laugh down the Senegalese. If any further proof of this is needed, it can be found in the pages of a magazine called the *Crusader*. On the cover of this magazine is the figure of a black man bearing a spear and a shield, and inside one finds this sort of thing:

Let us notice a combat between black boys and white boys and we will see that the blacks exchange two or three cuffs for one. And no single white man will attack a Negro until he is first sure that he has some other help than himself, for the Negro would endeavour to greet him with such blows as only one who knows that there is no other god but God can. . . . Do not fail to teach your children the truth, for Africa is our heritage, the hope of our salvation.

And in another number, this:

What the Negro needs to know is that in many qualities he is the superior of the white man. He needs to know these qualities and to believe in them and insist on them.

To complete the familiar paraphernalia of nationalism with historical illusion, the coloured people are urged by the *Negro World* to "restore the ancient glories of Ethiopia."

In the face of this movement, American liberalism seeks to preserve its calm unconsciousness of race; even as it has sought to keep up the appearance of moral disinterestedness in the realm of economic interests. And just as the liberals, for all their good intentions, did not succeed in forestalling class-movements among the white workers, it is pretty certain that they can not find palliatives enough to sweep back "the rising tide of colour." The Socialist-syndicalist group, on the other hand, replaces

the appeal to racial unity with a frank appeal to economic interest.

The conflict between the class-movement and the race-movement is fundamental and direct. If the expansion of American unionism leaves the Negroes for the most part unorganized, the white workers may rest assured that their coloured competitors will turn to racial

organization—black unions against white. If, on the other hand, the Negro workers can be absorbed into a general labour movement, the race problem may lose some of its difficulty, as, in the course of time, the labour-problem approaches a solution. Racial division may serve the interests of the old order for the present, but in the end it will profit no one but the munitions-makers.

HUBERT H. HARRISON

The New Politics (1920)

The New Politics for the New Negro

The world of the future will look upon the world of today as an essentially new turning point in the path of human progress. All over the world the spirit of democratic striving is making itself felt. The new issues have brought forth new ideas of freedom, politics, industry, and society at large. The New Negro living in this new world is just as responsive to these new impulses as other people are.

In the "good old days" it was quite easy to tell the Negro to follow in the footsteps of those who had gone before. The mere mention of the name Lincoln or the Republican Party was sufficient to secure his allegiance to that party which had seen him stripped of all political power and of civil rights without protest—effective or otherwise.

Things are different now. The New Negro is demanding elective representation in Baltimore, Chicago, and other places. He is demanding it in New York. The pith of the present occasion is that he is no longer begging or asking. He is demanding as a right that which he is in position to enforce.

In the presence of this new demand the old political leaders are bewildered, and afraid; for the old idea of Negro leadership by virtue of the white man's selection has collapsed. The New Negro leader must be chosen by his fellows—by those whose strivings he is supposed to represent.

Any man today who aspires to lead the Negro race must set squarely before his face the idea of "Race First." Just as the white men of these and other lands are white men before they are Christians, Anglo-Saxons or Republicans; so the Negroes before they are Christians, English men, or Republicans.

Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Charity begins at home, and our first duty is to ourselves. It is not what we wish but what we must, that we are concerned with. The world, as it ought to be, is still for us, as for others, the world that does not exist. The world as it is the real world, and it is to that real world that we address ourselves. Striving to be men, and finding no effective aid in government or in politics, the Negro of the Western world must follow the path of the Swadesha movement of India and the Sinn Fein movement of Ireland. The meaning of both these terms is "ourselves first." This is the mental background of the new politics of the New Negro, and we commend it to the consideration of all the political parties. For it is upon this background that we will predicate such policies as shall seem to us necessary and desirable.

In the British Parliament the Irish Home Rule Party clubbed its full strength and devoted itself so exclusively to the cause of Free Ireland that it virtually dictated for a time the policies of Liberals and Conservatives alike.

The new Negro race in America will not achieve political self-respect until it is in a position to

the appeal to racial unity with a frank appeal to economic interest.

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In the British Parliament the Irish Home Rule Party clubbed its full strength and devoted itself so exclusively to the cause of Free Ireland that it virtually dictated for a time the policies of Liberals and Conservatives alike.

The new Negro race in America will not achieve political self-respect until it is in a position to

organize itself as a politically independent party and follow the example of the Irish Home Rulers. This is what will happen in American politics.
—September 1917.

The Drift in Politics

The Negroes of America—those of them who think—are suspicious of everything that comes from the white people of America. They have seen that every movement for the extension of democracy here has broken down as soon as it reached the color line. Political democracy that declared that “all men are created equal,” meant only all white men; the Christian church found that the brotherhood of man did not include God’s bastard children; the public school system proclaimed that the school house was the backbone of democracy “for white people only,” and the civil service says that Negroes must keep their place—at the bottom. So they can hardly be blamed for looking askance at any new gospel of freedom. Freedom to them has been like one of

those juggling fiends
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.

In this connection, some explanation of the former political solidarity of those Negroes who were voters may be of service. Up to six years ago the one great obstacle to the political progress of the colored people was their sheep-like allegiance to the Republican Party. They were taught to believe that God had raised up a peculiar race of men called Republicans who had loved the slaves so tenderly that they had taken guns in their hands and rushed on the ranks of the Southern slaveholders to free the slaves; that this race of men was still in existence, marching under the banner of the Republican Party and showing their great love for Negroes by appointing from six to sixteen near-Negroes to soft political snaps. Today that great political superstition is falling to pieces before the advance of intelligence among Negroes. They begin to realize that they were sold out by the Republican Party in 1876; that in the last

twenty-five years lynchings have increased, disfranchisement has spread all over the South and “Jim-crow” cars run even into the national capitol—with the continuing consent of a Republican Congress, a Republican Supreme Court, and Republican president.

Ever since the Brownsville affair, but more clearly since Taft declared and put in force the policy of pushing out the few near-Negro officeholders, the rank and file have come to see that the Republican Party is a great big sham. Many went over to the Democratic Party because, as the *Amsterdam News* puts it. “They had nowhere else to go.” Twenty years ago the colored men who joined that party were ostracized as scalawags and crooks. But today, the defection to the Democrats of such men as Bishop Walters, Wood, Morton, Carr and Langston—whose uncle was a colored Republican congressman from Virginia—has made the colored democracy respectable and given quite a tone to political heterodoxy.

All this loosens the bonds of their allegiance and breaks the bigotry of the last forty years. But of this change in their political view-point the white world knows nothing. The two leading Negro newspapers are subsidized by the same political pirates who own the title-deeds to the handful of hirelings holding office in the name of the Negro race. One of these papers is an organ of Mr. Washington, the other pretends to be independent—that is it must be bought on the installment plan, and both of them are in New York. Despite this “conspiracy of silence” the Negroes are waking up, are beginning to think for themselves, to look with more favor on “new doctrines.”¹

Today the politician who wants the support of the Negro voter will have to give something more than pie-crust promises. The old professional “friend to the colored people” must have something more solid than the name of Lincoln and party appointments.

We demand what the Irish and the Jewish voter get: nominations on the party’s tickets in our own districts. And if we don’t get this we will smash the party that refuses to give it.

For we are not Republicans, Democrats or Socialists any longer. We are Negroes first. And

we are no longer begging for sops. We demand, not "recognition," but representation, and we are out to throw our votes to *any* party which gives us this, and withhold them from any party which refuses to give it. No longer will we follow any leader whose job the party controls. For we know that no leader so controlled can oppose such party in our interests beyond a given point.

That is why so much interest attaches to the mass meeting to be held at Palace Casino on the 29th where the Citizens' Committee will make its report to the Negro voters of Harlem and tell them how it was "turned down" by the local representatives of the Republican Party when it begged the boon of elective representation. All such rebuffs will make for manhood—if we are men—and will drive us to play in American politics the same role which the Irish party played in British politics. That is the new trend in Negro politics, and we must not let any party forget it.—1917.

A Negro for President

For many years the Negro has been the football of American politics. Kicked from pillar to post, he goes begging, hat in hand, from a Republican convention to a Democratic one. Always is he asking some one else to do something for him. Always is he begging, pleading, demanding, or threatening. In all these cases his dependence is on the good will, sense of justice, or gratitude of the other fellow. And in none of these cases is the political reaction of the other fellow within the control of the Negro.

But a change for the better is approaching. Four years ago, the present writer was propounding in lectures, indoors and outdoors, the thesis that the Negro people of America would never amount to anything much politically until they should see fit to imitate the Irish of Britain and to organize themselves into a political party of their own whose leaders, on the basis of this large collective vote, could "hold up" Republicans, Democrats, Socialists, or any other political group of American whites. As in many other cases, we have lived to see time ripen the fruits of our own thought for some one else

to pluck. Here is the editor of the *Challenge* making a campaign along these very lines. His version of the idea takes the form of advocating the nomination of a Negro for the presidency of United States. In this form we haven't the slightest doubt that this idea will meet with a great deal of ridicule and contempt. Nevertheless, we venture to prophesy that, whether in the hands of Mr. Bridge or another, it will come to be ultimately accepted as one of the finest contributions to Negro statesmanship.

No one pretends, of course, that the votes of Negroes can elect a Negro to the high office of president of the United States. Nor would any one expect that the votes of white people will be forthcoming to assist them in such project. The only way in which a Negro could be elected President of the United States would be by virtue of the voters not knowing that the particular candidate was of Negro ancestry. This, we believe, has already happened within the memory of living men. But the essential intent of this new plan is to furnish a focusing-point around which the ballots of the Negro voters may be concentrated for the realization of racial demands for justice and equality of opportunity and treatment. It would be carrying "Race First" with a vengeance into the arena of domestic politics. It would take the Negro voter out of the ranks of the Republican, Democratic, and Socialist parties and would enable their leaders to trade the votes of their followers, openly and above-board, for those things for which masses of men largely exchange their votes.

Mr. Bridges will find that the idea of a Negro candidate for President presupposes the creation of a purely Negro party and upon that prerequisite he will find himself compelled to concentrate. Doubtless, most of the political wise-acres of the Negro race will argue that the idea is impossible because it antagonizes the white politicians of the various parties. They will close their eyes to the fact that politics implies antagonism and a conflict of interest. They will fail to see that the only things which count with politicians are votes, and that, just as one white man will cheerfully cut another white man's throat to get the dollars which a black man has, so will one white politician or party

cut another one's throat politically to get the votes which black men may cast at the polls. But these considerations will finally carry the day. Let there be no mistake. The Negro will never be accepted by the white American democracy except in so far as he can by the use of force, financial, political, or other, win, seize or maintain in the teeth of opposition that position which he finds necessary to his own security and salvation. And we Negroes may as well make up our minds now that we can't depend upon the good-will of white men in anything or at any point where our interests and theirs conflict. Disguise it as we may, in business, politics, education, or other departments of life, we as Negroes are compelled to fight for what we want to win from the white world.

It is easy enough for those colored men whose psychology is shaped by their white inheritance to argue the ethics of compromise and inter-racial co-operation. But we whose brains are still unbastardized must face the frank realities of this situation of racial conflict and competition. Wherefore, it is well that we marshal our forces to withstand and make head against the constant racial pressure. Action and reaction are equal and opposite. Where there is but slight pressure a slight resistance will suffice. But where, as in our case, that pressure is grinding and pitiless, the resistance that would re-establish equal conditions of freedom must of necessity be intense and radical. And it is this philosophy which must furnish the motive for such a new and radical departure as is implied in the joint idea of a Negro party in American politics and a Negro candidate for the Presidency of these United States.—June 1920.

When the Tail Wags the Dog

Politically, these United States may be roughly divided into two sections, so far as the Negroes are concerned. In the North the Negro population has the vote. In the South it hasn't. This was not always so. There was a time when the Negro voters of the South sent in to Congress a thin but steady stream of black men who represented their political interest directly. Due to the misadventures of the Reconstruction period,

this stream was shut off until at the beginning of this century George White, of North Carolina, was the sole and last representative of the black man with a ballot in the South.

This result was due largely to the characteristic stupidity of the Negro voter. He was a Republican, he was. He would do anything with his ballot for Abraham Lincoln—who was dead—but not a thing for himself and his family, who were all alive and kicking. For this the Republican Party loved him so much that it permitted the Democrats to disfranchise him while it controlled Congress and the courts, the army and navy, and all the machinery of law-enforcement in the Untied States. With its continuing conesnt, Jim-crowism, disfranchisement, segregation, and lynching spread abroad over the land. The end of it all was the reduction of the Negro in the South to the position of a political serf, an industrial peon and a social outcast.

Recently there has been developed in the souls of black folk a new manhood dedicated to the proposition that, if all Americans are equal in the matter of baring their breast to foreign bayonets, then all Americans must, by their own efforts, be made equal in balloting for residents and other officers of the government. This principle is compelling the Republican Party in certain localities to consider the necessity of nominating Negroes on its local electoral tickets. Yet the old attitude of that party on the political rights of Negroes remains substantially the same.

Here, for instance, is the Chicago convention, at which the Negro delegates were lined up to do their duty by the party. Of course, these delegates had to deal collectively with the white leaders. This was to their mutual advantage. But the odd feature of the entire affair was: *Whereas the Negro people in the South are not free to cast their votes it was precisely from these voteless areas that the national Republican leaders selected the political spokesmen for the voting Negroes of the North.* Men who will not vote at the coming election and men who, like Roscoe Simmons, never cast a vote in their lives were the accredited representatives in whose hands lay the destiny of a million Negro voters.

But there need be no fear that this insult will annoy the black brother in the Republican ranks.

A Negro Republican generally runs the rhinoceros and the elephant a close third. In plain English, the average Negro Republican is too stupid to see and too meek to mind. Then, too, here is Fate's retribution for the black man in the North who has never cared enough to fight (the Republican Party) for the political freedom of his brother in the South, but left him to rot under poll-tax laws and grandfather clauses. The Northern white Democrats, for letting their Southern brethren run riot through the Constitution, must pay the penalty of being led into the ditch by the most ignorant, stupid, and vicious portion of their party. Even so, the Northern Negro Republican, for letting his Southern brothers remain a political ragamuffin, must now stomach the insult of this same ragamuffin dictating the destiny of the freer Negroes of the North. In both cases the tail doth wag the dog because of "the solid South." Surely, "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether!"—July, 1920.

The Grand Old Party

In the early days of 1861, when the Southern senators and representatives were relinquishing their seats in the United States Congress and hurling cartels of defiant explanation broadcast, the Republican Party in Congress, under the leadership of Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts, organized a joint committee made up of thirteen members of the Senate and thirty-three members of the House to make overtures to the seceding Southerners. The result of this friendly gesture was a proposed Thirteenth Amendment, which, if the Southerners had not been so obstinate, would have bridged the chasm. For this amendment proposed to make the slavery of the black man in America eternal and inescapable. It provided that no amendment to the Constitution, or any other proposition affecting slavery in any way, could ever be legally presented upon the floor of Congress unless its mover had secured the previous consent of *every senator and representative from the slave-holding states*. It put teeth into the Fugitive Slaves Law and absolutely gave the Negro over into the keeping of his oppressors.

Most Negro Americans (and white ones, too) think it fashionable to maintain the most fervid faith and deepest ignorance about points in their national history of which they should be informed. We therefore submit that these facts are open and notorious to those who know American history. The record will be found slimly and shame facedly given in McPherson's *History of the Rebellion*; at indignant length in Blaine's *Twenty Years of Congress*, and Horace Greeley's *The Great American Conflict*. The document can be examined in Professor Macdonald's *Select Documents of United States History*. These works are to be found in every public library, and we refer to them here because there are "intellectual" Negroes today who are striving secretly, when they dare not do so openly, to perpetuate the bonds of serfdom which bind the Negro Americans to the Republican Party. This bond of serfdom, this debt of gratitude, is supposed to hinge on the love which Abraham Lincoln and his party are supposed to have borne towards the Negro; and the object of this appeal to the historical record is to show that that record demonstrates that if the Negro owes any debt to the Republican Party it is a debt of execration and of punishment rather than one of gratitude.

It is an astounding fact that in his First Inaugural Address Abraham Lincoln gave his explicit approval to the substance of the Crittenden resolutions which the joint committee referred to above had collectively taken over. This demonstrates that the Republican Party at the very beginning of its contact with the Negro was willing to sell the Negro, bound hand and foot, for the substance of its own political control. This Thirteenth Amendment was adopted by six or eight Northern States, including Pennsylvania and Illinois: and if Fort Sumter had not been fired upon it would have become by state action the law of the land.

The Republican Party did not fight for the freedom of the Negro, but for the maintenance of its own grip on the government which the election of Abraham Lincoln had secured. If any one wants to know for what the Republican Party fought he will find it in such facts as this: That thousands of square miles of the people's

property were given away to Wall Street magnates who had corrupted the Legislature in their effort to build railroads on the government's money. The sordid story is given in "Forty Years in Wall Street," by the banker, Henry Clews, and others who took part in this raid upon the resources of a great but stupid people.

But the Civil War phase of the Republican Party's treason to the Negro is not the only outstanding one, as was shown by the late General Tremaine in his "Sectionalism Unmasked." Not only was General Grant elected in 1868 by the newly created Negro vote, as the official records prove, but his re-election in 1872 was effected by the same means. So was the election of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876. Yet when the election of Hayes had been taken before the overwhelmingly Republican Congress this shameless party made a deal whereby, in order to pacify the white "crackers" of the South, the Negro was given over into the hands of the triumphant Ku-Klux; the soldiers who protected their access to the ballot box in the worst southern states were withdrawn, while the "crackers" agreed as the price of this favor to withdraw their opposition to the election of Hayes. For this there exists ample proof which will be presented upon the challenge of any politician or editor. As a Republican senator from New England shamelessly said, it was a matter of "Root, hog, or die" for the helpless Negro whose ballots had buttressed the Republican Party's temple of graft and corruption. So was reconstruction settled against the Negro by the aid and abetting of the Republican Party.

And since that time lynching, disfranchisement, and segregation have grown with the Republican Party in continuous control of the government from 1861 to 1920—with the exception of eight years of Woodrow Wilson and eight years of Grover Cleveland. With their continuing consent the South has been made solid, so that at every Republican convention delegates who do not represent a voting constituency but a grafting collection of white postmasters and their Negro lackeys can turn the scales of nomination in favor of any person whom the central clique of the party, controlled as it has always been by Wall Street financiers, may foist upon a

disgusted people, as they have done in the case of Harding. So long as the South remains solid, so long will the Republican delegates from the South consist of only this handful of hirelings; so long will they be amenable to the "discipline" which means the pressure of the jobs by which they get their bread. Therefore the Republican leaders will know that the solidarity of the South is their most valuable asset; and they are least likely to do anything that will break that solidarity. The Republican Party's only interest in the Negro is to get his vote for nothing; and so long as Negro Republican leaders remain the contemptible grafters and political procurers that they are at present, so long will it get Negro votes for nothing.

Through it all the Republican Party remains the most corrupt influence among Negro Americans. It buys up by jobs, appointments and gifts those Negroes who in politics should be the free and independent spokesmen of Negro Americans. But worse than this is its private work in which it secretly subsidizes men who pose before the public as independent radicals. These intellectual pimps draw private supplementary incomes from the Republican Party to sell out the influence of any movement, church, or newspaper with which they are connected. Of the enormity of this mode of procedure and the extent to which it saps the very springs of Negro integrity the average Negro knows nothing. Its blighting, baleful influence is known only to those who have trained ears to hear and trained eyes to see.

And now in this election the standards will advance and the cohorts go forward under the simple impulse of the same corrupting influence. But whether the new movement for a Negro party comes to a head or not the new Negro in America will never amount to anything politically until he enfranchises himself from the Grand Old Party which has made a political joke of him.—July 1920.

NOTE

1. The first part of this editorial is reprinted from an article written in 1912.

HUBERT H. HARRISON

Education and the Race (1925)

[With most of the present sources of power controlled by the white race it behooves my race as well as the other subject races to learn the wisdom of the weak and to develop to the fullest that organ whereby weakness has been able to overcome strength; namely, the intellect. It is not with our teeth that we will tear the white man out of our ancestral land. It isn't with our jaws that we can ring from his hard hands consideration and respect. It must be done by the upper and not by the lower parts of our heads. Therefore, I have insisted ever since my entry into the arena of racial discussion that we Negroes must take to reading, study, and the development of intelligence as we have never done before. In this respect we must pattern ourselves after the Japanese who have gone to school to Europe but have never used Europe's education to make them the apes of Europe's culture. They have absorbed, adopted, transformed, and utilized, and we Negroes must do the same. The three editorials in this chapter and the article which follows them were written to indicate from time to time the duty of the transplanted African in this respect.]

Reading for Knowledge

Some time ago we wrote an editorial entitled "Read, Read, Read!" We touch upon the same subject again, because in our recent trip to Washington we found thousands of people who are eager to get in touch with the stored-up knowledge which the books contain, but do not know just where to turn for it. In New York the

same situation obtains, and no help is afforded by the papers of our race.

The reason is that some of our newspaper editors don't read and don't know beans themselves. James W. Johnson is one of the notable exceptions. We were cheered up a good deal by noting his recent editorial advice to our "leaders" to read Arthur Henderson's "The Aims of Labor." But that was six months after the editor of *The Voice* had been telling thousands of the "led" all about it and about the British Labor Party and the Russian Bolsheviks in his outdoor talks in Harlem.

But there is no doubt that the New Negro is producing a New Leadership and that this new leadership will be based not upon the ignorance of the masses, but upon their intelligence. The old leadership was possible partly because the masses were ignorant. Today the masses include educated laymen who have studied science, theology, history, and economics, not, perhaps in college but, nevertheless, deeply and down to date. These young men and women are not going to follow fools and, indeed, are not going to follow *any one*, blindly. They want a reason for the things that they are asked to do and to respect. The others, the so-called Common People, are beginning to read and understand. As we sat in the great John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church in Washington one Sunday night, and heard the cultured black minister speak to his people on literature, science, history, and sociology, and yet so simply that even the dullest could catch the meat and inspiration of his great ideas, we could not help saying as we went out of the church: "Depend upon it, these people will demand as much from their next minister." In fact our race will demand as much from *all* its leaders. And they will demand no less for themselves.

So, with a glad heart, we reprint the following paragraphs from our earlier editorial

trusting that our readers everywhere may find them helpful:

As a people our bent for books is not encouraging. We mostly read trash. And this is true not only of our rank and file but even of our leaders. When we heard Kelly Miller address the Sunrise Club of New York at a Broadway hotel two or three years ago, we were shocked at the ignorance of modern science and modern thought which his remarks displayed. His biology was of the brand of Pliny, who lived about eighteen hundred years ago. For him Darwin and Spencer and Jacques Loeb had never existed or written. His ignorance of the A B C's of astronomy and geology was pitiful.

If this is true of the leaders to whom our reading masses look, what can we expect from those reading masses? The masses must be taught to love good books. But to love them they must first know them. The handicaps placed on us in America are too great to allow us to ignore the help which we can get from that education which we get out of school for ourselves—the only one that is really worth while.

Without the New Knowledge the New Negro is no better than the old. And this new knowledge will be found in the books. Therefore, it would be well if every Negro of the new model were to make up his (or her) mind to get the essentials of modern science and modern thought as they are set down in the books which may be easily had. Don't talk about Darwin and Spencer: read them!

To help the good work along we append the following list of books that are essential. When you *master* these you will have a better "education" than is found in nine-tenths of the graduates of the average American college.

Modern Science and Modern Thought, by Samuel Laing; *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, by Charles Darwin; *The Principles of Sociology* and *First Principles*, by Herbert Spencer; *The Childhood of the World* and *The Childhood of Religion*, by Edward Clodd; *Anthropology*,

by E. B. Tylor (very easy to read and a work of standard information on Races, Culture and the origins of Religion, Art and Science); Buckle's *History of Civilization*; Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; *The Martyrdom of Man*, by Winwood Reade; the books on Africa by Livingstone and Mungo Park, and *The Mind of Primitive Man*, by Franz Boas.—Sept. 1918.

Education and the Race

In the dark days of Russia, when the iron heel of Czarist despotism was heaviest on the necks of the people, those who wished to rule decreed that the people should remain ignorant. Loyalty to interests that were opposed to theirs was the prevailing public sentiment of the masses. In vain did the pioneers of freedom for the masses perish under the knout and the rigors of Siberia. They sacrificed to move the masses, but the masses, strong in their love of liberty, lacked the head to guide the moving feet to any successful issue. It was then that Leo Tolstoi and the other intelligentsia began to carry knowledge to the masses. Not only in the province of Tula, but in every large city, young men of university experience would assemble in secret classes of instruction, teaching them to read, to write, to know, to think, and to love knowledge. Most of this work was underground at first. But it took. Thousands of educated persons gave themselves to this work—without pay: their only hope of reward lay in the future effectiveness of an instructed mass movement.

What were the results? As knowledge spread, enthusiasm was backed by brains. The Russian revolution began to be sure of itself. The workingmen of the cities studied the thing that they were "up against," gauged their own weakness and strength as well as their opponents'. The despotism of the Czar could not provoke them to a mass movement before they were ready and had the means; and when at last they moved, they swept not only the Czar's regime but the whole exploiting system upon which it stood into utter oblivion.

What does this mean to the Negro of the Western world? It may mean much, or little: that depends on him. If other men's experiences have value for the New Negro Manhood Movement it will seek now to profit by them and to bottom the new fervor of faith in itself with the solid support of knowledge. The chains snap from the limbs of the young giant as he rises, stretches himself, and sits up to take notice. But let him, for his future's sake, insist on taking notice. To drop the figure of speech, we Negroes who have shown our *manhood* must back it by our *mind*. This world, at present, is a white man's world—even in Africa. We, being what we are, want to shake loose the chains of his control from our corner of it. We must either accept his domination and our inferiority, or we must contend against it. But we go up to win: and whether we carry on that contest with ballots, bullets, or business, we can not win from the white man unless we know at least as much as the white man knows. For, after all, knowledge *is* power.

But that isn't all. What kind of knowledge is it that enables white men to rule black men's lands? Is it the knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, philosophy, or literature? It isn't. It is the knowledge of explosives and deadly compounds: that is chemistry. It is the knowledge which can build ships, bridges, railroads, and factories: that is engineering. It is the knowledge which harnesses the visible and invisible forces of the earth and air and water: that is science, modern science. And that is what the New Negro must enlist upon his side. Let us, like the Japanese, become a race of knowledge-getters, preserving our racial soul, but digesting into it all that we can glean or grasp, so that when Israel goes up out of bondage he will be "skilled in all the learning of the Egyptians" and competent to control his destiny.

Those who have knowledge must come down from their Sinai's and give it to the common people. Theirs is the great duty to simplify and make clear, to light the lamps of knowledge that the eyes of their race may see; that the feet of their people may not stumble. This is the task of the Talented Tenth.

To the masses of our people we say: Read! Get the reading habit; spend your spare time

not so much in training the feet to dance, as in training the head to think. And, at the very outset, draw the line between books of opinion and books of information. Saturate your minds with the latter and you will be forming your own opinions, which will be worth ten times more to you than the opinions of the greatest minds on earth. Go to school whenever you can. If you can't go in the day, go at night. But remember always that the best college is that on your bookshelf: the best education is that on the inside of your own head. For in this work-a-day world people ask first, not "Where were you educated?" but "What do you know?" and next, "What can you do with it?" And if we of the Negro race can master modern knowledge—the kind that counts—we will be able to win for ourselves the priceless gifts of freedom and power, and we will be able to hold them against the world.

The Racial Roots of Culture

Education is the name which we give to that process by which the ripened generation brings to bear upon the rising generation the stored-up knowledge and experience of the past and present generations to fit it for the business of life. If we are not to waste money and energy, our educational systems should shape our youth for what we intend them to become.

We Negroes, in a world in which we are the under-dog, must shape our youth for living in such a world. Shall we shape them mentally to accept the status of under-dog as their predestined lot? Or shall we shape them into men and women fit for a free world? To do the former needs nothing more than continuing as we are. To do the latter is to shape their souls for continued conflict with a theory and practice in which most of the white world that surrounds them are at one.

The educational system in the United States and the West Indies was shaped by white people for white youth, and from their point of view, it fits their purpose well. Into this system came the children of Negro parents when chattel slavery was ended—and their relation to the

problems of life was obviously different. The white boy and girl draw exclusively from the stored-up knowledge and experience of the past and present generations of white people to fit them for the business of being dominant whites in a world full of colored folk. The examples of valor and virtue on which their minds are fed are exclusively white examples. What wonder, then, that each generation comes to maturity with the idea imbedded in its mind that only white men are valorous and fit to rule and only white women are virtuous and entitled to chivalry, respect, and protection? What wonder that they think, almost instinctively, that the Negro's proper place, nationally and internationally, is that of an inferior? It is only what we should naturally expect.

But what seems to escape attention is the fact that the Negro boy and girl, getting the same (though worse) instruction, also get from it the same notion of the Negro's place and part in life which the white children get. Is it any wonder, then, that they so readily accept the status of inferiors; that they tend to disparage themselves, and think themselves worthwhile only to the extent to which they look and act and think like the whites? They know nothing of the stored-up knowledge and experience of the past and present generations of Negroes in their ancestral lands, and conclude there is no such store of knowledge and experience. They readily accept the assumption that Negroes have never been anything but slaves and that they never had a glorious past as other fallen peoples like the Greeks and Persians have. And this despite the mass of collected testimony in the works of Barth; Schweinfurth, Mary Kingsley, Lady Lugard, Morel, Ludolphus, Blyden, Ellis, Ratzel, Kidd, Es-Saadi, Casely Hayford, and a host of others, Negro and white.

A large part of the blame for this deplorable condition must be put upon the Negro colleges like Howard, Fisk, Livingstone, and Lincoln in the United States, and Codrington, Harrison, and the Mico in the West Indies. These are the institutions in which our cultural ideals and educational systems are fashioned for the shaping of the minds of the future generations of Negroes. It cannot be expected that it shall begin

with the common schools; for, in spite of logic, educational ideas and ideals spread from above downwards. If we are ever to enter into the confraternity of colored peoples it should seem the duty of our Negro colleges to drop their silly smatterings of "little Latin and less Greek" and establish modern courses in Hausa and Arabic, for these are the living languages of millions of our brethren in modern Africa. Courses in Negro history and the culture of West African peoples, at least, should be given in every college that claims to be an institution of learning for Negroes. Surely an institution of learning for Negroes should not fail to be also an institution of Negro learning.

The New Negro, September 1919.

The New Knowledge for the New Negro

Quite a good deal of unnecessary dispute has been going on these days among the guardians of the inner temple as to just which form of worship is necessary at the shrine of the Goddess Knowledge. In plain English, the pundits seem to be at odds in regard to the kind of education which the Negro should have. Of course, it has long been known that the educational experts of white America were at odds with ours on the same subject; now, however, ours seem to be at odds among themselves.

The essence of the present conflict is not the easy distinction between "lower" and "higher" education, which really has no meaning in terms of educational principles, but it is rather "the knowledge of things" versus "the knowledge of words." The same conflict has been waged in England from the days of Huxley's youth to the later nineties when the London Board Schools were recognized and set the present standard of efficiency for the rest of England. The present form of the question is, "Shall education consist of Latin and Greek, literature, and metaphysics, or of modern science, modern languages, and modern thought?" The real essence of the question is whether we shall train our children to grapple effectively with the problem of life that lies before them, or to look longingly back upon the past standards of life and thought

and consider themselves a special class because of this.

If education be, as we assert, a training for life, it must of course have its roots in the past. But so has the art of the blacksmith, the tailor, the carpenter, the bookbinder, or the priest. What the classicists really seek is the domination of the form, method, and aim of that training by the form methods, and aims of an earlier age.

Classics, Clerics, and Class Culture

Perhaps an explanation of that earlier training may serve to give the real innerness of the classicists position so that ordinary people may understand it better than the classicists themselves seem to do. In the Middle Ages, the schools of Western Europe and the subject matter of the education given in them were based upon the Latin "disciplines." Western Europe had no literature, no learning, no science of its own. It was the church—particularly the monasteries—to which men had to go to get such training as was obtainable in a barbarous age. This training was, of course, given in the tongue of the church which was Latin, the clerical language. The contact of medieval Europeans with the dark-skinned Arabs added Greek and the knowledge of Greek literature and philosophy to the earlier medieval discipline. Imbedded in this was the substance of science nurtured by the Arabs and added to by them.

The ruling classes kept their children within the treadmill of these two literatures and languages and it came to be thought that this was the indispensable training for a gentleman. But:

Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.

We are in a different age, an age in which the nation, not the church, gives training to all children, and not merely to the children of aristocrats who will grow up to do nothing. The children of the people must become the doers of all that is done in the world of tomorrow, and they must be trained for this doing. Today in England, not Oxford, the home of lost ideals, but such institutions as the University of London, are the sources of that training which

gives England its physicians, surgeons, inventors, business men, and artists.

Classicists Ignorant of Latin and Greek

But the noise of the classicists may be rudely stopped by merely pointing out the hollowness of their watch words. These persons would have us believe that Latin and Greek are in their eyes, the backbone of any education that is worth while. Very well, then, let us take them at their word. I make the broad assertion that not one in one thousand of them can read a page of Greek or Latin that may be set before them. I offer to put under their noses a page of Athenacus or Horace (to say nothing of more important classical authors) and if they should be able to read and translate it at sight I shall be genuinely surprised. Let the common reader who is a man of today make the test with this little bit of Latin verse:

*Exegi momentum acre perennius
Regalique situ pyramidum altius.*

Let him ask some classicist to translate off-hand this common school boy's tag from a most popular author and note whether they can place the author or translate the lines. Here is another:

*Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum
Tendimus in Latiūm.*

To speak in plain United States, when it comes to the showdown it will be found that those of us who argue in favor of the modern discipline (in so far as we have any knowledge of classical literature) know more about them than those whose sole defence they are.

It is said by the classicists that a knowledge of Latin and Greek is necessary to an adequate comprehension of the English language. But so is the knowledge of Sanscrit, Arabic, French, and Italian. And when it comes to facility and clearness of expression, it will be found that Huxley's prose is superior to that of Matthew Arnold, and Brisbane's superior to that of any professor of the Latin language in Harvard or Yale. So much for the ghost fighters. *Requiescant in pace!*

The Knowledge We Need

Now, what is the knowledge which the New Negro needs most? He needs above all else a knowledge of the wider world and of the long past. But that is history, modern and ancient: history as written by Herodotus and John Bach McMaster; sociology not as conceived by Giddings, but as presented by Spencer and Ward, and anthropology as worked out by Boas and Thomas. The Negro needs also the knowledge of the best thought; but that is literature as conceived, not as a collection of flowers from the tree of life, but as its garnered fruit. And, finally, the Negro needs a knowledge of his own kind,

concerning which we shall have something to say later. And the purposes of this knowledge? They are, to know our place in the human processus, to strengthen our minds by contact, with the best and most useful thought-products evolved during the long rise of man from anthropoid to scientist; to inspire our souls and to lift our race industrially, commercially, intellectually to the level of the best that there is in the world about us. For *never until the Negro's knowledge of nitrates and engineering, of chemistry and agriculture, of history, science and business is on a level, at least, with that of the whites, will the Negro be able to measure arms successfully with them.*

ALAIN LOCKE

The New Negro (1925)

In the last decade something beyond the watch and guard of statistics has happened in the life of the American Negro and the three norns who have traditionally presided over the Negro problem have a changeling in their laps. The Sociologist, the Philanthropist, the Race-leader are not unaware of the New Negro, but they are at a loss to account for him. He simply cannot be swathed in their formulæ. For the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses, and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem into the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life.

Could such a metamorphosis have taken place as suddenly as it has appeared to? The answer is no; not because the New Negro is not here, but because the Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man. The Old Negro, we must remember, was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy. His has been a stock figure perpetuated as an historical fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactionism. The Negro himself has contributed his share to this through a sort of protective social mimicry

forced upon him by the adverse circumstances of dependence. So for generations in the mind of America, the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being—a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be “kept down,” or “in his place,” or “helped up,” to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden. The thinking Negro even has been induced to share this same general attitude, to focus his attention on controversial issues, to see himself in the distorted perspective of a social problem. His shadow, so to speak, has been more real to him than his personality. Through having had to appeal from the unjust stereotypes of his oppressors and traducers to those of his liberators, friends, and benefactors he has had to subscribe to the traditional positions from which his case has been viewed. Little true social or self-understanding has or could come from such a situation.

But while the minds of most of us, black and white, have thus burrowed in the trenches of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the actual march of development has simply flanked these positions, necessitating a sudden reorientation of view. We have not been watching in the right

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direction; set North and South on a sectional axis, we have not noticed the East till the sun has us blinking.

Recall how suddenly the Negro spirituals revealed themselves; suppressed for generations under the stereotypes of Wesleyan hymn harmony, secretive, half-ashamed, until the courage of being natural brought them out—and behold, there was folk-music. Similarly the mind of the Negro seems suddenly to have slipped from under the tyranny of social intimidation and to be shaking off the psychology of imitation and implied inferiority. By shedding the old chrysalis of the Negro problem we are achieving something like a spiritual emancipation. Until recently, lacking self-understanding, we have been almost as much of a problem to ourselves as we still are to others. But the decade that found us with a problem has left us with only a task. The multitude perhaps feels as yet only a strange relief and a new vague urge, but the thinking few know that in the reaction the vital inner grip of prejudice has been broken.

With this renewed self-respect and self-dependence, the life of the Negro community is bound to enter a new dynamic phase, the buoyancy from within compensating for whatever pressure there may be of conditions from without. The migrant masses, shifting from countryside to city, hurdle several generations of experience at a leap, but more important, the same thing happens spiritually in the life-attitudes and self-expression of the Young Negro, in his poetry, his art, his education, and his new outlook, with the additional advantage, of course, of the poise and greater certainty of knowing what it is all about. From this comes the promise and warrant of a new leadership. As one of them has discerningly put it:

We have tomorrow
Bright before us
Like a flame.

Yesterday, a night-gone thing
A sun-down name.

And dawn today
Broad arch above the road we came.
We march!

This is what, even more than any "most creditable record of fifty years of freedom," requires that the Negro of to-day be seen through other than the dusty spectacles of past controversy. The day of "aunties," "uncles," and "mammies" is equally gone. Uncle Tom and Sambo have passed on, and even the "Colonel" and "George" play barnstorm rôles from which they escape with relief when the public spotlight is off. The popular melodrama has about played itself out, and it is time to scrap the fictions, garret the bogeys, and settle down to a realistic facing of facts.

First we must observe some of the changes which since the traditional lines of opinion were drawn have rendered these quite obsolete. A main change has been, of course, that shifting of the Negro population which has made the Negro problem no longer exclusively or even predominantly Southern. Why should our minds remain sectionalized, when the problem itself no longer is? Then the trend of migration has not only been toward the North and the Central Midwest, but city-ward and to the great centers of industry—the problems of adjustment are new, practical, local, and not peculiarly racial. Rather they are an integral part of the large industrial and social problems of our present-day democracy. And finally, with the Negro rapidly in process of class differentiation, if it ever was warrantable to regard and treat the Negro *en masse* it is becoming with every day less possible, more unjust, and more ridiculous.

In the very process of being transplanted, the Negro is becoming *transformed*.

The tide of Negro migration, northward and city-ward, is not to be fully explained as a blind flood started by the demands of war industry coupled with the shutting off of foreign migration, or by the pressure of poor crops coupled with increased social terrorism in certain sections of the South and Southwest. Neither labor demand, the boll-weevil, nor the Ku Klux Klan is a basic factor, however contributory any or all of them may have been. The wash and rush of this human tide on the beach line of the northern city centers is to be explained primarily in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social

and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize, even in the face of an extortionate and heavy toll, a chance for the improvement of conditions. With each successive wave of it, the movement of the Negro becomes more and more a mass movement toward the larger and the more democratic chance—in the Negro's case a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern.

Take Harlem as an instance of this. Here in Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. It has attracted the African, the West Indian, the Negro American; has brought together the Negro of the North and the Negro of the South; the man from the city and the man from the town and village; the peasant, the student, the business man, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast. Each group has come with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another. Proscription and prejudice have thrown these dissimilar elements into a common area of contact and interaction. Within this area, race sympathy and unity have determined a further fusing of sentiment and experience. So what began in terms of segregation becomes more and more, as its elements mix and react, the laboratory of a great race-welding. Hitherto, it must be admitted that American Negroes have been a race more in name than in fact, or to be exact, more in sentiment than in experience. The chief bond between them has been that of a common condition rather than a common consciousness; a problem in common rather than a life in common. In Harlem, Negro life is seizing upon its first chances for group expression and self-determination. It is—or promises at least to be—a race capital. That is why our comparison is taken with those nascent centers of folk-expression and self-determination which are playing a creative part in the world to-day. Without pretense to their political significance, Harlem has the same role to play for the New Negro as Dublin has had for the New Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia.

Harlem, I grant you, isn't typical—but it is significant, it is prophetic. No sane observer, however sympathetic to the new trend, would contend that the great masses are articulate as yet, but they stir, they move, they are more than physically restless. The challenge of the new intellectuals among them is clear enough—the “race radicals” and realists who have broken with the old epoch of philanthropic guidance, sentimental appeal, and protest. But are we after all only reading into the stirrings of a sleeping giant the dreams of an agitator? The answer is in the migrating peasant. It is the “man farthest down” who is most active in getting up. One of the most characteristic symptoms of this is the professional man himself migrating to recapture his constituency after a vain effort to maintain in some Southern corner what for years back seemed an established living and clientele. The clergyman following his errant flock, the physician or lawyer trailing his clients, supply the true clues. In a real sense it is the rank and file who are leading, and the leaders who are following. A transformed and transforming psychology permeates the masses.

When the racial leaders of twenty years ago spoke of developing race-pride and stimulating race-consciousness, and of the desirability of race solidarity, they could not in any accurate degree have anticipated the abrupt feeling that has surged up and now pervades the awakened centers. Some of the recognized Negro leaders and a powerful section of white opinion identified with “race work” of the older order have indeed attempted to discount this feeling as a “passing phase,” an attack of “race nerves” so to speak, an “aftermath of the war,” and the like. It has not abated, however, if we are to gauge by the present tone and temper of the Negro press, or by the shift in popular support from the officially recognized and orthodox spokesmen to those of the independent, popular, and often radical type who are unmistakable symptoms of a new order. It is a social disservice to blunt the fact that the Negro of the Northern centers has reached a stage where tutelage, even of the most interested and well-intentioned sort, must give place to new relationships, where positive self-direction must be reckoned with in ever

increasing measure. The American mind must reckon with a fundamentally changed Negro.

The Negro too, for his part, has idols of the tribe to smash. If on the one hand the white man has erred in making the Negro appear to be that which would excuse or extenuate his treatment of him, the Negro, in turn, has too often unnecessarily excused himself because of the way he has been treated. The intelligent Negro of to-day is resolved not to make discrimination an extenuation for his shortcomings in performance, individual or collective; he is trying to hold himself at par, neither inflated by sentimental allowances nor depreciated by current social discounts. For this he must know himself and be known for precisely what he is, and for that reason he welcomes the new scientific rather than the old sentimental interest. Sentimental interest in the Negro has ebbed. We used to lament this as the falling off of our friends; now we rejoice and pray to be delivered both from self-pity and condescension. The mind of each racial group has had a bitter weaning, apathy or hatred on one side matching disillusionment or resentment on the other; but they face each other to-day with the possibility at least of entirely new mutual attitudes.

It does not follow that if the Negro were better known, he would be better liked or better treated. But mutual understanding is basic for any subsequent coöperation and adjustment. The effort toward this will at least have the effect of remedying in large part what has been the most unsatisfactory feature of our present stage of race relationships in America, namely the fact that the more intelligent and representative elements of the two race groups have at so many points got quite out of vital touch with one another.

The fiction is that the life of the races is separate, and increasingly so. The fact is that they have touched too closely at the unfavorable and too lightly at the favorable levels.

While inter-racial councils have sprung up in the South, drawing on forward elements of both races, in the Northern cities manual laborers may brush elbows in their everyday work, but the community and business leaders have experienced no such interplay or far too little of it.

These segments must achieve contact or the race situation in America becomes desperate. Fortunately this is happening. There is a growing realization that in social effort the co-operative basis must supplant long-distance philanthropy, and that the only safeguard for mass relations in the future must be provided in the carefully maintained contacts of the enlightened minorities of both race groups. In the intellectual realm a renewed and keen curiosity is replacing the recent apathy; the Negro is being carefully studied, not just talked about and discussed. In art and letters, instead of being wholly caricatured, he is being seriously portrayed and painted.

To all of this the New Negro is keenly responsive as an augury of a new democracy in American culture. He is contributing his share to the new social understanding. But the desire to be understood would never in itself have been sufficient to have opened so completely the protectively closed portals of the thinking Negro's mind. There is still too much possibility of being snubbed or patronized for that. It was rather the necessity for fuller, truer self-expression, the realization of the unwisdom of allowing social discrimination to segregate him mentally, and a counter-attitude to cramp and fetter his own living—and so the "spite-wall" that the intellectuals built over the "color-line" has happily been taken down. Much of this reopening of intellectual contacts has centered in New York and has been richly fruitful not merely in the enlarging of personal experience, but in the definite enrichment of American art and letters and in the clarifying of our common vision of the social tasks ahead.

The particular significance in the re-establishment of contact between the more advanced and representative classes is that it promises to offset some of the unfavorable reactions of the past, or at least to re-surface race contacts somewhat for the future. Subtly the conditions that are molding a New Negro are molding a new American attitude.

However, this new phase of things is delicate; it will call for less charity but more justice; less help, but infinitely closer understanding. This is indeed a critical stage of race relationships

because of the likelihood, if the new temper is not understood, of engendering sharp group antagonism and a second crop of more calculated prejudice. In some quarters, it has already done so. Having weaned the Negro, public opinion cannot continue to paternalize. The Negro to-day is inevitably moving forward under the control largely of his own objectives. What are these objectives? Those of his outer life are happily already well and finally formulated, for they are none other than the ideals of American institutions and democracy. Those of his inner life are yet in process of formation, for the new psychology at present is more of a consensus of feeling than of opinion, of attitude rather than of program. Still some points seem to have crystallized.

Up to the present one may adequately describe the Negro's "inner objectives" as an attempt to repair a damaged group psychology and reshape a warped social perspective. Their realization has required a new mentality for the American Negro. And as it matures we begin to see its effects; at first, negative, iconoclastic, and then positive and constructive. In this new group psychology we note the lapse of sentimental appeal, then the development of a more positive self-respect and self-reliance; the repudiation of social dependence, and then the gradual recovery from hyper-sensitiveness and "touchy" nerves, the repudiation of the double standard of judgment with its special philanthropic allowances and then the sturdier desire for objective and scientific appraisal; and finally the rise from social disillusionment to race pride, from the sense of social debt to the responsibilities of social contribution, and offsetting the necessary working and commonsense acceptance of restricted conditions, the belief in ultimate esteem and recognition. Therefore the Negro to-day wishes to be known for what he is, even in his faults and shortcomings, and scorns a craven and precarious survival at the price of seeming to be what he is not. He resents being spoken of as a social ward or minor, even by his own, and to being regarded a chronic patient for the sociological clinic, the sick man of American Democracy. For the same reasons, he himself is through with those social nostrums

and panaceas, the so-called solutions of his "problem," with which he and the country have been so liberally dosed in the past. Religion, freedom, education, money—in turn, he has ardently hoped for and peculiarly trusted these things; he still believes in them, but not in blind trust that they alone will solve his life-problem.

Each generation, however, will have its creed, and that of the present is the belief in the efficacy of collective effort, in race co-operation. This deep feeling of race is at present the mainspring of Negro life. It seems to be the outcome of the reaction to proscription and prejudice; an attempt, fairly successful on the whole, to convert a defensive into an offensive position, a handicap into an incentive. It is radical in tone, but not in purpose and only the most stupid forms of opposition, misunderstanding or persecution could make it otherwise. Of course, the thinking Negro has shifted a little toward the Left with the world-trend, and there is an increasing group who affiliate with radical and liberal movements. But fundamentally for the present the Negro is radical on race matters, conservative on others, in other words, a "forced radical," a social protestant rather than a genuine radical. Yet under further pressure and injustice iconoclastic thought and motives will inevitably increase. Harlem's quixotic radicalisms call for their ounce of democracy to-day lest to-morrow they be beyond cure.

The Negro mind reaches out as yet to nothing but American wants, American ideas. But this forced attempt to build his Americanism on race values is a unique social experiment, and its ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions. There should be no delusion about this. American nerves in sections unstrung with race hysteria are often fed the opiate that the trend of Negro advance is wholly separatist, and that the effect of its operation will be to encyst the Negro as a benign foreign body in the body politic. This cannot be—even if it were desirable. The racialism of the Negro is no limitation or reservation with respect to American life; it is only a constructive effort to build the obstructions in the stream of his progress into an efficient dam of social energy

and power. Democracy itself is obstructed and stagnated to the extent that any of its channels are closed. Indeed they cannot be selectively closed. So the choice is not between one way for the Negro and another way for the rest, but between American institutions frustrated, on the one hand, and American ideals progressively fulfilled and realized, on the other.

There is, of course, a warrantably comfortable feeling in being on the right side of the country's professed ideals. We realize that we cannot be undone without America's undoing. It is within the gamut of this attitude that the thinking Negro faces America, but with variations of mood that are if anything more significant than the attitude itself. Sometimes we have it taken with the defiant ironic challenge of McKay:

Mine is the future grinding down to-day
Like a great landslip moving to the sea,
Bearing its freight of debris far away
Where the green hungry waters restlessly
Heave mammoth pyramids, and break and
roar
Their eerie challenge to the crumbling
shore.

Sometimes, perhaps more frequently as yet, it is taken in the fervent and almost filial appeal and counsel of Weldon Johnson's:

O Southland, dear Southland!
Then why do you still cling
To an idle age and a musty page,
To a dead and useless thing?

But between defiance and appeal, midway almost between cynicism and hope, the prevailing mind stands in the mood of the same author's *To America* an attitude of sober query and stoical challenge:

How would you have us, as we are?
Or sinking 'neath the load we bear,
Our eyes fixed forward on a star,
Or gazing empty at despair?

Rising or falling? Men or things?
With dragging pace or footsteps fleet?
Strong, willing sinews in your wings,
Or tightening chains about your feet?

More and more, however, an intelligent realization of the great discrepancy between the American social creed and the American social practice forces upon the Negro the taking of the moral advantage that is his. Only the steady and sobering effect of a truly characteristic gentleness of spirit prevents the rapid rise of a definite cynicism and counter-hate and a defiant superiority feeling. Human as this reaction would be, the majority still deprecate its advent, and would gladly see it forestalled by the speedy amelioration of its causes. We wish our race pride to be a healthier, more positive achievement than a feeling based upon a realization of the shortcomings of others. But all paths toward the attainment of a sound social attitude have been difficult; only a relatively few enlightened minds have been able as the phrase puts it "to rise above" prejudice. The ordinary man has had until recently only a hard choice between the alternatives of supine and humiliating submission and stimulating but hurtful counter-prejudice. Fortunately from some inner, desperate resourcefulness has recently sprung up the simple expedient of fighting prejudice by mental passive resistance, in other words by trying to ignore it. For the few, this manna may perhaps be effective, but the masses cannot thrive upon it.

Fortunately there are constructive channels opening out into which the balked social feelings of the American Negro can flow freely.

Without them there would be much more pressure and danger than there is. These compensating interests are racial but in a new and enlarged way. One is the consciousness of acting as the advance-guard of the African peoples in their contact with twentieth-century civilization; the other, the sense of a mission of rehabilitating the race in world esteem from that loss of prestige for which the fate and conditions of slavery have so largely been responsible. Harlem, as we shall see, is the center of both these movements; she is the home of the Negro's "Zionism." The pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem. A Negro newspaper carrying news material in English, French, and Spanish, gathered from all quarters of America, the West Indies, and Africa has maintained

itself in Harlem for over five years. Two important magazines, both edited from New York, maintain their news and circulation consistently on a cosmopolitan scale. Under American auspices and backing, three pan-African congresses have been held abroad for the discussion of common interests, colonial questions, and the future co-operative development of Africa. In terms of the race question as a world problem, the Negro mind has leapt, so to speak, upon the parapets of prejudice and extended its cramped horizons. In so doing it has linked up with the growing group consciousness of the dark-peoples and is gradually learning their common interests. As one of our writers has recently put it: "It is imperative that we understand the white world in its relations to the non-white world." As with the Jew, persecution is making the Negro international.

As a world phenomenon this wider race consciousness is a different thing from the much asserted rising tide of color. Its inevitable causes are not of our making. The consequences are not necessarily damaging to the best interests of civilization. Whether it actually brings into being new armadas of conflict or argosies of cultural exchange and enlightenment can only be decided by the attitude of the dominant races in an era of critical change. With the American Negro, his new internationalism is primarily an effort to recapture contact with the scattered peoples of African derivation. Garveyism may be a transient, if spectacular, phenomenon, but the possible rôle of the American Negro in the future development of Africa is one of the most constructive and universally helpful missions that any modern people can lay claim to.

Constructive participation in such causes cannot help giving the Negro valuable group incentives, as well as increased prestige at home and abroad. Our greatest rehabilitation may possibly come through such channels, but for the present, more immediate hope rests in the revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and

cultural contributions, past and prospective. It must be increasingly recognized that the Negro has already made very substantial contributions, not only in his folk-art, music especially, which has always found appreciation, but in larger, though humbler and less acknowledged ways. For generations the Negro has been the peasant matrix of that section of America which has most undervalued him, and here he has contributed not only materially in labor and in social patience, but spiritually as well. The South has unconsciously absorbed the gift of his folk-temperament. In less than half a generation it will be easier to recognize this, but the fact remains that a leaven of humor, sentiment, imagination, and tropic nonchalance has gone into the making of the South from a humble, unacknowledged source. A second crop of the Negro's gifts promises still more largely. He now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization. The great social gain in this is the releasing of our talented group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression. The especially cultural recognition they win should in turn prove the key to that revaluation of the Negro which must precede or accompany any considerable further betterment of race relationships. But whatever the general effect, the present generation will have added the motives of self-expression and spiritual development to the old and still unfinished task of making material headway and progress. No one who understandingly faces the situation with its substantial accomplishment or views the new scene with its still more abundant promise can be entirely without hope. And certainly, if in our lifetime the Negro should not be able to celebrate his full initiation into American democracy, he can at least, on the warrant of these things, celebrate the attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual Coming of Age.

Sterling Brown: The New Negro Folk-Poet (1934)

Many critics, writing in praise of Sterling Brown's first volume of verse, have seen fit to hail him as a significant new Negro poet. The discriminating few go further; they hail a new era in Negro poetry, for such is the deeper significance of this volume (*The Southern Road*, Sterling Brown, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1932). Gauging the main objective of Negro poetry as the poetic portrayal of Negro folk-life true in both letter and spirit to the idiom of the folk's own way of feeling and thinking, we may say that here for the first time is that much-desired and long-awaited acme attained or brought within actual reach.

Almost since the advent of the Negro poet public opinion has expected and demanded folk-poetry of him. And Negro poets have tried hard and voluminously to cater to this popular demand. But on the whole, for very understandable reasons, folk-poetry by Negroes, with notable flash exceptions, has been very unsatisfactory and weak, and despite the intimacy of the race poet's attachments, has been representative in only a limited, superficial sense. First of all, the demand has been too insistent. "They required of us a song in a strange land." "How could we sing of thee, O Zion?" There was the canker of theatricality and exhibitionism planted at the very heart of Negro poetry, unwittingly no doubt, but just as fatally. Other captive nations have suffered the same ordeal. But with the Negro another spiritual handicap was imposed. Robbed of his own tradition, there was no internal compensation to counter the external pressure. Consequently the Negro spirit had a triple plague on its heart and mind—morbid self-consciousness, self-pity, and forced exhibitionism. Small wonder that so much poetry by Negroes exhibits in one degree or another the blights of bombast, bathos, and artificiality. Much genuine poetic talent has thus been blighted either by these spiritual faults

or their equally vicious over-compensations. And so it is epoch-making to have developed a poet whose work, to quote a recent criticism, "has no taint of music-hall convention, is neither arrogant nor servile"—and plays up to neither side of the racial dilemma. For it is as fatal to true poetry to cater to the self-pity or racial vanity of a persecuted group as to pander to the amusement complex of the overlords and masters.

I do not mean to imply that Sterling Brown's art is perfect, or even completely mature. It is all the more promising that this volume represents the work of a young man just in his early thirties. But a Negro poet with almost complete detachment, yet with a tone of persuasive sincerity, whose muse neither clowns nor shouts; is indeed a promising and a grateful phenomenon.

By some deft touch, independent of dialect, Mr. Brown is able to compose with the freshness and naturalness of folk balladry—*Maumee Ruth*, *Dark O'the Moon*, *Sam Smiley*, *Slim Green*, *Johnny Thomas*, and *Memphis Blues* will convince the most sceptical that modern Negro life can yield real balladry and a Negro poet achieve an authentic folk-touch.

Or this from *Sam Smiley*:

The mob was in fine fettle, yet
The dogs were stupid-nosed, and day
Was far spent when the men drew round
The scrawny wood where Smiley lay.

The oaken leaves drowsed prettily,
The moon shone benignly there;
And big Sam Smiley, King Buckdancer,
Buckdanced on the midnight air.

This is even more dramatic and graphic than that fine but more melodramatic lyric of Langston Hughes:

Way down South in Dixie
(Break the heart of me!)

They hung my black young lover
To a cross-road's tree.

With Mr. Brown the racial touch is quite independent of dialect; it is because in his ballads and lyrics he has caught the deeper idiom of feeling or the peculiar paradox of the racial situation. That gives the genuine earthy folk-touch, and justifies a statement I ventured some years back: "the soul of the Negro will be discovered in a characteristic way of thinking and in a homely philosophy rather than in a jingling and juggling of broken English."

As a matter of fact, Negro dialect is extremely local—it changes from place to place, as do white dialects. And what is more, the dialect of Dunbar and the other early Negro poets never was on land or sea as a living peasant speech; but it has had such wide currency, especially on the stage, as to have successfully deceived half the world, including the many Negroes who for one reason or another imitate it.

Sterling Brown's dialect is also local, and frankly an adaptation, but he has localised it carefully, after close observation and study, and varies it according to the brogue of the locality of the characteristic jargon of the *milieu* of which he is writing. But his racial effects, as I have said, are not dependent on dialect. Consider *Maumee Ruth*:

Might as well bury her
And bury her deep,
Might as well put her
Where she can sleep....

Boy that she suckled
How should he know,
Hiding in city holes
Sniffing the "snow"?*

And how should the news
Pierce Harlem's din,
To reach her baby gal
Sodden with gin?

Might as well drop her
Deep in the ground,
Might as well pray for her,
That she sleep sound.

*Cocaine.

That is as uniquely racial as the straight dialect of *Southern Road*:

White man tells me—hunh—
Damn yo' soul;
White man tells me—hunh—
Damn yo' soul;
Got no need, bebby,
To be tole.

If we stop to inquire—as unfortunately the critic must—into the magic of these effects, we find the secret, I think, in this fact more than in any other: Sterling Brown has listened long and carefully to the folk in their intimate hours, when they were talking to themselves, not, so to speak, as in Dunbar, but actually as they do when the masks of protective mimicry fall. Not only has he dared to give quiet but bold expression to this private thought and speech, but he has dared to give the Negro peasant credit for thinking. In this way he has recaptured the shrewd Aesopian quality of the Negro folk thought, which is more profoundly characteristic than their types of metaphors or their mannerisms of speech. They are, as he himself says,

Illiterate, and somehow very wise,

and it is this wisdom, bitter fruit of their suffering, combined with their characteristic fatalism and irony, which in this book gives a truer soul picture of the Negro than has ever yet been given poetically. The traditional Negro is a clown, a buffoon, an easy laugher, a shallow sobber and a credulous Christian; the real Negro underneath is more often an all but cynical fatalist, a shrewd pretender, and a boldly whimsical pagan; or when not, a lusty, realistic religionist who tastes its nectars here and now.

Mammy
With deep religion defeating the grief
Life piled so closely about her

is the key picture to the Negro as Christian; Mr. Brown's *When the Saints Come Marching Home* is worth half a dozen essays on the Negro's religion. But to return to the question of bold exposure of the intimacies of Negro thinking—read that priceless apologia of kitchen stealing in the *Ruminations of Luke Johnson*, reflective

husband of Mandy Jane, tromping early to work with a great big basket, and tromping wearily back with it at night laden with the petty spoils of the day's picking:

Well, taint my business noway,
An' I ain' near fo' gotten
De lady what she wuks fo',
An' how she got her jack;
De money dat she live on
Come from niggers pickin' cotton,
Ebbery dollar dat she squander
Nearly bust a nigger's back.

So I'm glad dat in de evenins
Mandy Jane seems extra happy,
An' de lady at de big house
Got no kick at all I say—
Cause what huh "dear grandfawthaw"
Took from Mandy Jane's grandpappy—
Ain' no basket in de worl'
What kin tote all dat away. . . .

Or again in that delicious epic of *Sporting Beasley* entering heaven:

Lord help us, give a look at him,
Don't make him dress up in no nightgown,
Lord.
Don't put no fuss and feathers on his
shoulders, Lord.
Let him know it's heaven,
Let him keep his hat, his vest, his elkstooth,
and everything.
Let him have his spats and cane.

It is not enough to sprinkle "dis's and dat's" to be a Negro folk-poet, or to jingle rhymes and juggle popularised clichés traditional to sentimental minor poetry for generations. One must study the intimate thought of the people who can only state it in an ejaculation, or a metaphor, or at best a proverb, and translate that into an articulate attitude, or a folk philosophy or a daring fable, with Aesopian clarity and simplicity—and above all, with Aesopian candor.

The last is most important; other Negro poets in many ways have been too tender with their own, even though they have learned with the increasing boldness of new Negro thought not to be too gingerly and conciliatory to

and about the white man. The Negro muse weaned itself of that in McKay, Fenton Johnson, Toomer, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes. But in Sterling Brown it has learned to laugh at itself and to chide itself with the same broomstick. I have space for only two examples. From *Children's Children*:

When they hear
These songs, born of the travail of their sires,
Diamonds of song, deep buried beneath the
weight
Of dark and heavy years;
They laugh.

They have forgotten, they have never
known
Long days beneath the torrid Dixie sun,
In miasma'd rice swamps;
The chopping of dried grass, on the third
go round
In strangling cotton;
Wintry nights in mud-daubed makeshift
huts,
With these songs, sole comfort.

They have forgotten
What had to be endured—
That they, babbling young ones,
With their paled faces; coppered lips,
And sleek hair cajoled to Caucasian
straightness,
Might drown the quiet voice of beauty
With sensuous stridency;

And might, on hearing these memories of
their sires,
Giggle,
And nudge each other's satin-clad
Sleek sides.

Anent the same broomstick, it is refreshing to read *Mr. Samuel and Sam*, from which we can only quote in part:

Mister Samuel, he belong to Rotary,
Sam, to de Sons of Rest;
Both wear red hats like monkey men,
An' you cain't say which is de best. . . .

Mister Samuel die, an' de folks all know,
Sam die widout no noise;

De worl' go by in de same ol' way,
And dey's both of 'em po' los' boys.

There is a world of psychological distance between this and the rhetorical defiance and the plaintive, furtive sarcasms of even some of our other contemporary poets—even as theirs, it must be said in all justice, was miles better and more representative than the sycophancies and platitudes of the older writers.

In closing it might be well to trace briefly the steps by which Negro poetry has scrambled up the sides of Parnassus from the ditches of minstrelsy and the trenches of race propaganda. In complaining against the narrow compass of dialect poetry (dialect is an organ with only two stops—pathos and humor), Weldon Johnson tried to break the Dunbar mould and shake free of the traditional stereotypes. But significant as it was, this was more a threat than an accomplishment; his own dialect poetry has all of the clichés of Dunbar without Dunbar's lilting lyric charm. Later in the *Negro Sermons* Weldon Johnson discovered a way out—in a rhapsodic form free from the verse shackles of classical minor poetry, and in the attempt to substitute an idiom of racial thought and imagery for a mere dialect of peasant speech. Claude McKay then broke with all the moods conventional in his day in Negro poetry, and presented a Negro who could challenge and hate, who knew resentment, brooded intellectual sarcasm, and felt contemplative irony. In this, so to speak, he pulled the psychological cloak off the Negro and revealed, even to the Negro himself, those facts disguised till then by his shrewd protective mimicry or pressed down under the dramatic mask of living up to what was expected of him. But though McKay sensed a truer Negro, he was at times too indignant at the older sham, and, too, lacked the requisite native touch—as of West Indian birth and training—with the local color of the American Negro. Jean Toomer

went deeper still—I should say higher—and saw for the first time the glaring paradoxes and the deeper ironies of the situation, as they affected not only the Negro but the white man. He realised, too, that Negro idiom was anything but trite and derivative, and also that it was in emotional substance pagan—all of which he convincingly demonstrated, alas, all too fugitively, in *Cane*. But Toomer was not enough of a realist, or patient enough as an observer, to reproduce extensively a folk-idiom.

Then Langston Hughes came with his revelation of the emotional color of Negro life, and his brilliant discovery of the flow and rhythm of the modern and especially the city Negro, substituting this jazz figure and personality for the older plantation stereotype. But it was essentially a jazz version of Negro life, and that is to say as much American, or more, as Negro; and though fascinating and true to an epoch this version was surface quality after all.

Sterling Brown, more reflective, a closer student of the folk-life, and above all a bolder and more detached observer, has gone deeper still, and has found certain basic, more sober and more persistent qualities of Negro thought and feeling; and so has reached a sort of common denominator between the old and the new Negro. Underneath the particularities of one generation are hidden universalities which only deeply penetrating genius can fathom and bring to the surface. Too many of the articulate intellects of the Negro group—including, sadly enough, the younger poets—their children of opportunity, have been unaware of these deep resources of the past. But here, if anywhere, in the ancient common wisdom of the folk, is the real treasure trove of the Negro poet; and Sterling Brown's poetic divining-rod has dipped significantly over this position. It is in this sense that I believe *Southern Road* ushers in a new era in Negro folk-expression and brings a new dimension in Negro folk-portraiture.

GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS STEWART

The New Negro Hokum (1928)

Of all the solemn nonsense with which this "greatest nation on earth" loves to salve its vanity bump, the still nebulous but rapidly crystallizing New Negro legend approaches indistinguishably close to the superlative degree of unmitigated bunk. For nothing agitates so penetratingly our "body politic," convulsing it from periphery to inmost core, as does our diverting Negro problem. Hence, to hail with shouts of joyous approval the emergence of a new disconcerting element which promises further to confuse an admittedly befuddling situation, a new figure which, despite the assiduous beating of tom-toms and industrious barkers' spiels, stubbornly remains incorporeal, frustrating all mediumistic conjurations designed to raise it from the shadowy realm of imagination, is either sheer hallucination or goose-like gullibility.

This mythological figure is assuming an increasing public importance. He is being "put over" with appropriate technique, carefully selected from that body of now familiar publicity stunts which "sold" us the World War. There is persistent repetition that he has come to establish a reign of justice and recognition for the oppressed Aframerican. Sophisticated metropolitan dilettantes and migratory doctors of philosophy acclaim him. Newspapers, magazines, books glorify him. He is heralded with that same widespread fanfare which modern American advertising concentrates upon any article it expects to ram down the public's throats and "make 'em like it." If in his case the fanfare happens not to be boundingly delirious, if it halts and limps a bit and threatens to putter out disappointingly, if apologists persuasively suggest the unpopularity of the subject's color as reason for this lack of enthusiastic bruiting, nevertheless the effectiveness with which "the message gets across" must be conceded. It is therefore well to inquire who and what is this New Negro.

In the first place and according to his gospel, he is a real, honest-to-God he-man, keen-eyed, keen-minded, virile, red blooded, two-fisted, and challenging. He is at one and the same time both champion and despiser of the weak among his dark-skinned compatriots, the noble knight who resents and redresses all insults heaped upon the poverty-stricken, the widows and orphans, the Negro latter day savior from the damnation of American race prejudice. Among laborers he is both contemner of the strike breaking scab and upstanding giant storming single-handedly the gold-barred gates of capitalistic exploitation and the color-locked portals of trade unions. In politics he is aggressive and achieving, demanding and securing his basic human rights—or just about to do so; in religion he is a cock-sure, if windy, atheist, despising orthodox forms as soporific pap for the feeble-minded; in education he is proclaimed as superior to the machine-made American school product, contending for the "best" for his race, though at times rather uncertain just what that "best" is, but in art—in *art*—here is the holy of holies—he is a shining and blessed light, both creator of new symbols and incomparable votary bringing his own peculiar and inimitable and perfect offerings. This is the New Negro, or this is the idealistic personage so advertised. If he isn't our good old calamity-breeding friend of Teutonic extraction, erstwhile and in more sunny days dubbed superman who made uncomfortable "in the old country" by such hard-boiled practicalities as Dawes plans, Saar occupations, bewildered ministries, and economic collapses, has emigrated to the "land of the pilgrim's pride to masquerade under a kinky crown and sable skin, then this starry visitant and paragon must be one of Grimm's all conquering princes bodily resuscitated. All this "newness" among Negroes, particularly in music, poetry, drama, and other literary forms, in drawing, painting, and sculpture, to

say nothing of matters more mundane, dates from one or both of two interdependent occurrences, the so-called Negro migration—as a matter of uninspiring fact Negroes are still rather overwhelmingly settled in the South—or the World War. The New Negro seems to have been swaddled either during the northward hegira or to have arisen god-like out of the desolation and disillusion of mankind's recent holocaust. However that may be, the inference is that prior to these occurrences only "old" Negroes peopled the land, "old" Negroes being the wooly-headed Uncle Toms, bland and obsequious, spineless and grinning, tale-bearing and treacherous, accepting obloquy with one hand and old clothes with the other from their adored white patrons, the proverbial "good darkey" of regretful Southern memory and the abhorred "white folks' nigger" of Aframerican loathing.

An examination of the Negro's life in this country, from his forced landing here until the coming of this ebony Messiah, refutes this; refutes it in all those avenues of human endeavor which the apostles of the New Negro declare he has suddenly and resplendently opened; refutes it first in those divers by-plays of human intercourse which we may call the "custom of the country," and in such more or less definite spheres of civilized activity as industry, politics, religion, education, and—sanctissima—art.

When the Negro made his unsought and unwilling entry into this haven of the oppressed, this "land of the free," the custom of the country was to disembarke him with the status of slave and zealously to maintain him in that station. Heavy theological controversies raged to invest that status with divine sanction, while some of the "best blood" of the country reddened Southern cotton fields to confirm it. The Negro remained a slave for more than two centuries. During these to him seemingly interminable years there was manifest with irritating frequency to slaveholders the same undying spirit of revolt against injustice, of determination to enjoy "inalienable rights" as is now diligently advertised as one of the New Negro's differentiating characteristics. Otherwise the world would never have heard of fugitive slave

laws, the Underground Railroad, Dred Scott, Denmark Vesey, John Brown. New Negroes—only they were cursed as "bad niggers" then—were evidently annoyingly numerous, for there were sporadic slave uprisings of alarming proportions, while the auction block and the overseer's lash doubtless aborted unknown others.

From emancipation until this black deliverer descended from Sinai, American practice has been to surround the Negro with ever-tightening steel rings of galling proscription, with periodic individual atrocities like Aiken and grand scale murder like East St. Louis thrown in to heighten the tension. Yet during this advent period many independent Negroes demanded unflinchingly the right to live and move and have their being unmolested in this commonwealth. They spread their demands before the public while occupying influential governmental posts. They voiced their protests in great public assemblies and in skilfully written documents. They formed organizations to secure the ends for which they fought, some of which exist today, while one, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, has become the sole powerful agency with a definite and realizable promise of ultimate relief of the Negro's disabilities. Incidentally, it will require the mediation of some such instrumentality to unfetter the beating pinions of this New Negro.

From the arrival of this dusky Parsifal until this very moment there has been no perceptible change in the American intention to encircle the Negro with unbreakable bonds of race prejudice. Here and there legal dents in these bonds have been made, as in the recent Supreme Court decisions affecting New Orleans segregation, Texas secret orders and primaries, and the earlier Arkansas cases. But these legal indentations are mere tappings, distressingly futile, upon the custom of the country, which in all essentials remains rigidly bent to "keep the nigger in his place." Here and there also a startling and sobering blow has been dealt by race riots. After the dead have been counted and sickeningly identified, the custom of the country, at least in a particular locality, has reelingly recovered some semblance of discretion, and has in

consequence become less fanatically devoted to pernicious attention to Negroes.

But who fights these battles? The New Negro? At least some of those for civil rights were begun and successfully terminated before his heaven-sent appearance. Moreover, it has been more than once remarked that it is the hoodlum element—the street lounger, the pool-room habitue, expert in knife juggling and bullet dodging, to whom fighting is an exhilarating avocation—who strikes back so effectively when the city mob gathers to “teach the nigger a lesson.” And it has also been said that it is the much touted New Negro who, after “the tumult and the shouting dies,” comes in for surveys and conferences and interracial backscratching and ponderous tomes, all to explain how the “criminal misunderstanding and great catastrophe” might have been avoided!

Industrially the American Negro, slave and emancipated, has been assigned chiefly the rôles of menial and unskilled laborer. No saving grace of the New Negro has as yet altered this situation. Certain forces quite beyond his initiation of control have operated to elevate slightly the Negro’s low economic level, but in the main his poor industrial status remains discouragingly fixed. Legislative curtailment of the European supply of mechanically perfect robots create a void in the labor market. Into the vacuum poured a stream of eager-eye plantation hands from Dixie, their soul aglow with visions of big wages and a dubious equality. Yet in the North as elsewhere, the Negro remains generally confined to personal service and the rough tasks requiring only weak minds and strong backs for their perfect performance. Here and there may be noted a black foreman, a black chemist, a black draftsman, a black accountant, or other highly trained technician as part of an important corporation, but the occurrence is so unusual as to receive undue notice and to be accorded quite disproportionate significance. The inescapable fact is that the control of American industry is held by investments of capital contributed by white people, a fact which, through the subtle operation of race prejudice, renders the Negro an industrial beggar, dependent upon whatever crumbs he may

be able to capture in a deadly scramble with his preferred and more powerful white brother. He is the nation’s industrial pariah. His unenviable and dispiriting portion is to wait for any possible industrial amelioration upon the whims of the unfavorably disposed white lords of creation.

That he will wait longer than his white competitor is therefore evident. All the more so as he is totally without leverage himself to budge the plutocratic dominance. Moreover, proud of a stupefying tradition of loyalty and terrified by the Bolshevik bogey, he fears to align himself openly with the more heretical labor movements, on the one hand, while, on the other, no manner of supplication or demanding or threatening gesture avails to admit him into the orthodox bodies. In consequence such advantages as are won by organized labor he either misses completely, or they come to him only as a result of a general improvement in the labor situation—more crumbs!

To remedy his mendicancy the persistently press-agented New Negro is powerless. With his brethren he too must take what he can get. He can effectively demand nothing. The only possible exception is the present effort to organize the Pullman porters, a movement as yet fiercely antagonized by the capital involved, hardly more than experimental among the workers, and certainly incomplete. Nevertheless, this is the one movement giving some basis in fact to the grandiose advertisement of the New Negro. It should be remembered, however, that there have always been Negroes who have sensed the raw unfairness which, solely on account of color, arbitrarily assigns them inferior industrial prerogatives and privileges, who have kindled at the swollen hypocrisy of the brotherhoods and unions which similarly deny them membership. Such militant individuals have talked and worked to better these conditions, and have won some measure of success. But generally speaking, all this systematic furore generated to stage the figure of a New Negro suddenly uprisen and heroic, striking the fetters from black labor, is empty and sonorous farce.

But if the New Negro seems to be disappointingly ineffectual in attempted adjustments

of social and industrial relations between the races, it is in politics that he is completely voiceless. It may be he is too refined a being to play so coarse a game. The grime and sweat of America's recurring rough and tumble electoral scrimmage are fatal to Olympian refulgence. At any rate, Negroes seem still eminently capable of holding only second-rate political appointments, while their usual post-election rewards are genial tasks like mopping corridors, emptying majestic brass cuspidors, and cleansing toilet bowls. This is as it has latterly been, particularly during the paper-glorious period ushered in by the New Negro. Before that time Negroes in the national congress and state legislatures were far from unusual. A few held prominent national political posts, while many minor officials testified to the efficacy of campaign pressure Negroes formerly exerted. Paradoxical as it may seem, some of the most enlightened legislation which Dixie ever took time enough off from her regular occupation of "keeping the nigger down" to consider was originated by Negroes, and by Negroes only a few months removed from slavery. Time was when what certain forceful Negroes had to say politically was heeded, as mere mention of the name of Frederick Douglass indicates. Of course, there were then venal Negroes to whom cash in hand was infinitely more desirable than uncertain messengerships and obscure clerical berths. And so there are today. But in addition, there is not now in American politics, and has not been for years, a single outstanding Negro individual or accomplishment, not forgetting the hopeful outlook in Illinois and in New York, Georgia's continuing muddle, and Tennessee's recent amazing somersault in the Memphis municipal election. But it should be remarked right here that of two New Negroes who essayed political careers in the free atmosphere of a Northern political paradise where "you can get away with murder," as the saying is, it is reported that one suffered such devastating loss of prestige among his fellows and such wholesale withdrawal of patronage of offended whites that he was compelled to abandon his highly remunerative, highly respected, and highly desirable berth in a Negro uplift organization, and was

rescued from complete disaster only by a timely transfer to other parts graciously made by the aforesaid uplift organization, while the other was totally overwhelmed by the deluge of opposition and has since dwelt in all but impenetrable and unbroken silence, lost alike to his black brethren and to those white worshippers who once hungered for the honeyed words of wisdom which dropped from his learned lips. It seems to be a fact that whatever political influence the Negro may claim in the North is possessed by the "old" Negroes, the seasoned henchmen of typical bosses. And it goes without conjecture that only the satisfactory or "old" type Negro however modern and well educated, can for the present expect to acquire and keep any measure of political preferment in the South. There the New Negro would hardly think of announcing any political choice, to say nothing of duplicating the just-recited experience of his defeated brothers lest immediately the kluckers' tarpot be set a-boiling. If, then, this blessed redemptive force in Aframerican life called the New Negro is wielding any influence whatsoever it is certainly not discernible in politics.

Similarly in the field of religion, New Negro thought is without discoverable weight. Those who like to think of themselves as belonging to the same celestial lineage as the demi-god they worship strut about privately in a clamorous atheism, but their pose has no appreciable effect on the mass of Negroes for the simple and sufficient reason that Negro religionists are too heavily and to immovably orthodox. In the public utterances of these self-acclaimed New Negroes scientific refutation of dogma on what is far easier, empty scoffing at the religious forms so dear to the herd, singularly absent. No black pulpiteer no matter how liberal, no matter with what intellectual doubts tormented would sacrifice his easy life and joyous camaraderie with the sisters for so un-remunerative and prosaic a consideration as mere inner honesty. Moreover, if he did, the spiritually bereft would promptly crucify him, and not even the New Negro courts Golgotha. Indeed, it happens that a crusading young Negro, whom the New Negro movement proudly claims, was only

yesterday forced to give up the headship of a growing sociological experiment, ostensibly and officially for "administrative inefficiency," but really because, along with certain unregenerate opinions about white supremacy and Negro sycophancy, he holds a coldly analytical attitude towards all religions and was therefore accused of corrupting the youth committed to his charge. Periodicals rampantly propagating the New Negro cult dare not jeopardize their enormous but wavering, oftentimes smutbolstered circulations by the procedure which integrity demands. Where nickels are the all-precluding desiderata such honesty is palpably inept. They therefore never discuss religion critically. In consequence of all this, if the "old" Negro, so soon to be superseded, is the one who takes his religion in ample fundamentalist doses washed down with gulps of emotional suds, he is and has always been in the ascendant. Unlettered, yowling jacks-in-boxes, in long coats and longer faces, still pull the bulk of the twelve million Aframeicans around by spiritual leading strings, chloroforming them with stuff worse than medieval doctrinal imbecilities. Meanwhile devotees of the New Negro persuasion confirm this tyranny by a self-advantaging silence.

The New Negro propaganda would spread the belief that in education he is a force not to be ignored. It is he alone who, being himself the best result of American educational processes, must have the best for his dark-skinned fraters. For decades there has been much uncertainty in the minds of Negro educators as to what is best for their students. Fiery battles have been fought over this matter. There have been three parties to the frays—those who advocate so-called higher education, those who champion industrial or vocational training, and those who fail to see that the Negro should be paternalistically set aside for special treatment, regarding him as subject to such educational experiments as may be adopted as a national program. Among modern educated Negroes this confusion still prevails. But certain it is that the only widely recognized educational achievement among American Negroes was accomplished not by New Negroes. Tuskegee Institute

embodied a novel idea. Yet Booker Washington was assailed during his lifetime as conniving opportunist and bedeviled traitor, as sublimated Uncle Tom and handpicked Moses of his race—as exactly what the New Negro proponents call "old" Negro. It is only since the Tuskegee idea has been made respectable by institutions like Antioch and systems like Gary that these attacks have ceased. No new educational movement among Negroes has since begun. The universities and colleges grind out annually thousands of standardized bachelors, masters, and doctors, their degrees apparently mere rubber-stamp concessions to the vogue of the day. The New Negro graduate is a mill product along with the rest. If he is capable of becoming a genuine pioneer in education, if he has any original didactic, if he can do other than lose all trace of his individuality and initiative as a cog in the great American scholastic machine, he has yet to demonstrate such capacity. Most assuredly he produces no text books, develops no new ideas of school management, creates no new methods, evolves no great teachers, founds no unique institutions.

And now *art*. According to the propaganda, here is the New Negro's real and vitalizing milieu. No sphere reflects his splendor like this one. He is at once art's ardent worshipper and adored creator. He is not only the playful child of the sun, responding spontaneously and in a thousand charming ways to Nature's swiftly changing panorama, thus instinctively artistic, but he is also custodian of a peculiar heritage of surprising art forms compounded somehow of African jungle orgies, tragic slave experiences, occidental sophistication, and barrel-house crudities. These remarkable and extravagant claims are of themselves provocative of skepticism or downright amused blasphemy on the part of the irreverent, while a cursory examination of their content drowns them in doubt. For example, in the pictorial arts the New Negro has yet to meet the challenge flung down years ago by Tanner. As regards the theatre, it is probably due to the entree made by Cole and Johnson, Williams and Walker, Kersands and Dudley, that later celebrities owe their opportunities. With an eye towards campaign possibilities,

however, the New Negroes have appropriated every recent histrionic addition. Thus the names of persons of recognized ability, like Gilpin and Robeson, Mills and Gee, Sissle and Blake, as well as those of almost every exceptionally nimble gyrating black comedian and drum-stick contortionist, embellish their lengthening who's who.

The case is similar in music. While hitherto no Negro has reached the heights of international renown won by Roland Hayes, yet preceding him by many years were Sissieretta Jones and Flora Batson, Mme. Selika and "The Black Swan," the original Fisk Singers, Burleigh and Douglass. Moreover, in spite of the excessive faddism which today "puts over" the spirituals with such tremendous clout, it is not to be forgotten that these songs are the unique creation of the hooted "old," Negro. Incidentally, they constitute a further example of the New Negro cult's appropriating penchant. Even blues and jazz are but the evolution of earlier ragtime, much of which was created by Negroes antedating the present fulsome era of New Negro buncombe.

However, it is in literature that this golden being's glory is said to eclipse all previous manifestations. In fact there has been here, so the indefatigable New Negro puffers say, such a resurgence of high ordered output that only the phrase "Negro Renaissance" adequately describes it. What is this renaissance? There have appeared possibly a score of novels, some written by Negroes, some by whites. These range all the way from serious sympathetic but unsentimental attempts at portrayal of all phases of American Negro life to rollicking profanity and hilarious smut, with here and there a bit of poignant and pregnant expression a glimpse of searing tragedy, a ray of irrepressible humor, with much conscious propaganda, a large proportion of artificiality and labored "niggerisms," and in perspective, all quite unimportant and ephemeral. Inspired by literary contests sponsored by certain magazines, some writing grading slightly above the mediocre has been uncovered. In poetry there have been disclosed glistening barbs of beauty alongside of the same sort of ribald versification formerly spewed out

to the accompaniment of a crazy piano in the nineteenth-century combination saloon and bawdy house, and even now to be encountered with unconscious and intriguing variations in any army barracks. Whatever worthwhile drama has been produced is the work of whites.

This is the Negro Renaissance—one wonders why the prefix "re" should be employed—the particular pride of the whoopers-up for the New Negro. In all this literary production has appeared nothing new, unless it be that "new" embraces certain persons hitherto obscure but now thrust into public notice. The emergence of these "new" writers has been accompanied by a blast of publicity heralding the Negro Renaissance. The technique of manufacturing this renaissance seems to be this. First comes a sustained pumping up of enthusiastic expectancy of the approaching divine event, followed by vociferous iteration that "here it is," and then a well-timed, suitably advertised settling back into the conviction—"yes, sure enough, here it is"—all smacking of the hocus-pocus that made Houdini famous and demonstrating once again the truth of Barnum's dictum anent the un-diminishing crop of gulls. Meanwhile—and perhaps "this is the crux of the matter," as ancient teachers of philosophy are still fond of remarking—all this whoop-la about the New Negro and his renaissance is not without profit to budding scribes, precariously financed Aframerican editors, and to even popular authors of bizarre books as well as to shrewd money-scenting publishers.

Let it be repeated finally that there is no New Negro. What the Negro is doing today in a cultural, economic, and civic way he has always been doing. The basis of all this unceasing chatter about the New Negro lies in the fact that what he has always been doing he is now doing better. In other words, there are now more Negroes with something to say, more capable of saying it convincingly, and possessed of more media through which to say it. What else is to be expected after a half-century of education and intelligent contact with Western civilization? Negroes are today more articulate than they were ten, twenty-five years ago. They have in their own press a medium of incalculable

force, while increasingly the columns of metropolitan monthlies, of erudite quarterlies are opening to them. Publishing houses solicit their manuscripts, prominent colleges invite them to

lecture, great absorbed audiences tumultuously applaud as they sing, speak, or act. They are being heard and seen and felt and understood as never before. But a New Negro? Hardly!

J.A. ROGERS

Who Is the New Negro, and Why? (1927)

One hears much these days about the New Negro. Who is he, and who knows him? In slavery times there was a type of Negro, who worshipped his master and his family. He was a tattle-tale also, and whenever he saw one of his fellow-slaves do anything, he ran to the master, for which he would be rewarded with a ham knuckle, or a suit of old clothes. The betrayers of Nat Turner and John Brown were Negroes. The first person killed by John Brown was Hayward Shepard, a Negro.

This type was also made a slave-driver, then he became a tyrant of tyrants. When he became a slave-holder, as many did, he was even more exacting than the whites. When the Civil War broke out, this dog-like creature stayed at home protecting his master's family and property while the master was fighting to keep him enslaved, or he joined the ranks of the Confederacy. Benjamin Tillman later introduced a bill, to make these black Confederates and slaveholders "white," a quite unnecessary step, internally.

On the other hand there was a type of slave—stubborn, rebellious, liberty-loving—who, like Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey, kept his master awake at nights, worrying lest they should rise up, massacre him and his family, plunder the plantation and take to the woods, as was so often the case, particularly in Hayti, Jamaica, and Guiana.

The Old Negro is the present-day type of the first; the New of the second. Faces, like styles, may change but the human nature underneath remains practically unchanged.

One may recognize the difference between Old and New in their bearing. The former, respecting color more than qualification, is

apologetic when dealing with white people. He acts as if he were always in the way, as if he had no right to be on earth. One can hear the clank of the slave's chain in all that he says and does.

The New is erect, manly, bold; if necessary, defiant. He apologizes to no one for his existence, feeling deep in his inner being that he has just as much right to be on earth and in all public places as anyone else. He looks the whole world searchingly in the eye, fearing or worshipping nothing nor no one. Self-possessed, he makes himself at home wherever circumstances place him. In a word, he respects himself, first of all.

The Old Negro, on the other hand, worships the white man, because of his absence of pigment. He is like the old colored mammy, who, seeing the Minister from Hayti at a social function in Washington, was horrified that a black man should be associating on terms of equality with white people, many of whom were his inferiors.

The Old Negro has a contempt for his own people, and in speaking of them he uses the same terms of contempt that his spiritual predecessors did. Shut your eyes when he speaks, and you'll hear a cracker talking.

The New Negro wastes no time worrying about his color. He realizes that a human being if he is to be visible at all must have a coloring of some sort, hence to him, one shade of coloring is the equal of every other. If light-complexioned he does not deem himself better than his darker brother.

The Old Negro when insulted grins and apologizes; the New either ignores it or acts in a way to make his manliness felt. The Old

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submitted supinely to massacre as in the New York and Philadelphia riots, and the Palestine, Springfield, and East St. Louis ones. The New arms himself and prepares to exact as many lives as possible, as in Washington, Chicago, Longview, Houston, Brownsville. All of which makes it clear that the possession of a college degree or of polish and refinement does not necessarily make a New Negro. Also he may be old or young. Manliness is a quality that inheres in the very fibre of one's being—a quality that like wine, improves with age.

The New Negro would rather lose his tongue than betray his people in their struggle for freedom and equality. Should any amelioration come to him because of superior talent, it turns to gall in his mouth when he remembers the sufferings of the rest of his people.

The Old, hat in hand, is always begging white people, a sort of glorified cripple with a can. Because of this he always has two different messages, one which he gives to white people, the other to colored ones. He is a living lie.

The New Negro supports movements conducted by his own people, because he realizes that these are the only ones that are ever going to speak out frankly and forcefully on his grievances. White persons, in such matters as economics, religion, politics, range all the way from the rabid radical to the rank conservative. So far as race is concerned, however, the vast majority is but of one complexion—the conservative, hence organizations supported by them for Negroes, have at bottom, the same Nordic goal, that is keeping the Negro "in his place," or at best a little lower than the angels. The New Negro realizes that the finest work, the real work for the advancement of the group will have to be done by its own members. It's an old saying: The man that pays the piper calls the tune.

The Old Negro is too thankful for small mercies; he believes that the employer does him a favor by hiring *him*. He is always praising enemies of the race like Cole Bleasdale or Tillman or Vardaman, because of some trifling sop given by these individuals to some isolated group or person, while doing all they can to keep back the group, as a whole. The New Negro, on the other hand, is satisfied with no concessions or

patronage of any sort. He wants neither more nor less than his rights as a man and a citizen. And this difference between the Old and the New enters into their respective attitudes toward the times in which they are living. While the New Negro prepares to live, to live vigorously, and dangerously, if necessary, to make the whole weight of this presence felt while he moves on this earth; the Old prepares to die, and go to a heaven where he will at least be a white man in complexion. "Wash me," he sings, "and I shall be whiter than snow." He tries to get a corner on religion, and sinks his money in churches, which brings no returns and are shut four-fifths of the week. He is as priest-ridden as the Italians of the Middle Ages, and enjoys it. The New, on the other hand, invests his money in homes and factories. He tries to get a corner on business and education that will fit him to compete successfully with the whites, while the Old is singing psalms and repeating like parrots the religious nonsense that the enslavers of his forefathers used also to enslave their primitive minds.

The Old Negro is chiefly interested in what Abraham, Moses, David, Jehosaphat, and other fictitious and semi-fictitious creatures of a barbarous tribe did in Palestine thousands of years ago. So far as his thinking is concerned he is a walking mummy. The New Negro relegates all these things to their proper, infinitesimal place in the scheme of things, and is interested most of all in life as it stirs around him. He jettisons Matthew for Marx; David for Darwin, and prefers Douglass to Lincoln. He studies economics instead of wasting his time with epistles.

The New Negro joins unions either of his own, or forces the whites to take him in, and once in never rests until he gets fairplay. He realizes that if white men have to create unions in order to get justice from white men like themselves, then this step is even more necessary for Negroes. The Old Negro, on the other hand, is an individualist. He pulls off to himself and begs the employer for work, thus paving the way for his being used, not as a union, but as an individual, to break strikes.

The Old Negro, once having reached what he believes to be the top of the ladder, spends a

great deal of his time kicking off other climbers. He wants to rule the roost alone, to be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, while the New Negro, remembering his own hard struggle, is eager to give other aspirants a helping hand, even though the newcomer gives promise of eclipsing him. In other words, he is a good sport. He is, further, not afraid of contradiction, and does not believe he is an oracle on what will solve this so-called race problem. He is ever eager for new information.

The Old Negro falls glibly for all the agencies used by white friends to sidetrack the mind of the Negro group from its real problems such as over-stressing of Negro art, spirituals, piffling poetry, jazz, cabaret life, and the puffing into prominence of mediocre Negroes. The New Negro again relegates these to their proper place. He realizes that the race question is almost solely an economic one, and is satisfied with nothing less than equal opportunity for employment with equal wages. He sees that in all those things that make for the benefit of the nation, as a whole, there is no color discrimination. That is, as in paying taxes, no one asks his color; it is only in getting a return that there is discrimination. In short that in all those things that make for the white man's benefit, he is a white man, but in those that make for his, he is only a Negro.

The Old Negro is also more interested in "high-yallers," football, boxing, handball, in mastering the intricacies of the black bottom and the Charleston, in making signs in "frats"

and lodges and splitting hairs about points of order in such places, in parading in gaudy uniforms, and in slicking his hair than in doing something vital toward getting himself and his group out of the rut of semi-slavery. Improving his mind by reading good books and acquiring a knowledge of the history of his racial group, is to the Old Negro, a real pain.

The Old Negro protests that he does not want social equality; the New, seeing that this is but another phrase for social justice, demands it. No social inequality for him. He feels that the first and foremost of all duties is to seek freedom, hence he has a perfect right to take any step, however violent, to rid himself of tyranny. With Thomas Jefferson he repeats: "Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God." Like the five colored immortals,—Anderson, Copeland, Green, Leary and Newby,—who joined John Brown in his raid on Harper's Ferry, he stands ever ready to head or to join any movement that will strike for freedom.

The New Negro is not afraid of such bogey labels as rebel, atheist, pagan, infidel, Socialist, Red, heathen, radical, realizing that what they really connote is "thinker." He will be anything else but a sheep.

And where is this New Negro of whom we have been hearing so much? Is he an ideal or a reality? This much is evident, that many who have been making a noise like New Negroes have proved to be but asses in lion's skins. When a lion appeared they took to the woods.

CHARLOTTE E. TAUSSIG

The New Negro as Revealed in His Poetry (1927)

In approaching the subject of the new Negro, whether it be in his social or community life, his relations to his own or the white race, or in his artistic endeavors, it is necessary to readjust our minds and bring to its consideration a new point of view.

It is quite useless to try to understand these men and women who are selves in art, literature,

and music if we continue making a place for them-to conjure visions of "Aunties" and "Uncles" and "Mammies." A new generation has arisen that is no longer only something to be argued about, condemned, or defended, to be kept down, helped up, or in its place—a generation that is fast learning that if it can give of the best, it has a chance to be judged on a

great deal of his time kicking off other climbers. He wants to rule the roost alone, to be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, while the New Negro, remembering his own hard struggle, is eager to give other aspirants a helping hand, even though the newcomer gives promise of eclipsing him. In other words, he is a good sport. He is, further, not afraid of contradiction, and does not believe he is an oracle on what will solve this so-called race problem. He is ever eager for new information.

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universal basis. As "J. Poindexter, Colored" says in the book of that name, by Irvin Cobb, "I ain't no problem, I'se a person. I crave to be so regarded." And that many of them are becoming persons who must be reckoned with in any survey of contemporary achievement soon, becomes clear to anyone who makes himself familiar with the prose and the poetry that the Negro is producing today.

Some of this has great limitations. It is often self-conscious and is propaganda rather than straight writing. But much of it, and this is particularly true of the poetry, is of such merit that it bears comparison with the beat of the moderns. And this from a race who sixty years ago were slaves, of whom one in ten could read and write.

Professor Kittredge, of Harvard, once said that culture is a by-product. A by-product of what? Surely not of slavery, or oppression, or discrimination. And yet in considering Negro art, this race, with a background so little fitted to make for that illusive quality, has, in this short time, prepared a field too broad to cover. I have had to weed out and eliminate. I find myself not only sympathetic to, but overwhelmed by the mass of material obtainable. Because of this, I have had more and more to confine my subject matter, I cannot give even a brief survey of the Spirituals and the Blues and the Folk Legends of which these people have such a store. And so I am confining myself to one form of their expression and in line with the general subject of this section, except for a slight historical background, to the more modern phase.

I was asked the other day whether these poems were really good, whether they were being accepted by publishers and editors of magazines and awarded prizes on their worth; or because there was a rather sensational interest in the entire Negro question that was being catered to. I think the answer lies in the poems themselves.

II

It is true that we speak of the new Negro. He is new in many ways, but that deep-lying feeling, which is inherent in the race, has found

expression in poetic form for a long time. There were recognized Negro poets even when slavery existed. In 1761, Phyllis Wheatley was brought to Boston and sold on the public block. She fell into the hands of a kindly woman who taught her to read and write. She was not a great poet, but after the publication of her small volume of verse, the Lord Mayor of London sent her an inscribed copy of *Paradise Lost*, which is still preserved in the Harvard Library.

In 1829, George Moses Norton published, with the help of some white friends, a book of poems, entitled *The Hope of Liberty*. He hoped to sell enough copies to buy his freedom. But his master refused to sell him to himself; and bitterly disappointed, he stopped writing.

In 1854, a volume appeared by Frances Ellen Watkins, which showed an advance in literary merit.

With Paul Laurence Dunbar, we come to the first Negro poet who can be judged by the standards generally applied. He was born in 1872, nine years after his parents had gained their freedom. With the publication of his poems, there comes the first step towards the greater power and broader vision that the Negro is enjoying. Up to and during his time, there were individuals who overcame the almost insuperable obstacles placed in their path and achieved a certain, and, in some instances, a marked success in their undertakings. Booker Washington immediately comes to mind and William Stanley Braithwaite, whose anthologies of American verse are among the most discriminating of their kind. There are others, but in each case they stood alone—an educator here—an aspiring poet there. Today we speak of Negro educators, Negro novelists, Negro musicians, and Negro poets.

This has been made possible because, in the last decade, something has happened to the race that even the sociologist and the philanthropist cannot account for. It has come about partially through the shifting of the Negro population, which has made the Negro problem no longer exclusively or predominantly Southern. The trend of migration has been not only North but to the city and the great centers of industry. This migration is not to be entirely explained by the demands of war, industry or

increased terrorism in the South. Neither labor demands nor the Ku Klux Klan is altogether responsible, although both have been important factors. It can be partially explained by the promise of a place where there can be found greater opportunity, more social and economic freedom and a chance to improve conditions.

Harlem is, of course, the outstanding example of a Northern Negro community. It is a city within a city, the largest Negro city in the world. The statement has often been made that if Negroes were transplanted to the North in large numbers, the race problem, with all its acuteness, and with new aspects, would be transferred with them: 175,000 Negroes live closely together in Harlem, 100,000 more than live in any Southern city, and there is no record of race friction, not any unusual record of crime. In a recent article in the *Survey*, a captain of police of the Harlem district is quoted as saying that, on the whole, it is the most law abiding precinct in the city.

The Negro, and this applies especially to the educated Negro, is happier in Harlem than he can be in any other place in this country. There, group expression and self-determination have, for the first time, become possible. Each group has come with its own special motives and its own special ends. But the greatest experience of coming has been the finding of each other and the joining in common pursuits. In New York, Negroes publish their own newspapers, two magazines, *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*; maintain their news and circulation on a cosmopolitan scale, and any Negro with literary or artistic aspirations can find there the stimulus through association, that the white artist finds in his larger centers.

It is possible that these men and women, who are making a place for themselves in American literature, might have achieved success under less advantageous conditions. It is not necessary for all of them to live in Harlem; as a matter of fact, they don't. But it is open to them and sooner or later they drift there.

Fortunately, too, many of them have been able to go to college; some of them have studied or lived abroad, where for a time they were freed of a sense of race inferiority and with very few exceptions, all have founded their homes in

the North, where segregation is less marked. Were this not the case, they might still have written good poetry. But as happened with the earlier, more isolated Negro poets, their writings would have continued to express only the emotions of their race. Today, while much of it deals with their own problems and is written in characteristic folk speech, a larger part is of universal appeal. One of the dangers which we are facing is that as the Negro writer increases his powers and becomes more generally recognized, he will cease giving us the typical products of his race. Fortunately, however, just as Roland Hayes is maintaining the best racial traditions in his conceptions of the spirituals, so some of the Negro writers feel this same need when it comes to expressing the instincts and emotions of their own people.

III

Speaking of the place of dialect in Negro literature, James Weldon Johnson, whom we shall consider as the poet succeeding Dunbar, says:

It may be surprising to many to see how little of the poetry written by Negro poets today is in Negro dialect. Much of the subject matter which went into the making of traditional dialectic poetry they have discarded altogether, at least as poetic material. This tendency will, no doubt, be regretted by the majority of white readers, and it would be a distinct loss if the American Negro poets threw away this quaint and musical folk speech as a medium of expression; and yet these poets are working through a problem. They are trying to break away from, not the Negro dialect itself, but the limitations imposed by the fixing effects of long convention. What the colored poet in the United States needs is to find a form that will express the racial spirit by symbols from within, rather than by symbols from without, such as the mere mutilation of English spelling and pronunciation. He needs a form expressing the imagery, the idioms, the peculiar turn of

thought and the distinctive humor and pathos of the Negro, but which will also be capable of voicing the deepest and highest emotions and aspirations and allow of the widest range of subject and the widest scope of treatment.

James Weldon Johnson has been a great asset to his race. He has published two volumes, *The Book of American Negro Poetry* and *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, which make it possible to gain a definite impression of the Negro's strivings and achievements. For the first time, in his *Fiftieth Anniversary Ode*, written in 1913, did a Negro poet break away from the brooding undercurrents which had characterized all their efforts.

After him, a new literary generation begins, giving us poetry that is racial in substance and context, but with the universal note and using consciously the full heritage of English poetry. Because he marks so definite a step in Negro poetry, I am using this poem as an example:

O Black and Unknown Bards

O black and unknown bards of long ago
How came your lips to touch the sacred
fire?
How, in your darkness did you come to
know
The power and beauty of the minstrel's
lyre?
Who first from midst his bonds lifted his
eyes!
Who first from out the still watch lone
and long Feeling the ancient faith of
prophets rise
Within his dark kept soul, burst into song?

There is a wide, wide wonder in it all,
That from degraded rest and servile toil
The fiery spirit of the seer should call
These simple children of the sun and soil.
O black slave singers, gone, forgot,
unfamed,
You—you, alone, of all the long, long line
Of those who've sung untaught, unknown,
unnamed,
Have stretched out upward, seeding the
divine.

Johnson seems to be almost a generic name for Negro poets. There is Charles Bertram Johnson, the minister of the Second Baptist Church of Moberly, Mo., a native-born and reared Missourian, whose poetry has the virtue of sincerity and a definite melodious quality; Fenton Johnson, who takes the ideas embodied in the spirituals and transposes them into modern verse; and Georgia Douglas Johnson, who is generally considered the outstanding Negro woman poet of the day. She was born in Atlanta and received her academic education there. Later she specialized in music at Oberlin. Her first book of lyrics was entitled *The Heart of a Woman*. Mrs. Johnson is a poet who is neither afraid nor ashamed of her emotions. Through all her poems one can sense the longing for a fuller chance at life. Without one word or hint of race in all the book, there lies between its covers the full tragedy of her people.

I give a short poem of Mrs. Johnson's and one by Angelina Grimké, in order that we may hear from more than one woman:

Memory

Georgia Douglas Johnson

What need have I for memory
When not a single flower
Has bloomed within life's desert
For me one little hour?

What need have I for memory
Whose burning hours have met
The course of unborn happiness
Winding the trail regret?

The Black Finger

Angelina Grimké

I have just seen a beautiful thing
Slim and still.
Against a gold, gold sky,
 A straight cypress,
 Sensitive
 Exquisite,
A black finger
Pointing upwards.
Why, beautiful, still finger are you black?
And why are you pointing upwards?

IV

From now on the process of elimination must be drastic. One would like to dwell at length on Jean Toomer, Anne Spencer, Lewis Alexander, Lucien Watkins, Joseph Cotter, and many others. But it seems wiser to concentrate on the three Negro poets who represent the high-water mark of the new Negro poetry—Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen. I shall consider them according to their age and not their merit. Each can well bear to be judged on his own.

Claude McKay was born in Jamaica in 1889 and received his early education there. He came to the United States in 1912 and for the two succeeding years was a student at the Kansas State University. Since then he has devoted himself to journalism and writing. In 1921 he visited Russia and he has spent much time in France and Germany. He was formerly associate editor of *The Liberator* and *The Masses*.

Let me quote from Max Eastman's introduction to McKay's volume of verse, *Harlem Shadows*, and briefly from an article by another critic Mr. Eastman says:

These poems have a special interest for all the races of man because they are sung by a pure blooded Negro. They are characteristic of that race as we most admire it; they are gentle, simple, candid, brave and friendly, quick of laughter and of tears, yet they are still more characteristic of what is deep and universal in mankind. There is no special or exotic kind of merit in them, no quality that demands a transmutation of our own natures to perceive. These poems move with a sovereignty that is never new to the lovers of the high music of human utterance. They have in them the pure, clear arrow like quality that reminds us of Burns, Villon and Catullus and all the poets that we call lyric.

And Robert Littell writing in the *New Republic* says: "If Mr. McKay and the other Negro poets do not always stir us unusually when they travel over poetic roads so many have traveled

before they do make us sit up and take notice when they write about their race and ours. Claude McKay strikes hard and pierces deep." The following poem is indicative of his powers:

Like a Strong Tree

Like a strong tree that in the virgin earth
Sends far its roots through rock and loam
and clay
And proudly thrives in rain or time of
dearth,
When the dry waves scare rainy sprites
away;
Like a strong tree that reaches down, deep,
deep,
For sunken water, fluid underground,
Where the great ringed unsightly blind
worms creep.
And queer things of the nether world
abound;
So would I live in rich imperial growth.
Touching the surface and the depth of
things,
Instinctively responsive unto both.
Tasting the sweet of being and the stings,
Sensing the subtle spell of changing forms,
Like a strong tree against a thousand
storms.

In his introduction to Langston Hughes' volume, *The Weary Blues* which has gone through four editions, Carl Von Vechten says: "At the moment I cannot recall the name of any other person who at the age of twenty-three has enjoyed so picturesque and rambling an existence as Langston Hughes."

Hughes was born in Joplin, Mo., in 1902. He was educated in the public schools of Lawrence, Kansas, went to high school in Cleveland, and spent one year at Columbia University. During his youth he lived for a time in Mexico City. When he left college he worked for a truck farmer on Staten Island; as a delivery boy for a New York florist, and then signed up as a sailor for a cruise of the Canary Islands, the Azores and the west coast of Africa. Returning to New York with plenty of money and a monkey he shipped again, this time for Holland. Again he came and went west, landing finally in Paris where he was

employed as doorman of a night club; and later as second cook, and then waiter at one of the larger restaurants. Since 1924 he has divided his time between Harlem and Washington and has devoted himself to writing.

Langston Hughes than any of the other Negro poets breaks away from the traditional form. His poems have often almost an air of informality. They reveal the shifting scenes and places which have made up his life. They portray a ceaseless hunger for warmth and color and beauty, and almost invariably they are personal in tone, although they are not confined to an exclusive mood, and in his language form he uses a Biblical simplicity. Most of his poems are short. I have chosen to quote:

Dream Variation

To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes gently
Dark like me—
That is my dream.

To fling my arms wide
In the face of the sun.
Dance, whirl, whirl!
Till the quick day is done.
Rest at pale evening—
A tall slim tree—
Night coming tenderly
Black like me.

The John Reed Memorial Prize awarded through the magazine *Poetry* was given to Countee Cullen for this *Threnody for a Brown Girl*, in 1925. He has also won the Witter Bynner prize. Cullen is the most prolific of these younger Negro poets. In his volume entitled *Color*, of which over 6,000 copies have been sold to date, he makes acknowledgment to these magazines for permission to reprint (I give this as an indication of the place he is taking): *The American Mercury*, *The Bookman*, *The Century*, *The Crisis*, *The Conning Tower of the New York World*, *Folio*, *Harpers*, *Les Continents*, *The Messenger*,

The Nation, *Opportunity*, *Palms*, *Poetry*, *The Southwestern Christian Monitor Advocate*, *The Survey Graphic*, *The World Tomorrow*, and *Vanity Fair*. He is the youngest of these poets, having been born in New York City in 1903. He went to the public schools and New York University where he was graduated a Phi Beta Kappa man in 1925. Young as he is, he has taken the new movement a step beyond even the strength displayed by Claude McKay. The bitterness revealed by those who have preceded him is with him converted into a question. It almost seems as if he were treasuring a dream that it may be given to his generation to solve the unsolvable problems of his race. His poems are beautiful in form, they cover a wide range of subject, reveal originality, and in his longer poems he shows the ability to sustain, perhaps the most difficult achievement in artistic creation. *Judas Iscariot*, an entirely new conception, is particularly interesting as coming from a race which so naturally has the fullest sympathy for the outcast, but it is unfortunately, too long for quotation. The following sonnet is exemplary of his general style:

Yet Do I Marvel.

I doubt not God is good, well-meaning,
kind.
And did He stoop to quibble could
tell why
The little buried mole continues blind,
Why flesh that mirrors Him must some day
die.
Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus
Is baited by the fickle fruit, declare
If merely brute caprice dooms Sisyphus
To struggle up a never-ending stair.
Inscrutable His ways are, and immune
To catechism by a mind too strewn
With petty cares to slightly understand
What awful brain compels His awful hand.
Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:
To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

I hope in presenting this subject, I have not seemed to let my sympathy get the better of my judgment. I have tried to approach it without any sense of race conflict. I have found that I

could read these poems with the same disregard of the fact that they were written by a Negro as I can *The Three Musketeers*. That is, I *can* dissociate myself from the struggle and the pathos and the pity of their situation. It is this which makes me stand in awe of what these men and women are doing, in spite of what we have done

to them. And I ask myself whether we who are so responsible, dare scorn any who so truly seek the light. After all, haven't they earned the right to say this—

I, too sing America.
I am the darker brother.

E. FRANKLIN FRAZIER

La Bourgeoisie Noire (1928–30)

Radicals are constantly asking the question: Why does the Negro, the man farthest down in the economic as well as social scale, steadily refuse to ally himself with the radical groups in America? On the other hand, his failure so far to show sympathy to any extent with the class which *a priori* would appear to be his natural allies has brought praise from certain quarters. Southern white papers when inclined to indulge in sentimental encomiums about the Negro cite his immunity to radical doctrines as one of his most praiseworthy characteristics. Negro orators and, until lately, Negro publications, in pleading for the Negro's claim to equitable treatment, have never failed to boast of the Negro's undying devotion to the present economic order. Those white who are always attempting to explain the Negro's social behavior in terms of hereditary qualities have declared that the Negro's temperament is hostile to radical doctrines. But the answer to what is a seeming anomaly to many is to be found in the whole social background of the Negro. One need not attribute it to any peculiar virtue (according as one regards virtue) or seek an explanation in such an incalculable factor as racial temperament.

The first mistake of those who think that the Negro of all groups in America should be in revolt against the present system is that they regard the Negro group as homogeneous. As a matter of fact, the Negro group is highly differentiated, with about the same range of interests as the whites. It is very well for white and black

radicals to quote statistics to show that 98 percent of the Negroes are workers and should seek release from their economic slavery; but as a matter of fact 98 percent of the Negroes do not regard themselves as in economic slavery. Class differentiation among Negroes is reflected in their church organizations, educational institutions, private clubs, and the whole range of social life. Although these class distinctions may rest upon what would seem to outsiders flimsy and inconsequential matters, they are the social realities of Negro life, and no amount of reasoning can rid his mind of them. Recently we were informed in Dr. Herskovits' book on the Negro that color is the basis of social distinctions. To an outsider or a superficial observer this would seem true; but when one probes the tissue of the Negro's social life he finds that the Negro reacts to the same illusions that feed the vanity of white men.

What are some of the marks of distinctions which make it impossible to treat the Negro group as a homogeneous mass? They are chiefly property, education, and blood or family. If those possessing these marks of distinctions are generally mulattoes, it is because the free Negro class who first acquired these things as well as a family tradition were of mixed blood. The church in Charleston, South Carolina, which was reputed not to admit blacks did not open its doors to nameless mulatto nobodies. Not only has the distinction of blood given certain Negro groups a feeling of superiority over other Negroes, but it has made them feel superior to

"poor whites." The Negro's feeling of superiority to "poor whites" who do not bear in their veins "aristocratic" blood has always created a barrier to any real sympathy between the two classes. Race consciousness to be sure has constantly effaced class feeling among Negroes. Therefore we hear on every hand Negro capitalists supporting the right of the Negro worker to organize—against white capitalists, of course. Nevertheless class consciousness has never been absent.

The Negro's attitude towards economic values has been determined by his economic position in American life. First of all, in the plantation system the Negro has found his adjustment to our economic system. The plantation system is based essentially upon enforced labor. Since emancipation the Negro has been a landless peasant without the tradition of the European peasant which binds the latter to the soil. Landownership remained relatively stationary from 1910 to 1920; while the number of landless workers increased. If this class of black workers were to espouse doctrines which aimed to change their economic status, they would be the most revolutionary group in America. From ignorant peasants who are ignorant in a fundamental sense in that they have no body of traditions even, we cannot expect revolutionary doctrines. They will continue a mobile group; while the white landlords through peonage and other forms of force will continue to hold them to the land.

Another factor of consequence in the Negro's economic life is the fact of the large number of Negroes in domestic service. One psychologist has sought to attribute this fact to the strength of the "instinct of submission" in the Negro. But it has represented an adjustment to the American environment. Nevertheless, it has left its mark on the Negro's character. To this is due the fact that he has taken over many values which have made him appear ridiculous and at the same time have robbed him of self-respect and self-reliance. This group is no more to be expected to embrace radical doctrines than the same class was expected to join slave insurrections, concerning which Denmark Vesey warned his followers: "Don't mention it

to those waiting men who receive presents of old coats, etc., from their masters, or they'll betray us."

Even this brief consideration of the social situation which has determined the Negro's attitudes towards values in American life will afford a background for our discussion of the seeming anomaly which he presents to many spectators. We shall attempt to show that, while to most observers the Negro shows an apparent indifference to changing his status, this is in fact a very real and insistent stimulus to his struggles. The Negro can only envisage those things which have meaning for him. *The radical doctrines appeal chiefly to the industrial workers, and the Negro has only begun to enter industry.* For Negroes to enter industries which are usually in the cities and escape the confinement of the plantation, they have realized a dream that is as far beyond their former condition as the New Economic Order is beyond the present condition of the wage earner. It has often been observed that the Negro subscribes to all the canons of consumption as the owning class in the present system. Even here we find the same struggle to realize a status that he can envisage and has a meaning for him. Once the Negro struggled for a literary education because he regarded it as the earmark of freedom. The relatively segregated life which the Negro lives makes him struggle to realize the values which give status within his group. An automobile, a home, a position as a teacher, or membership in a fraternity may confer a distinction in removing the possessor from an inferior social status, that could never be appreciated by one who is a stranger to Negro life. An outsider may wonder why a downtrodden, poor, despised people seem so indifferent about entering a struggle that is aimed to give all men an equal status. But if they could enter the minds of Negroes they would find that in the world in which they live they are not downtrodden and despised, but enjoy various forms of distinction.

An interesting episode in the life of the Negro which shows to what extent he is wedded to bourgeois ideals is the present attempt of the Pullman porters to organize. Some people have very superficially regarded this movement as a

gesture in the direction of economic radicalism. But anyone who is intimately acquainted with the psychology of the Negro group, especially the porters, know that this is far from true. One who is connected with the white labor movement showed a better insight through his remark to the writer that the porters showed little working class psychology and showed a disposition to use their organization to enjoy the amenities of bourgeois social life. The Pullman porters do not show any disposition to overthrow bourgeois values. In fact, for years this group was better situated economically than most Negroes and carried over into their lives as far as possible the behavior patterns which are current in the middle class. In some places they regarded themselves as a sort of aristocracy, and as a colored woman said in one of their meetings recently, "Only an educated gentleman with culture could be a Pullman porter." The advent of a large and consequential professional and business class among Negroes has relegated the Pullman porters to a lower status economically as well as otherwise. Collective bargaining will help them to continue in a role in the colored group which is more in harmony with their conception of their relative status in their group. It is far from the idea of the Pullman porters to tear down the present economic order, and hardly any of them would confess any spiritual kinship with the "poor whites." The Pullman porters are emerging, on the other hand, as an aristocratic laboring group just as the Railroad Brotherhoods have done.

The Negro's lack of sympathy with the white working class is based on more than the feeling of superiority. In the South, especially, the caste system which is based on color, determines the behavior of the white working class. If the Negro has fatuously claimed spiritual kinship with the white bourgeois, the white working class has taken over the tradition of the slaveholding aristocracy. When white labor in the South attempts to treat with black labor, the inferior status of the latter must be conceded in practice and in theory. Moreover, white labor in the South not only has used every form of trickery to drive the Negro out of the ranks of skilled labor, but it has resorted to legislation to

accomplish its aims. Experience, dating from before the Civil War, with the white group, has helped to form the attitude of Negro towards white labor as well as traditional prejudices.¹

In the February number of the *Southern Workman*, there appears an article in which the psychology of the Negro is portrayed as follows. The discovery is made by a white business in Chicago:

The average working class Negro in Chicago earns \$22 a week. His wife sends her children to the Day Nursery or leaves them with relatives or friends, and she supplements the family income by from \$10 to \$15 or more per week. The average white man of the same class earns \$33 per week and keeps his wife at home. This colored man will rent a \$65 per month apartment and buy a \$50 suit of clothes while the white man will occupy a \$30 per month apartment and buy a \$25 suit of clothes. This average white man will come into our store to buy furniture and about \$300 will be the limit of his estimated purchase, while the colored man will undertake a thousand dollar purchase without the least thought about meeting the payments from his small income.

To the writer of the article the company's new policy in using colored salesmen is a wonderful opportunity for colored men to learn the furniture business. The furniture company is going to make Negroes better citizens, according to the author of the article, by encouraging them to have better homes. This situation represents not only the extent to which the average Negro has swallowed middle-class standards but the attitude of the upperclass Negro towards the same values.

There is much talk at the present time about the New Negro. He is generally thought of as the creative artist who is giving expression to all the stored-up aesthetic emotion of the race. Negro in Art Week has come to take its place beside, above, or below the other three hundred and fifty-two weeks [sic] in the American year. But the public is little aware of the Negro business man who regards himself as a

new phenomenon. While the New Negro who is expressing himself in art promises in the words of one of his chief exponents not to compete with the white man either politically or economically, the Negro business man seeks the salvation of the race in economic enterprise. In the former case there is either an acceptance of the present system or an ignoring of the economic realities of life. In the case of the latter there is an acceptance of the gospel of economic success. Sometimes the New Negro of the artistic type calls the New Negro business man a Babbitt, while the latter calls the former a mystic. But the Negro business man is winning out, for he is dealing with economic realities. He can boast of the fact that he is independent of white support, while the Negro artist still seeks it. One Negro insurance company in a rather cynical acceptance of the charge of Babbitry begins a large advertisement in a Negro magazine in the words of George F. Babbitt.

A perusal of Negro newspapers will convince anyone that the Negro group does not regard itself as outcasts without status. One cannot appeal to them by telling them that they have nothing to lose but their chains. The chains which Negroes have known in the South were not figurative. Negro newspapers are a good index of the extent to which middle-class ideals have captured the imagination of Negroes. In one newspaper there is a column devoted to What Society Is Wearing. In this column the apparel of those who are socially prominent is described in detail. The parties, the cars, the homes, and the jewelry of the elite find a place in all of these papers. In fact, there is no demand on the part of Negro leaders to tear down social distinctions and create a society of equals. As the writer heard a colored editor tell a white man recently, "the white people draw the line at the wrong point and put all of us in the same class."

Negro schools in the South furnish an example of the influence of middle-class ideals which make Negroes appear in a ridiculous light. These schools give annually a public performance. Instead of giving plays such as Paul Green's folk plays of Negro life, they give fashion shows which have been popularized to boost sales.

Negro students appear in all kinds of gorgeous costumes which are worn by the leisured middle class. One more often gets the impression that he has seen a Mardi Gras rather than an exhibition of correct apparel.

Even the most ardent radical cannot expect the Negro to hold himself aloof from the struggle for economic competence and only dream of his escape from his subordinate economic status in the overthrow of the present system. A Negro business man who gets out of the white man's kitchen or dining room rightly regards himself as escaping from economic slavery. Probably he will maintain himself by exploiting the Negro who remains in the kitchen, but he can always find consolation in the feeling, that if he did not exploit him a white man would. But in seeking escape from economic subordination, the Negro has generally envisaged himself as a captain of industry. In regard to group efficiency he has shown no concern. For example, a group isolated to the extent of the Negro in America could have developed cooperative enterprises. There has been no attempt in schools or otherwise to teach or encourage this type of economic organization. The ideal of the rich man has been held up to him. More than one Negro business has been wrecked because of this predatory view of economic activity.

Many of those who criticize the Negro for selecting certain values out of American life overlook the fact that the primary struggle on his part has been to acquire a culture. In spite of the efforts of those who would have him dig up his African past, the Negro is a stranger to African culture. The manner in which he has taken over the American culture has never been studied in intimate enough detail to make it comprehensible. The educated class among Negroes has been the forerunners in this process. Except perhaps through the church the economic basis of the civilized classes among Negroes has not been within the group. Although today the growing professional and business classes are finding support among Negroes, the upper classes are subsidized chiefly from without. To some outsiders such a situation makes the Negro intellectual appear as merely an employee of the white group. At times the emasculating effect of Negro

men appearing in the role of mere entertainers for the whites has appeared in all its tragic reality. But the creation of this educated class of Negroes has made possible the civilization of the Negro. It may seem conceivable to some that the Negro could have contended on the ground of abstract right for unlimited participation in American life on the basis of individual efficiency; but the Negro had to deal with realities. It is strange that today one expects this very class which represents the most civilized group to be in revolt against the system by which it was created, rather than the group of leaders who have sprung from the soil of Negro culture.

Here we are brought face to face with a fundamental dilemma of Negro life. Dean Miller at Howard University once expressed this dilemma aphoristically, namely, that the Negro pays for what he wants and begs for what he needs. The Negro pays, on the whole, for his church, his lodges and fraternities, and his automobile, but he begs for his education. Even the radical movement which had vogue a few years back was subsidized by the white radical group. It did not spring out of any general movement among Negroes towards radical doctrines. Moreover, black radicals theorized about the small number of Negroes who had entered industry from the security of New York City; but none ever undertook to enter the South and teach the landless peasants any type of self-help. What began as the organ of the struggling working masses became the mouthpiece of Negro capitalists. The New Negro group which has shown a new orientation towards Negro life and the values which are supposed to spring from Negro life has restricted itself to the purely cultural in the narrow sense.

CLAUDE MCKAY

The New Negro in Paris (1937)

I finished my native holiday in Marrakesh. In Casablanca I found a huge pile of mail awaiting me. The handsomest thing was a fat envelope from a New York bank containing a gold-lettered

In this article the writer has attempted to set forth the social forces which have caused the Negro to have his present attitude towards the values in American life. From even this cursory glance at Negro life we are able to see to what extent bourgeois ideals are implanted in the Negro's mind. We are able to see that the Negro group is a highly differentiated group with various interests, and that it is far from sound to view the group as a homogeneous group of outcasts. There has come upon the stage a group which represents a nationalistic movement. This movement is divorced from any program of economic reconstruction. It is unlike the Garvey movement in that Garvey through schemes—phantastic to be sure—united his nationalistic aims with an economic program. This new movement differs from the program of Booker Washington which sought to place the culture of the Negro upon a sound basis by making him an efficient industrial worker. Nor does it openly ally itself with those leaders who condemn the organization of the Pullman porters and advise Negroes to pursue an opportunistic course with capitalism. It looks askance at the new rising class of black capitalism while it basks in the sun of white capitalism. It enjoys the congenial company of white radicals while shunning association with black radicals. The New Negro Movement functions in the third dimension of culture; but so far it knows nothing of the other two dimensions—Work and Wealth.

NOTE

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1. E. Franklin Frazier: "The Negro in the Industrial South." *The Nation*, Vol. 125, pp. 32-38.

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There were stacks of clippings with criticisms of my novel; praise from the white press,

harsh censure from the colored press. And a lot of letters from new admirers and old friends and associates and loves. One letter in particular took my attention. It was from James Weldon Johnson, inviting me to return to America to participate in the Negro renaissance movement. He promised to do his part to facilitate my return if there were any difficulty. And he did.

The Johnson letter set me thinking hard about returning to Harlem. All the reports stressed the great changes that had occurred there since my exile, pictured a Harlem spreading west and south, with splendid new blocks of houses opened up for the colored people. The reports described the bohemian interest in and patronage of Harlem, the many successful colored shows on Broadway, the florescence of Negro literature and art, with many promising aspirants receiving scholarships from foundations and patronage from individuals. Newspapers and magazines brought me exciting impressions of a more glamorous Harlem. Even in Casablanca a Moor of half-German parentage exhibited an article featuring Harlem in an important German newspaper, and he was eager for more information.

But the resentment of the Negro intelligentsia against *Home to Harlem* was so general, bitter, and violent that I was hesitant about returning to the great Black Belt. I had learned very little about the ways of the Harlem élite during the years I lived there. When I left the railroad and the companionship of the common blacks, my intellectual contacts were limited mainly to white radicals and bohemians. I was well aware that if I returned to Harlem I wouldn't be going back to the *milieu* of railroad men, from whom I had drifted far out of touch. Nor could I go back among radical whites and try to rekindle the flames of an old enthusiasm. I knew that if I did return I would have to find a new orientation among the Negro intelligentsia.

One friend in Harlem had written that Negroes were traveling abroad *en masse* that spring and summer and that the élite would be camping in Paris. I thought that it might be less unpleasant to meet the advance guard of the

Negro intelligentsia in Paris. And so, laying aside my experiment in wearing bags, bournous, and tarboosh, I started out.

First to Tangier, where four big European powers were performing their experiment of international government in Africa upon a living corpse. Otherwise Tangier was a rare African-Mediterranean town of Moors and progressive Sephardic Jews and Europeans, mostly Spanish.

Through Spanish Morocco I passed and duly noted its points of interest. The first was Tetuán, which inspired this sonnet:

Tetuán

Morocco conquering homage paid to Spain
And the Alhambra lifted up its towers!
Africa's fingers tipped with miracles,
And quivering with Arabian designs,
Traced words and figures like exotic flowers,
Sultanas' chambers of rare tapestries,
Filigree marvels from Koranic lines,
Mosaics chanting notes like tropic rain.

And Spain repaid the tribute ages after:
To Tetuán, that fort of struggle and strife,
Where chagrined Andalusian Moors
 retired,
She brought a fountain bubbling with new
 life,
Whose jewelled charm won even the native
 pride,
And filled it sparkling with flamenco
 laughter.

In all Morocco there is no place as delicious as Tetuán. By a kind of magic instinct the Spaniards have created a modern town which stands up like a happy extension of the antique Moroccan. The ancient walls merge into the new without pain. The Spanish Morisco buildings give more lightness to the native Moroccan, and the architectural effect of the whole is a miracle of perfect miscegenation.

I loved the colored native lanterns, illuminating the archways of Larache. I liked Ceuta lying like a symbolic handclasp across the Mediterranean. And I adored the quaint tiled-roofed houses and cool watered gardens in the mountain fastness of Xauen. From Gibraltar I was barred by the British. But that was no

trouble to my skin, for ever since I have been traveling for the sheer enjoyment of traveling I have avoided British territory. That was why I turned down an attractive invitation to visit Egypt, when I was living in France.

Once again in Spain, I inspected the great Moorish landmarks. And more clearly I saw Spain outlined as the antique bridge between Africa and Europe.

After the strong dazzling colors of Morocco, Paris that spring appeared something like the melody of larks chanting over a gray field. It was over three years since I had seen the metropolis. At that time it had a political and financial trouble hanging heavy round its neck. Now it was better, with its head up and a lot of money in every hand. I saw many copies of my book, *Banjo*, decorating a shop window in the Avenue de l'Opéra and I was disappointed in myself that I could not work up to feeling a thrill such as I imagine an author should feel.

I took a fling at the cabarets in Montparnasse and Montmartre, and I was very happy to meet again a French West Indian girl whom I knew as a *bonne* in Nice when I was a valet. We ate some good dinners together and saw the excellent French productions of *Rose Marie* and *Show Boat* and danced a little at the Bal Negre and at Bricktop's Harlem hang-out in Montmartre.

I found Louise Bryant in Paris. It was our first meeting since she took my manuscript to New York in the summer of 1926. The meeting was a nerve-tearing ordeal. About two years previously she had written of a strange illness and of doctors who gave her only six months to live and of her determination to live a long time longer than that. She had undergone radical treatment. The last time I had seen her she was plump and buxom. Now she was shrunken and thin and fragile like a dried-up reed. Her pretty face had fallen like a mummy's and nothing was left of her startling attractiveness but her eyebrows.

She embarrassed me by continually saying: "Claude, you won't even look at me." Her conversation was pitched in a nervous hysterical key and the burden was "male conceit." I told her that the female was largely responsible for

"male conceit." Often when I had seen her before she had been encircled by a following of admirably created young admirers of the collegiate type. Now she was always with an ugly-mugged woman. This woman was like an apparition of a male impersonator, who was never off the stage. She had a trick way of holding her shoulders and her hands like a gangster and simulating a hard-boiled accent. A witty French man pronounced her a *Sappho-manqué*. The phrase sounded like a desecration of the great glamorous name of Sappho. I wondered why (there being so many attractive women in the world) Louise Bryant should have chosen such a companion. And I thought that it was probably because of the overflow of pity pouring out of her impulsive Irish heart.

I remembered, "Aftermath," the beautiful poem which she sent us for publication in *The Liberator* after John Reed died. Now it seemed of greater significance:

Aftermath

Dear, they are singing your praises,
Now you are gone.
But only I saw your going,
I . . . alone . . . in the dawn.

Dear, they are weeping about you,
Now you are dead,
And they've placed a granite stone
Over your darling head.

I cannot cry any more,
Too burning deep is my grief . . .
I dance through my spendthrift days
Like a fallen leaf.

Faster and faster I whirl
Toward the end of my days.
Dear, I am drunken with sadness
And lost down strange ways.

If only the dance could finish
Like a flash in the sky . . . Oh, soon
If only a storm could come shouting—
Hurl me past stars and moon.

And I thought if I could not look frankly with admiration at Louise Bryant's face, I could always turn to the permanently lovely poem which she had created.

I had spruced myself up a bit to meet the colored élite. Observing that the Madrileños were well-tailored, I had a couple of suits made in Madrid, and chose a hat there. In Paris I added shoes and shirts and ties and gloves to my wardrobe.

The cream of Harlem was in Paris. There was the full cast of *Blackbirds* (with Adelaide Hall starring in the place of Florence Mills), just as fascinating a group off the stage as they were extraordinary on the stage. The *Porgy* actors had come over from London. There was an army of school teachers and nurses. There were Negro communists going to and returning from Russia. There were Negro students from London and Scotland and Berlin and the French universities. There were presidents and professors of the best Negro colleges. And there were painters and writers and poets, of whom the most outstanding was Countee Cullen.

I met Professor Alain Locke. He had published *The Anthology of the New Negro* in 1925 and he was the animator of the movement as well as the originator of the phrase "Negro renaissance." Commenting upon my appearance, Dr. Locke said, "Why, you are wearing the same kind of gloves as I am!" "Yes," I said, "but my hand is heavier than yours." Dr. Locke was extremely nice and invited me to dinner with President Hope of Atlanta University. The dinner was at one of the most expensive restaurants in the *grands boulevards*. President Hope, who was even more Nordic-looking than Walter White, was very affable and said I did not look like the boxer-type drawings of me which were reproduced with the reviews of *Home to Harlem*. President Hope hoped that I would visit his university when I returned to America.

There had been an interesting metamorphosis in Dr. Locke. When we met for the first time in Berlin in 1923, he took me for a promenade in the Tiergarten. And walking down the row, with the statues of the Prussian kings supported by the famous philosophers and poets and composers on either side, he remarked to me that he thought those statues the finest ideal and expression of the plastic arts in the world. The remark was amusing, for it was just a short while before that I had walked through the same row

with George Grosz, who had described the statues as "the sugar-candy art of Germany." When I showed Dr. Locke George Grosz's book of drawings, *Ecce Homo*, he recoiled from their brutal realism. (Dr. Locke is a Philadelphia blue-black blood, a Rhodes scholar and graduate of Oxford University, and I have heard him described as the most refined Negro in America).

So it was interesting now to discover that Dr. Locke had become the leading Negro authority on African Negro sculpture. I felt that there was so much more affinity between the art of George Grosz and African sculpture than between the Tiergarten insipid idealization of Nordic kings and artists and the transcending realism of the African artists.

Yet I must admit that although Dr. Locke seemed a perfect symbol of the Aframerican rococo in his personality as much as in his prose style, he was doing his utmost to appreciate the new Negro that he had uncovered. He had brought the best examples of their work together in a pioneer book. But from the indication of his appreciations it was evident that he could not lead a Negro renaissance. His introductory remarks were all so weakly winding round and round and getting nowhere. Probably this results from a kink in Dr. Locke's artistic outlook, perhaps due to its effete European academic quality.

When he published his *Anthology of the New Negro*, he put in a number of my poems, including one which was originally entitled "The White House." My title was symbolic, not meaning specifically the private homes of white people, but more the vast modern edifice of American Industry from which Negroes were effectively barred as a group. I cannot convey here my amazement and chagrin when Dr. Locke arbitrarily changed the title of my poem to "White Houses" and printed it in his anthology, without consulting me. I protested against the act, calling Dr. Locke's attention to the fact that my poem had been published under the original title of "The White House" in *The Liberator*. He replied that he had changed the title for political reasons, as it might be implied that the title meant the White House in Washington, and that that could be made an issue against my returning to America.

I wrote him saying that the idea that my poem had reference to the official residence of the president of the United States was ridiculous; and that, whether I was permitted to return to America or not, I did not want the title changed, and would prefer the omission of the poem. For his title "White Houses" was misleading. It changed the whole symbolic intent and meaning of the poem, making it appear as if the burning ambition of the black malcontent was to enter white houses in general. I said that there were many white folks' houses I would not choose to enter, and that, as a fanatical advocate of personal freedom, I hoped that all human beings would always have the right to decide whom they wanted to have enter their houses.

But Dr. Locke high-handedly used his substitute title of "White Houses" in all the editions of his anthology. I couldn't imagine such a man as the leader of a renaissance, when his artistic outlook was so reactionary.

The Negroid élite was not so formidable to meet after all. The financial success of my novel had helped soften hard feelings in some quarters. A lovely lady from Harlem expressed the views of many. Said she:

Why all this nigger-row if a colored writer can exploit his own people and make money and a name? White writers have been exploiting us long enough without any credit to our race. It is silly for the Negro critics to holler to God about *Home to Harlem* as if the social life of the characters is anything like that of the respectable class of Negroes. The people in *Home to Harlem* are our low-down Negroes and we respectable Negroes ought to be proud that we are not like them and be grateful to you for giving us a real picture of Negroes whose lives we know little about on the inside.

I felt completely vindicated.

My agent in Paris gave a big party for the cast of *Blackbirds*, to which the lovely lady and other members of the black élite were invited. Adelaide Hall was the animating spirit of the *Blackbirds*. They gave some exhibition numbers, and

we all turned loose and had a grand gay time together, dancing and drinking champagne. The French guests (there were some chic ones) said it was the best party of the season. And in tipsy accents some of the Harlem élite admonished me against writing a *Home-to-Harlem* book about them.

Thus I won over most of the Negro intelligentsia in Paris, excepting the leading journalist and traveler who remained intransigent. Besides Negro news, the journalist specialized in digging up obscure and Amazing Facts for the edification of the colored people. In these "Facts" Beethoven is proved to be a Negro because he was dark and gloomy; also the Jewish people are proved to have been originally a Negro people!

The journalist was writing and working his way through Paris. Nancy Cunard's *Negro Anthology* describes him as a guide and quoted him as saying he had observed, in the flesh market of Paris, that white Southerners preferred colored trade, while Negro leaders preferred white trade. Returning to New York, he gave lectures "for men only" on the peepholes in the walls of Paris.

The journalist was a bitter critic of *Home to Harlem*, declaring it was obscene. I have often wondered if it is possible to establish a really intelligent standard to determine obscenity—a standard by which one could actually measure the obscene act and define the obscene thought. I have done lots of menial work and have no snobbery about common labor. I remember that in Marseilles and other places in Europe I was sometimes approached and offered a considerable remuneration to act as a guide or procurer or do other sordid things. While I was working as a model in Paris a handsome Italian model brought me an offer to work as an occasional attendant in a special *bains de vapeur*. The Italian said that he made good extra money working there. Now, although I needed more money to live, it was impossible for me to make myself do such things. The French say "*On fait ce que on peut.*" I could not. The very idea of the thing turned me dead cold. My individual morale was all I possessed. I felt that if I sacrificed it to make a little extra money, I would

become personally obscene. I would soon be utterly unable to make that easy money. I preferred a menial job.

Yet I don't think I would call another man obscene who could do what I was asked to do without having any personal feeling of revulsion against it. And if an artistic person had or was familiar with such sordid experiences of life and could transmute them into literary or any other art form, I could not imagine that his performance or his thought was obscene.

The Negro journalist argued violently against me. He insisted that I had exploited Negroes to please the white reading public. He said that the white public would not read good Negro books because of race prejudice; that he himself had written a "good" book which had not sold. I said that Negro writers, instead of indulging in whining and self-pity, should aim at reaching the reading public in general or creating a special Negro public; that Negroes had plenty of money to spend on books if books were sold to them.

I said I knew the chances for a black writer and a white writer were not equal, even if both were of the same caliber. The white writer had certain avenues, social and financial, which opened to carry him along to success, avenues which were closed to the black. Nevertheless I believed that the Negro writer also had a chance, even though a limited one, with the great American reading public. I thought that if a Negro writer were sincere in creating a plausible Negro tale—if a Negro character were made credible and human in his special environment with a little of the virtues and the vices that are common to the human species—he would obtain some recognition and appreciation. For Negro writers are not alone in competing with heavy handicaps. They have allies among some of the white writers and artists, who are fighting formalism and classicism, crusading for new forms and ideas against the dead weight of the old.

But the journalist was loudly positive that it was easy for a Negro writer to make a sensational success as a writer by "betraying" his race to the white public. So many of the Negro élite love to mouth that phrase about "betraying the

race"! As if the Negro group had special secrets which should not be divulged to the other groups. I said I did not think the Negro could be betrayed by any real work of art. If the Negro were betrayed in any place it was perhaps in that Negro press, by which the journalist was syndicated, with its voracious black appetite for yellow journalism.

Thereupon the journalist declared that he would prove that it was easy for a Negro to write the "nigger stuff" the whites wanted of him and make a success of it. He revealed that he was planning a novel for white consumption; that, indeed, he had already written some of it. He was aiming at going over to the white market. He was going to stop writing for Negroes, who gave him so little support, although he had devoted his life to the betterment of the Negro.

I was eager to see him prove his thesis. For he was expressing the point of view of the majority of the colored élite, who maintain that Negroes in the arts can win success by clowning only, because that is all the whites expect and will accept of them. So although I disliked his type of mind, I promised to help him, I was so keen about the result of his experiment. I introduced him to my agent in Paris, and my agent introduced him to a publisher in New York.

Our Negro journalist is very yellow and looks like a *métèque* in France, without attracting undue attention. Yet besides his "Amazing Facts" about Negroes he has written in important magazines, stressing the practical nonexistence of color prejudice in Europe and blaming Negroes for such as exists! Also he wrote in a white magazine about Africa and the color problem under a nom de plume which gave no indication of the writer's origin.

He might have thought that as he had "passed white" a little in complexion and in journalism, it would be just as easy "passing white" as a creative writer. Well, the Negro journalist deliberately wrote his novel as a "white" novelist—or as he imagined a white man would write. But the sensational white novel by a Negro has not yet found its publisher.

The last time I heard about him, he was again a Negro in Ethiopia, interviewing Haile

Selassie and reporting the white rape of Ethiopia from an African point of view for the American Negro press.

Nigger Heaven, the Harlem novel of Carl Van Vechten, also was much discussed. I met some of Mr. Van Vechten's Negro friends, who were not seeing him any more because of his book. I felt flattered that they did not mind seeing me! Yet most of them agreed that *Nigger Heaven* was broadly based upon the fact of contemporary high life in Harlem. Some of them said that Harlemites should thank their stars that *Nigger Heaven* had soft-pedaled some of the actually wilder Harlem scenes. While the conventional Negro moralists gave the book a hostile reception because of its hectic bohemianism, the leaders of the Negro intelligentsia showed a marked liking for it. In comparing it with *Home to Harlem*, James Weldon Johnson said that I had shown a contempt for the Negro bourgeoisie. But I could not be contemptuous of a Negro bourgeoisie which simply does not exist as a class or a group in America. Because I made the protagonist of my novel a lusty black worker, it does not follow that I am unsympathetic to a refined or wealthy Negro.

My attitude toward *Nigger Heaven* was quite different from that of its Negro friends and foes. I was more interested in the implications of the book. It puzzled me a little that the author, who is generally regarded as a discoverer and sponsor of promising young Negro writers, gave Lascar, the ruthless Negro prostitute, the victory over Byron, the young Negro writer, whom he left, when the novel ends, in the hands of the police, destined perhaps for the death house in Sing Sing.

Carl Van Vechten also was in Paris in the summer of 1929. I had been warned by a white non-admirer of Mr. Van Vechten that I would not like him because he patronized Negroes in a subtle way, to which the Harlem élite were blind because they were just learning sophistication! I thought it would be a new experience to meet a white who was subtly patronizing to a black; the majority of them were so naïvely crude about it. But I found Mr. Van Vechten not a bit patronizing, and quite all right. It was neither his fault nor mine if my reaction was negative.

One of Mr. Van Vechten's Harlem sheiks introduced us after midnight at the Café de la Paix. Mr. Van Vechten was a heavy drinker at that time, but I was not drinking liquor. I had recently suffered from a cerebral trouble and a specialist had warned me against drinking, even wine. And when a French doctor forbids wine, one ought to heed. When we met at that late hour at the celebrated rendezvous of the world's cosmopolites, Mr. Van Vechten was full and funny. He said, "What will you take?" I took a soft drink and I could feel that Mr. Van Vechten was shocked.

I am afraid that as a soft drinker I bored him. The white author and the black author of books about Harlem could not find much of anything to make conversation. The market trucks were rolling by loaded with vegetables for Les Halles, and suddenly Mr. Van Vechten, pointing to a truck-load of huge carrots, exclaimed, "How I would like to have all of them!" Perhaps carrots were more interesting than conversation. But I did not feel in any way caroty. I don't know whether my looks betrayed any disapproval. Really I hadn't the slightest objection to Mr. Van Vechten's enthusiasm for the truck driver's raw carrots, though I prefer carrots *en casserole avec poulet cocotte*. But he excused himself to go to the men's room and never came back. So, after waiting a considerable time, I paid the bill with some *Home to Harlem* money and walked in the company of the early dawn (which is delicious in Paris) back to the Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Mr. Van Vechten's sheik friend was very upset. He was a precious, hesitating sheik and very nervous about that introduction, wondering if it would take. I said that all was okay. But upon returning to New York he sent me a message from Mr. Van Vechten. The message said that Mr. Van Vechten was sorry for not returning, but he was so high that, after leaving us, he discovered himself running along the avenue after a truck load of carrots.

Among the Negro intelligentsia in Paris there was an interesting group of story-tellers, poets, and painters. Some had received grants from foundations to continue work abroad; some were being helped by private individuals; and all were more or less identified with the

Negro renaissance. It was illuminating to exchange ideas with them. I was an older man and not regarded as a member of the renaissance, but more as a forerunner. Indeed, some of them had aired their resentment of my intrusion from abroad into the renaissance set-up. They had thought that I had committed literary suicide because I went to Russia.

For my part I was deeply stirred by the idea of a real Negro renaissance. The Arabian cultural renaissance and the great European renaissance had provided some of my most fascinating reading. The Russian literary renaissance and also the Irish had absorbed my interest. My idea of a renaissance was one of talented persons of an ethnic or national group working individually or collectively in a common purpose and creating things that would be typical of their group.

I was surprised when I discovered that many of the talented Negroes regarded their renaissance more as an uplift organization and a vehicle to accelerate the pace and progress of smart Negro society. It was interesting to note how sharply at variance their artistic outlook was from that of the modernistic white groups that took a significant interest in Negro literature and art. The Negroes were under the delusion that when a lady from Park Avenue or from Fifth Avenue, or a titled European, became interested in Negro art and invited Negro artists to her home, that was a token of Negroes breaking into upper-class white society. I don't think that it ever occurred to them that perhaps such white individuals were searching for a social and artistic significance in Negro art which they could not find in their own society, and that the radical nature and subject of their interest operated against the possibility of their introducing Negroes further than their own particular homes in coveted white society.

Also, among the Negro artists there was much of that Uncle Tom attitude which works like Satan against the idea of a coherent and purposeful Negro group. Each one wanted to be the first Negro, the one Negro, and the only Negro *for the whites* instead of for their group. Because an unusual number of them were receiving grants to do creative work, they actually and naïvely believed that Negro artists as a group would always be treated differently from white artists and be protected by powerful white patrons.

Some of them even expressed the opinion that Negro art would solve the centuries-old social problem of the Negro. That idea was vaguely hinted by Dr. Locke in his introduction to *The New Negro*. Dr. Locke's essay is a remarkable chocolate *soufflé* of art and politics, with not an ingredient of information inside.

They were nearly all Harlem-conscious, in a curious synthetic way, it seemed to me—not because they were aware of Harlem's intrinsic values as a unique and popular Negro quarter, but apparently because white folks had discovered black magic there. I understood more clearly why there had been so much genteel-Negro hostility to my *Home to Harlem* and to Langston Hughes's primitive Negro poems.

I wondered after all whether it would be better for me to return to the new *milieu* of Harlem. Much as all my sympathy was with the Negro group and the idea of a Negro renaissance, I doubted if going back to Harlem would be an advantage. I had done my best Harlem stuff when I was abroad, seeing it from a long perspective. I thought it might be better to leave Harlem to the artists who were on the spot, to give them their chance to produce something better than *Home to Harlem*. I thought that I might as well go back to Africa.

GEORGE S. SCHUYLER

The Rise of the Black Internationale (1938)

The three generations since Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation (which a quarter million black Union soldiers rescued from oblivion as a mere scrap of paper) have been the most momentous in the history of the world. They have seen unprecedented shifts and incredible alignments. They have seen miraculous inventions fantastic in their potentialities. They have seen such cruelty, such conquests, such persecution and oppression, such exploitation as humanity never dreamed before.

More important to colored people, these 75 years have seen the steady decline in the power and prestige of people of color the world over, thanks to the improvement in European firearms, the amazing technological advance of the West and the shattering of distance and isolation by modern transportation and communication. And most important of all, these years have seen the resultant rise of the White Internationale and the gradual rise of the Black Internationale in opposition; not powerful opposition as yet, perhaps, but containing vast potentialities of which the white world is all too painfully cognizant.

So far as the colored world is concerned, one might refer to these three generations as the period of fluctuating inferiority complexes. The decline in the fortunes of the darker races was quickly reflected in the attitude of the white world toward them and the colored people's attitude toward themselves. An important factor in the racial equation, this self-opinion, for there is a human tendency to become what we *think* we are. Status largely determines hope or hopelessness. Coupled with white control of colored education through control of government and missionary schools, the colored races were put on the defensive psychologically and so remained until the World War. It is important to trace the politico-economic changes that altered the world *without* and so altered the world *within*.

In 1863 Africa, with the exception of South Africa, Sierra Leone, Senegal, the Boer Republics, various stations and forts on the West Coast, and the Barbary States on the fringes of the South Mediterranean, was virtually unknown territory to Europeans. Europe had not yet been sufficiently prodded by circumstances or implemented by armaments to effect the conquest of Africa.

In the seventh-century the dusky Mosiems had conquered all northern Africa. They had planted colonies at Mombasa, Malindi, and Sofala which developed into powerful commercial states. They had swept into Spain and Portugal, ruled the former for 700 years and threatened the freedom of white Europe. In 1453 the Turks had conquered Constantinople. From 1517 to 1551 they extended their rule over Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripoli, and at one time rolled up to the gates of Vienna. Beginning with the European "Age of Discovery" in the fifteenth-century the fortunes of the darker races began to decline, but the trend was slow until 1875. As late as the beginning of the nineteenth-century the dusky Barbary States held tens of thousands of whites captive and flaunted their banners in the faces of Europe's navies.

While the slave trade had undermined the excellent monarcho-communistic economy of Africa, black men still ruled it (and often profited from the traffic). Europe had first to defeat the "Infidel," to end its disastrous nationalistic wars, to down Napoleon, and to start the age of steam before it could know Africa. Prior to that it was only interested in slaves and tall stories from the Dark Continent.

Interest in Africa revived with the explorations beginning in 1788. Interestingly enough this was also the age of Watt and Eli Whitney, of the Declaration of Independence and the Rights of Man. France occupied Egypt in 1798–1803 and Britain followed her. But an almost independent state was formed there under Mehemet Ali

which extended its rule deep into the Sudan from 1820 onward. The first recorded crossing of Africa was accomplished between the years 1802 and 1811 by two Portuguese Negro traders, Pedro Baptista and A. José, who passed from Angola eastward to Zambezi. In 1814 England formally annexed Cape Colony, over 150 years after the first permanent white settlement by the Dutch on April 6, 1652.

Waterloo for Africa

Waterloo in Europe spelled Waterloo for Africa. But the end was still a long way off. There was still the ages old struggle between Christianity and Mohammedanism for trade rights and political supremacy disguised as Holy War and suppression of slavery. The Moslems were accused of continuing the slave trade and stripping Africa of manpower. The Christians with their developing power economy needed raw materials furnished by enslaved black workers at the source of supply. So the rush of "Christian" explorers, traders, and missionaries descended upon Africa.

In 1863 Livingstone was exploring the Zambezi and Lake Nyasa, and making mulattoes the while. Speke was "solving the riddle of the Nile," Baker was "discovering" Lake Albert Nyanza, Stanley was yet to "find" Livingstone and solve the "mysteries" of Victoria Nyanza, Tanganyika, and the Congo River. It was the age of Schweinfurth and du Chaillu, of stirring tales of rich and powerful black kingdoms with swarms of stalwart black warriors, of mysterious cities like Timbuktu, of strange religious rites deep in the heart of steaming jungles.

As late as 1875 Great Britain controlled but 250,000 square miles, France 170,000 square miles. Portugal 40,000 square miles, Spain 1,000 square miles, and the Dutch Republics of Transvaal and Orange Free but 150,000 square miles of Africa. Turkey held sway very loosely over Egypt, the Egyptian Sudan, Tripoli, and Tunis. Morocco, Abyssinia, Zanzibar, and Liberia were independent. The great kingdoms of Ashanti, Dahomey, Benin Uganda, Cazembe, Musta Yanvo, and countless other Moham-

median sultanates and pagan countries still enjoyed their freedom. The Boers paid yearly tribute to the warlike Zulus and it was not until England's successful campaign against the Ethiopians in 1867-68 that that mountain kingdom learned what to expect from the white world.

In 1869 the richest diamond fields on earth were discovered in the Vaal River valley and the Suez Canal was opened to traffic: two events that focused added attention on Africa. Two years later England completed acquisition of the Gold Coast littoral. Already France had grabbed Senegal (1854) and Obok (1862) at the entrance to the Red Sea. In 1873 England worsted the Ashantis and two years later lifted the Union Jack over Delagoa Bay. Events were happening faster than anyone imagined, and yet on the eve of the biggest land-grab in history a House of Commons committee considering West Africa affairs could recommend "that all further extension of territory or assumption of government, or new treaty offering any protection to native tribes, would be inexpedient." Thick-witted Britons!

Now economic rivalry, political necessity, and rapid flow of invention were forcing the issue. The South beaten, the U. S. government forced withdrawal of France from Mexico and compelled other European powers to relinquish hopes of snatching territory in South America. Prussia defeated France in 1870 and the land-hungry German Empire was born late on the colonial scene. Italy became a nation instead of a conglomeration of Caribbean-like dukedoms and baronies and began looking for real estate abroad to add to her prestige.

Defeated France perforce switched her ambitions from Europe to Africa. The ambitions of young Germany and the grasping Leopold of Belgium set the pace for the imperialistic-minded world. These two countries had only Africa and the South Seas in which to seek exploitable territory. England, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal had grabbed everything else. Leopold's 1876 conference grew into the International African Association which afterward snatched the rich Congo "Free" State, with the United States the first to recognize the

robbery. In 1879 the Zulu military power was broken. The Germans called the 1884-85 imperialistic conference for the "proper" regulation of all stolen lands in Africa, but even while the criminals were conferring German agents planted the Kaiser's emblem in Southwest Africa, Togoland, Cameroons, and Southeast Africa. Alarmed by these precipitous and typically Teutonic methods, the British, French, and Portuguese redoubled their efforts. By means of bullets, chicanery, gin, and Christianity the white nations by 1900 had conquered or annexed all the rest of Africa and native kings who opposed them were either in exile or gathered to their fathers.

The Americas

The period from 1863 to 1876 which saw the African kingdoms drop into the European sack, also saw the emancipated Americans rise to the full promise of Appomattox, the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth Amendments and the political power inaugurated by Reconstruction. There was hope in their breasts that the darkest era was behind them; that they were on the threshold of full citizenship rights and privileges in the Union, and destined to march arm in arm with their white fellow men to the creation of a truly great civilization.

Southward in Mexico chaos reigned. In Spanish America dictator followed dictator and black men played their part in nation-building. In Brazil and Cuba slavery still obtained. Unhappy Haiti was torn with the usual strife and tyranny. In the Orient, Britain had just emerged from a serious Indian rebellion. The Malay peninsula, Indo-China, and the spice islands asleep in the azure seas, were still under their native rulers. China was still powerful, despite the aggressions of Britain, Russia, and France, and lording it over Korea, Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, Formosa, and adjacent lands. Little Japan, forced out of her voluntary isolation by Admiral Perry, was hastening to make up for lost time with the classic policy stated by one of her diplomats as "We adopt, we adapt, and so we become adept."

Railroads and steamships were in their infancy. Electric lights, telephones, bicycles, automobiles, the airplane, motion pictures, vulcanizing rubber, the phonograph, the radio, television, at countless other inventions and processes that have revolutionized industry and commerce and are now taken for granted were still in the future. The use of oil was confined to kerosene lamps and lubrication. Production and distribution of foodstuffs was yet to be revolutionized. Neither the repeating rifle, the machine gun, or the submarine had made its appearance. The new world economic that, by a combination of purely fortuitous circumstances, was already making the white nations the world rulers of colored nations was still in its infancy and the needs of national industry could still be served by the nation.

The scramble for colonies was not only a scramble for robber prestige but also a scramble for raw materials (or war materials) necessary to meet the essential demands of the new power economy without which no nation could or can become or remain a great power. The astounding technological mutation in the West in the century preceding and the years following 1875 also firmly established the international color line which until recently was only challenged by the sturdy and canny Nipponeese. Black, brown, and yellow alike were maligned and Jim-crowed on every side and in every place. Everywhere white people took precedence over darker people. "Science" justified the stealing exploitation, and oppression by "proving" to white satisfaction the "inferiority" of colored folk. History was rewritten in the light of the Aryan race theory. The so-called social sciences were yoked to the chariot of imperialism. The whole thing was blessed by the Church which undermined the psychology of colored peoples under the guise of teaching "morality."

American Negroes Groping

Betrayed by the Great Compromise of 1876 when Northern Republicans blessed their virtual re-enslavement in exchange for white Southern recognition of the crooked Hayes election, the

colored freeman progressively lost power and prestige in the face of Ku Klux Klan persecution and public indifference. By 1900 only one Negro's voice was heard in the halls of Congress and he was soon gone. The loudly-hailed rapprochement between the white South and the white North was well under way.

Nevertheless there was a tremendous store of hopefulness, optimism and naïveté in colored America. All you needed was education, religion, and thrift to succeed. You must pioneer and build something. Let down your bucket where you are. The Republican Party is the ship, all else the sea. The name of Lincoln made hearts leap under dusky hides and whatever white folks said was gospel.

Perhaps there *was* something to what they said about our having no history! Perhaps, after all, colored folks were inferior. Where, pray, *was* our background? What *had* our forefathers done except hew wood and haul water for Marse John? Mightn't it be true that we had never built a civilization? Wasn't that what our "education" taught us? Was there anything for us to be proud of—even our smooth dark skins and soft krinkly hair? Wasn't there some logic to the white contention that the lighter we were, the better we were? Didn't that put us nearer to perfection? So let's ridicule anything and everything Negro and eulogise everything white per se. Let's insist that black be comic and yellow refined *but of course not as refined as no color at all!* Let's make wall flowers out of our dusky-hued maidens and yell "Did you order any coal?" when a black man appeared. True, Negroes had ruled during Reconstruction, but weren't they corrupt like the white folks said and too ignorant to be entrusted with responsibility of office?

Thus some of the gropings of the Aframerican mind: fearful, uncertain, ignorant, and yet hopeful withal. Elsewhere, in India, China, Malaya, and Africa the products of mission training were similarly groping.

Then something else happened. World population, especially in Europe, was taking a tremendous spurt as forecast by Malthus. World area had not expanded an inch. Indeed, excessive and ignorant cultivation had contracted

the arable surface. As competition in international trade grew, capitalism turned to more intensive exploitation of home lands and there also competition grew more fierce. Panics came, unemployment grew, talk of a workers' revolution grew. There were insufficient markets for the goods produced in an ever endless stream. Fewer markets means fewer jobs. Fewer jobs made emigration imperative. The United States became the great labor market for white alien workers. The lower middle class of the white colonial powers sent their sons to Africa and Asia as clerks, army officers, and petty administrators. In America the growing emigration pushed Negroes farther and farther out to the economic fringes.

The period of 1900–1920 saw the social consequences of the politico-economic imperialism. Color discrimination and segregation grew apace as job competition intensified and imperialism became solidified. The lynching wave reached its peak. The Grandfather Clauses and the Springfield Race Riot were straws in the wind. Then the triumph of Japan over Russia in 1904 roused hope among colored people that the balance of power might again shift to their side. The Pan-African Conference in Paris in 1899, the Niagara Movement in 1904 and the organization of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909 marked a turning point in the mentality of the Negro. Elsewhere brown, black, and yellow men and women were coldly appraising this enforced white ideology and inaugurating a renaissance in opinion of self.

Beginning of Revolt

The World War came. The migration of black Southerners to the industrial North, the transportation of millions of brown and yellow and black workers and soldiers to the docks and battlefields of Europe gave new impetus to Negro thought; brought up new ideas of solidarity in the world of color. A quarter million dusky Americans in uniform went to France to be insulted and maligned and returned to be shot down. Millions of others made big

money at home. The Wilsonian slogans stirred the hearts and minds of the oppressed Africa and Asia. Dark colonial emigres schemed and planned in the salons and cellars of London, New York, Paris, Bombay, Batavia, Singapore, and Cairo. Mahatma Gandhi electrified the world with Non-cooperation. White people were *not* united, the colored world learned, and there were flaws in the armor of imperialism. Spengler and Stoddard wrote gloomily of the decline of the West and the rising tide of color. Soviet Russia, emerging from the slime of Czarism, tossed her bloodstained cap into the international arena professing love for all the oppressed the better to win concessions from their oppressors. Race riots swept over America and occurred elsewhere. American Negroes fought back with the white man's weapons in Chicago, Washington, Longview, and Tulsa. Thousands of Indians defied the British Raj and went to jail. In South Africa Clements Kadalie threw down the challenge of organized black workers to the brutal Boers. Four Pan-African Congresses under Du Bois brought together many bright minds of the Negro world.

Black scholars turned to piecing together the Negro's background. Negro newspapers, once mere pamphlets, challenged the best in America and unified the thinking of their people as never before. Black magazines seriously discussed the Negro's place in the world and his relation to other colored peoples. Black lawyers thundered at the bar of white justice. Marcus Garvey stirred the imagination of the ignorant and romantic; fostered pride of color where before there had too often been shame. Dusky surgeons headed hospitals. Businesses sprang up throughout Aframerica attesting to Negroes increasing belief in themselves, if nothing more. Again men of color sat in a dozen state legislatures and even returned to the halls of Congress. Black agitators spouted the jargon of socialism and communism and openly plotted the overthrow of the capitalist system.

In America, in Asia, in the islands of the sea the darker men became critical and condemnatory of white civilization where once they had

been worshipful and almost grateful for shoddy castoffs. Today the colored worker strikes in Trinidad and Jamaica, in Bathurst and Cape Town, in Nigeria and the Gold Coast. He sits down in Detroit and Chicago and pickets in New York and Pittsburgh. He sees whites relinquishing extraterritoriality in China and Egypt and giving Burma and India self-government. He sees erstwhile haughty whites cowering in the shellholes of Shanghai, a British ambassador machine gunned on the road to Nanking, and an American gunboat bombed to the bottom of the Yangtze River without reprisal from a Caucasia become panic-stricken and paralyzed.

The New Negro Arrives

The New Negro is here. Perhaps no more courageous than the Old Negro who dropped his shackles in 1863, and fought against ignorance, propaganda lethargy, and persecution, but better informed, privy to his past, understanding of the present, unafraid of the future. No longer blindly worshipful of his rulers, he yet has learned to respect and study the intelligence and accumulation of power that has put them where they are. He has less illusions about his world.

He is aware that the balance of power is shifting in the world and so are his cousins in Africa, in India, in Malaysia, the Caribbean, and China. He is rightly suspicious of white labor even when it is sincere. He has seen white labor forget the Marxian divisions of proletariat and bourgeoisie and join the White Internationale with the capitalists. He has seen both the second and third Internationales abandon the colored peoples to the tender mercies of their masters in order to perpetuate the industrial system of Europe, which is based on colonial slave labor. He sees Russia abandon its announced revolutionary role and with French and British workingmen back Deladier and Chamberlain. And, as crowning infamy, he has seen the ruthless rape of defenseless Ethiopia with the pope applauding on the sidelines.

He knows that the fear of losing the colonial peoples and their resources is all that prevents another World War. He believes that to combat this White Internationale of oppression a Black Internationale of liberation is necessary. He sees and welcomes a community of interest

of all colored peoples. No longer ignorant, terrorized, or lacking confidence, he waits, and schemes and plans. He is the Damoclean sword dangling over the white world. Everywhere he is on the march, he cannot be stopped, and he knows it.

ANNA JULIA COOPER

One Phase of American Literature (1892)

For nations as for individuals, a product, to be worthy of the term literature, must contain something characteristic and *sui generis*.

So long as America remained a mere English colony, drawing all her life and inspiration from the mother country, it may well be questioned whether there was such a thing as American literature. "Who ever reads an American book?" it was scornfully asked in the eighteenth century. Imitation is the worst of suicides; it cuts the nerve of originality and condemns to mediocrity; and 'twas not till the pen of our writers was dipped in the life-blood of their own nation and pictured out its own peculiar heart throbs and agonies that the world cared to listen. The nightingale and the skylark had to give place to the mocking bird, the bobolink, and the whip-poorwill, the heather and the blue bells of Britain, to our own, golden-rod and daisy; the insular and monarchic customs and habits of thought of old England needed to develop into the broader, looser, freer swing of democratic America, before her contributions to the world of thought could claim the distinction of individuality and gain an appreciative hearing.

And so our writers have succeeded in becoming national and representative in proportion as they have from year to year entered more and more fully, and more and more sympathetically, into the distinctive life of their nation, and endeavored to reflect and picture its homeliest pulsations and its elemental components. And so in all the arts, as men have gradually come to realize that

Nothing useless is or low
Each thing in its place is best,

and have wrought into their products, lovingly and impartially and reverently, every type, every tint, every tone that they felt or saw or heard, just to that degree have their expressions, whether by pen or brush or rhythmic cadence, adequately and simply given voice to the thought

of Nature around them. No man can prophesy with another's parable. For each of us truth means merely the re-presentation of the sensations and experiences of our personal environment, colored and vivified—fused into consistency and crystallized into individuality in the crucible of our own feelings and imaginations. The mind of genius is merely the brook, picturing back its own tree and bush and bit of sky and cloud ensparkled by individual salts and sands and rippling motion. And paradoxical as it may seem, instead of making us narrow and provincial, this trueness to one's habitat, this appreciative eye and ear for the tints and voices of one's own little wood serves but to usher us into the eternal galleries and choruses of God. It is only through the unclouded perception of our tiny "part" that we can come to harmonize with the "stupendous whole," and in order to do this our sympathies must be finely attuned and quick to vibrate under the touch of the commonplace and vulgar no less than at the hand of the elegant and refined. Nothing natural can be wholly unworthy; and we do so at our peril, if what God has cleansed we presume to call common or unclean. Nature's language is not writ in cipher. Her notes are always simple and sensuous, and the very meanest recesses and commonest byways are fairly deafening with her sermons and songs. It is only when we ourselves are out of tune through our pretentiousness and self-sufficiency, or are blinded and rendered insensate by reason of our foreign and unnatural "cultivation" that we miss her meanings and inadequately construe her multiform lessons.

For two hundred and fifty years there was in the American commonwealth a great *silent* factor. Though in themselves simple and unique their offices were those of the barest utility. Imported merely to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, no artist for many a generation thought them worthy of the sympathetic study of a model. No Shakespeare arose to distil from

their unmatched personality and unparalleled situations the exalted poesy and crude grandeur of an immortal Caliban. Distinct in color, original in temperament, simple and unconventionalized in thought and action their spiritual development and impressionability under their novel environment would have furnished, it might seem, as interesting a study in psychology for the poetic pen, as would the gorges of Yosemite to the inspired pencil. Full of vitality and natural elasticity, the severest persecution and oppression could not kill them out or even sour their temper. With massive brawn and indefatigable endurance they wrought under burning suns and chilling blasts, in swamps and marshes,—they cleared the forests, tunneled mountains, threaded the land with railroads, planted, picked, and ginned the cotton, produced the rice and the sugar for the markets of the world. Without money and without price they poured their hearts' best blood into the enriching and developing of this country. They wrought but were silent.

The most talked about of all the forces in this diversified civilization, they seemed the great American fact, the one objective reality, on which scholars sharpened their wits, at which orators and statesmen fired their eloquence, and from which, after so long a time, authors, with varied success and truthfulness, have begun at last to draw subjects and models. Full of imagination and emotion, their sensuous pictures of the "New Jerusalem," "the golden slippers," "the long white robe," "the pearly gates," etc., etc., seem fairly to steam with tropical luxuriance and naive abandon. The paroxysms of religious fervor into which this simple-minded, child-like race were thrown by the contemplation of Heaven and rest and freedom, would have melted into sympathy and tender pity if not into love, a race less cold and unresponsive than the one with which they were thrown in closest contact. There was something truly poetic in their weird moanings, their fitful gleams of hope and trust, flickering amidst the darkness of their wailing helplessness, their strange sad songs, the half-coherent ebullitions of souls in pain, which become, the more they are studied,

at once the wonder and the despair of musical critics and imitators. And if one had the insight and the simplicity to gather together, to digest and assimilate these original lisps of an unsophisticated people while they were yet close—so close—to nature and to nature's God, there is material here, one might almost believe, as rich, as unhackneyed, as original and distinctive as ever inspired a Homer, or a Cædmon, or other simple genius of a people's infancy and lisping childhood.

In the days of their bitterest persecution, their patient endurance and Christian manliness inspired *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which revolutionized the thought of the world on the subject of slavery and at once placed its author in the front rank of the writers of her country and age. Here at last was a work which England could not parallel. Here was a work indigenous to American soil and characteristic of the country—a work which American forces alone could have produced. The subject was at once seen to be fresh and interesting to the world as well as national and peculiar to America; and so it has been eagerly cultivated by later writers with widely varying degrees of fitness and success.

By a rough classification, authors may be separated into two groups: first, those in whom the artistic or poetic instinct is uppermost—those who write to please—or rather who write because *they* please; who simply paint what they see, as naturally, as instinctively, and as irresistibly as the bird sings—with no thought at all of audience—singing because it loves to sing,—singing because God, nature, truth sings through it. For such writers, to be true to themselves and true to Nature is the only canon. They cannot warp a character or distort a fact in order to prove a point. They have nothing to prove. All who care to, may listen while they make the woods resound with their glad sweet carolling; and the listeners may draw their own conclusions as to the meaning of the cadences of this minor strain, or that hushed and almost awful note of rage or despair. And the myriad-minded multitude attribute their myriad-fold impressions to the myriad-minded soul by which they have severally been enchanted, each

in his own way according to what he brings to the witching auditorium. But the singer sings on with his hat before his face, unmindful, it may be unconscious, of the varied strains reproduced from him in the multitudinous echoes of the crowd. Such was Shakespeare, such was George Eliot, such was Robert Browning. Such, in America, was Poe, was Bryant, was Longfellow; and such, in his own degree perhaps, is Mr. Howells.

In the second group belong the preachers,—whether of righteousness or unrighteousness,—all who have an idea to propagate, no matter in what form their talent enables them to clothe it, whether poem, novel, or sermon,—all those writers with a purpose or a lesson, who catch you by the buttonhole and pommel you over the shoulder till you are forced to give assent in order to escape their vociferations; or they may lure you into listening with the soft music of the siren's tongue—no matter what the expedient to catch and hold your attention, they mean to fetter you with their one idea, whatever it is, and make you, if possible, ride their hobby. In this group I would place Milton in much of his writing, Carlyle in all of his, often our own Whittier, the great reformer-poet, and Lowell; together with such novelists as E. P. Roe, Bellamy, Tourgee, and some others.

Now in my judgment writings of the first class will be the ones to withstand the ravages of time. 'isms' have their day and pass away. New necessities arise with new conditions and the emphasis has to be shifted to suit the times. No finite mind can grasp and give out the whole circle of truth. We do well if we can illuminate just the tiny arc which we occupy and should be glad that the next generation will not need the lessons we try so assiduously to hammer into this. In the evolution of society, as the great soul of humanity builds it "more lofty chambers," the old shell and slough of didactic teaching must be left behind and forgotten. The world for instance has outgrown, I suspect, those passages of *Paradise Lost* in which Milton makes the Almighty Father propound the theology of a seventeenth-century Presbyterian. But a passage like the one in which Eve with guileless

innocence describes her first sensations on awakening into the world is as perennial as man.

"That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awaked and found myself reposed
Under a shade on flowers, much wondering
where
And what I was, whence thither brought
and how.
Not distant far from thence a murmuring
sound
Of waters issued from a cave, and spread
Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved
Pure as the expanse of Heaven;
I thither went
With unexperienced thought and laid me
down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth lake that to me seemed another sky.
As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the watery gleam appeared,
Bending to look on me; I started back,
It started back; but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with answering
looks
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
Mine eyes till now,—and pined with vain
desire,
Had not a voice thus warned me.
 "What thou seest,
What there thou seest, fair creature, is
thyself;
With thee it came and goes; but follow me,
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
Thy coming and thy soft embraces.
 What could I do but follow straight
Invisibly thus led?
Till I espied thee, fair indeed and tall,
Under a plantain; yet methought less fair,
Less winning soft, less amiably mild
Than that smooth watery image; back I
turned
Thou following criedst aloud, Return, fair
Eve,
Whom fiest thou? whom thou fiest, of him
thou art.
Part of my soul, I seek thee, and thee claim
My other half."

This will never cease to throb and thrill as long as man is man and woman is woman.

Now owing to the problematical position at present occupied by descendants of Africans in the American social polity,—growing, I presume, out of the continued indecision in the mind of the more powerful descendants of the Saxons as to whether it is expedient to apply the maxims of their religion to their civil and political relationships,—most of the writers who have hitherto attempted a portrayal of life and customs among the darker race have belonged to our class II: they have all, more or less, had a point to prove or a mission to accomplish, and thus their art has been almost uniformly perverted to serve their ends; and, to add to their disadvantage, most, if not all, the writers on this line have been but partially acquainted with the life they wished to delineate and through sheer ignorance oft-times, as well as from design occasionally, have not been able to put themselves in the darker man's place. The art of "thinking one's self imaginatively into the experiences of others" is not given to all, and it is impossible to acquire it without a background and a substratum of sympathetic knowledge. Without this power our portraits are but death's heads or caricatures and no amount of cudgelling can put into them the movement and reality of life. Not many have had Mrs. Stowe's power because not many have studies with Mrs. Stowe's humility and love. They forget that underneath the black man's form and behavior there is the great bed-rock of humanity, the key to which is the same that unlocks every tribe and kindred of the nations of earth. Some have taken up the subject with a view to establishing evidences of ready formulated theories and preconceptions; and, blinded by their prejudices and antipathies, have altogether abjured all candid and careful study. Others with flippant indifference have performed a few psychological experiments on their cooks and coachmen, and with astounding egotism, and powers of generalization positively bewildering, forthwith aspire to enlighten the world with dissertations on racial traits of the Negro. A few with really kind intentions and a sincere desire for information have approached the subject as a clumsy

microscopist, not quite at home with his instrument, might study a new order of beetle or bug. Not having focused closely enough to obtain a clear-cut view, they begin by telling you that all colored people look exactly alike and end by noting down every chance contortion or idiosyncrasy as a race characteristic. Some of their conclusions remind one of the enterprising German on a tour of research and self improvement through Great Britain, who recommended his favorite sour kraut both to an Irishman, whom he found sick with fever, and to a Scotchman, who had a cold. On going that way subsequently and finding the Scotchman well and the Irishman dead, he writes: *Mem.—Sauer kraut good for the Scotch but death to the Irish.*

This criticism is not altered by our grateful remembrance of those who have heroically taken their pens to champion the black man's cause. But even here we may remark that a painter may be irreproachable in motive and as benevolent as an angel in intention, nevertheless we have a right to compare his copy with the original and point out in what respects it falls short or is overdrawn; and he should thank us for doing so.

It is in no captious spirit, therefore, that we note a few contributions to this phase of American literature which have been made during the present decade; we shall try to estimate their weight, their tendency, their truthfulness, and their lessons, if any, for ourselves.

Foremost among the champions of the black man's cause through the medium of fiction must be mentioned Albion W. Tourgee. No man deserves more the esteem and appreciation of the colored people of this country for his brave words. For ten years he has stood almost alone as the enthusiastic advocate, not of charity and dole to the Negro, but of justice. The volumes he has written upon the subject have probably been read by from five to ten millions of the American people. Look over his list consecrated to one phase or another of the subject: *A Fool's Errand*, *A Royal Gentleman*, *Bricks without Straw*, *An Appeal to Cæsar*, *Hot Ploughshares*, *Pactolus Prime*,—over three thousand pages—enough almost for a life's work, besides an almost interminable quantity published in periodicals.

Mr. Tourgee essays to paint life with the coloring of fiction, and yet, we must say, we do not think of him a novelist primarily; that is, novel making with him seems to be a mere incident, a convenient vehicle through which to convey those burning thoughts which he is constantly trying to impress upon the people of America, whether in lecture, stump speech, newspaper column, or magazine article. His power is not that already referred to of thinking himself imaginatively into the experiences of others. He does not create many men of many minds. All his offspring are little Tourgees—they preach his sermons and pray his prayers.

In *Pactolus Prime*, for example, one of his latest, his hero, a colored bootblack in a large hotel, is none other than the powerful, impassioned, convinced and convincing lecturer, Judge Tourgee himself, done over in ebony. His caustic wit, his sledge hammer logic, his incisive criticism, his righteous indignation, all reflect the irresistible arguments of the great pleader for the Negro; and all the incidents are arranged to enable this bootblack to impress on senators and judges, lawyers, and divines, his plea for justice to the Negro, along with the blacking and shine which he skillfully puts on their aristocratic toes. And so with all the types which Mr. Tourgee presents—worthy or pitiful ones always—they uniformly preach or teach, convict or convert. Artistic criticism aside, it is mainly as a contribution to polemic literature in favor of the colored man that most of Tourgee's works will be judged; and we know of no one who can more nearly put himself in the Negro's place in resenting his wrongs and pleading for his rights. In presenting truth from the colored American's standpoint Mr. Tourgee excels, we think, in fervency and frequency of utterance any living writer, white or colored. Mr. Cable is brave and just. He wishes to see justice done in the Freedman's case in equity, and we honor and revere him for his earnest, manly efforts towards that end. But Mr. Cable does not forget (I see no reason why he should, of course,) that he is a white man, a Southerner, and an ex-soldier in the Confederate army. To use his own words, he writes "with an admiration and affection for the South, that for justice

and sincerity yield to none; in a spirit of faithful sonship to a Southern state." Of course this but proves his sincerity, illustrates his candor, and adds weight to the axiomatic justice of a cause which demands such support from a thoroughly disinterested party, or rather a party whose interest and sympathy and affection must be all on the side he criticises and condemns. The passion of the partisan and the bias of the aggrieved can never be charged against him. Mr. Cable's is the impartiality of the judge who condemns his own son or cuts off his own arm. His attitude is judicial, convincing, irreproachable throughout.

Not only the Christian conscience of the South, but also its enlightened self-interest is unquestionably on the side of justice and manly dealing toward the black man; and one can not help feeling that a cause which thus enlists the support and advocacy of the "better self" of a nation must ultimately be invincible: and Mr. Cable, in my judgment, embodies and represents that Christian conscience and enlightened self-interest of the hitherto silent South; he vocalizes and inspires its better self. To him the dishonesty and inhumanity there practiced against the black race is a blot on the scutcheon of that fair land and doomed to bring in its wake untold confusion, disaster, and disgrace. From his calm elevation he sees the impending evil, and with loving solicitude urges his countrymen to flee the wrath to come. Mr. Tourgee, on the other hand, speaks with all the eloquence and passion of the aggrieved party himself. With his whip of fine cords he pitilessly scourges the inconsistencies, the weaknesses and pettiness of the black man's persecutors. The fire is burning within him, he cannot but speak. He has said himself that he deserves no credit for speaking and writing on this subject, for it has taken hold of him and possesses him to the exclusion of almost everything else. Necessity is laid upon him. Not more bound was Saul of Tarsus to consecrate his fiery eloquence to the cause of the persecuted Nazarene than is this white man to throw all the weight of his powerful soul into the plea for justice and Christianity in this American anomaly and huge inconsistency. Not many colored men would have

attempted Tourgee's brave defense of Reconstruction and the alleged corruption of Negro supremacy, more properly termed the period of white sullenness and desertion of duty. Not many would have dared, fearlessly as he did, to arraign this country for an enormous pecuniary debt to the colored man for the two hundred and forty-seven years of unpaid labor of his ancestors. Not many could so determinedly have held up the glass of the real Christianity before those believers in a white Christ and these preachers of the gospel, "Suffer the little *white* children to come unto me." We all see the glaring inconsistency and feel the burning shame. We appreciate the incongruity and the indignity of having to stand forever hat in hand as beggars, or be shoved aside as intruders in a country whose resources have been opened up by the unrequited toil of our forefathers. We know that our bill is a true one—that the debt is as real as to any pensioners of our government. But the principles of patience and forbearance, of meekness and charity, have become so ingrained in the Negro character that there is hardly enough self-assertion left to ask as our right that a part of the country's surplus wealth be *loaned* for the education of our children; even though we know that our present poverty is due to the fact that the toil of the last quarter century enriched these coffers, but left us the heirs of crippled, deformed, frost-bitten, horny-handed, and empty-handed mothers and fathers. Oh, the shame of it!

A coward during the war gets a few scratches and bruises—often in *fleeing from the enemy*—and his heirs are handsomely pensioned by his *grateful* country! But these poor wretches stood every man to his post for two hundred and fifty years, digging trenches, building roads, tunneling mountains, clearing away forests, cultivating the soil in the cotton fields and rice swamps till fingers dropped off, toes were frozen, knees twisted, arms stiff and useless—and when their sons and heirs, with the burdens of helpless parents to support, wish to secure enough education to enable them to make a start in life, *their* grateful country sagely deliberates as to the feasibility of sending them to another undeveloped jungle to show off their talent for unlimited

pioneer work in strange climes! The Indian, during the entire occupancy of this country by white men, has stood proudly aloof from all their efforts at development, and presented an unbroken front of hostility to the introduction and spread of civilization. The Negro, though brought into the country by force and compelled under the lash to lend his brawn and sturdy sinews to promote its material growth and prosperity, nevertheless with perfect amiability of temper and adaptability of mental structure has quietly and unhesitatingly accepted its standards and fallen in line with its creeds. He adjusts himself just as readily and as appreciatively, it would seem, to the higher and stricter requirements of freedom and citizenship; and although from beginning to end, nettled and goaded under unprecedented provocation, he has never once shown any general disposition to arise in his might and deluge this country with blood or desolate it with burning, as he might have done. It is no argument to charge weakness as the cause of his peaceful submission and to sneer at the "inferiority" of a race who would allow themselves to be made slaves—unrevenged. It *may* be nobler to perish red-handed, to kill as many as your battle axe holds out to hack and then fall with an exultant yell and savage grin of fiendish delight on the huge pile of bloody corpses,—expiring with the solace and unction of having ten thousand wounds all in front. I don't know. I sometimes think it depends on where you plant your standard and who wears the white plume which your eye inadvertently seeks. If Napoleon is the ideal of mankind, I suppose 'tis only noble to be strong; and true greatness may consist in an adamantine determination never to serve. The greatest race with which I am even partially acquainted proudly boasts that it has never met another race save as either enemy or victim. They seem to set great store by this fact and I judge it must be immensely noble according to their ideals. But somehow it seems to me that those nations and races who choose the Nazarene for their plumed knight would find some little jarring and variance between such notions and His ideals. There could not be at all times perfect unanimity between Leader

and host. A good many of his sayings, it seems to me, would have to be explained away; not a few of his injunctions quietly ignored, and I am not sure but the great bulk of his principles and precepts must after all lie like leaden lumps, an undigested and unassimilable mass on an uneasy, overburdened stomach. I find it rather hard to understand these things, and somehow I feel at times as if I have taken hold of the wrong ideal. But then, I suppose, it must be because I have not enough of the spirit that comes with the blood of those grand old *sea kings* (I believe you call them) who shot out in their trusty barks speeding over unknown seas and, like a death-dealing genius, with the piercing eye and bloodthirsty heart of hawk or vulture killed and harried, burned and caroused. This is doubtless all very glorious and noble, and the seed of it must be an excellent thing to have in one's blood. But I haven't it. I frankly admit my limitations. I am hardly capable of appreciating to the full such grand intrepidity,—due of course to the fact that the stock from which I am sprung did not attain that royal kink in its blood ages ago. My tribe has to own kinship with a very tame and unsanguinary individual who, a long time ago when blue blood was a distilling in the stirring fiery world outside, had no more heroic and daring a thing to do than help a pale sorrow-marked man as he was toiling up a certain hill at Jerusalem bearing his own cross whereon he was soon to be ignominiously nailed. This Cyrenian fellow was used to bearing burdens and he didn't mind giving a lift over a hard place now and then, with no idea of doing anything grand or memorable, or that even so much as his name would be known thereby. And then, too, by a rather strange coincidence this unwarlike and insignificant kinsman of ours had his home in a country (the fatherland of all the family) which had afforded kindly shelter to that same mysterious Stranger, when, a babe and persecuted by bloody power and heartless jealousy, He had to flee the land of His birth. And somehow this same country has in its day done so much fostering and sheltering of that kind—has watched and hovered over the cradles of religions and given refuge and comfort to the persecuted, the world-weary, the

storm-tossed benefactors of mankind so often that she has come to represent nothing stronger or more imposing than the "eternal womanly" among the nations, and to accept as her mission and ideal, *loving service* to mankind.

With such antecedents, then, the black race in America should not be upbraided for having no taste for blood and carnage. It is the fault of their constitution that they prefer the judicial awards of peace and have an eternal patience to abide the bloodless triumph of right. It is no argument, therefore, when I point to the record of their physical supremacy—when the homes and helpless ones of this country were absolutely at the black man's mercy and not a town laid waste, not a building burned, and *not a woman insulted*—it is no argument, I say, for you to retort: "*He was a coward; he didn't dare!*" The facts simply do not show this to have been the case.

Now the tardy conscience of the nation wakes up one bright morning and is overwhelmed with blushes and stammering confusion because convicted of dishonorable and unkind treatment of *the Indian*; and there is a wonderful scurrying around among the keepers of the keys to get out more blankets and send out a few primers for the "*wards*." While the black man, a faithful son and indefeasible heir,—who can truthfully say, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment, and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends,"—is snubbed and chilled and made unwelcome at every merry-making of the family. And when appropriations for education are talked of, the section for which he has wrought and suffered most, actually defeats the needed and desired assistance for fear they may not be able to prevent his getting a fair and equitable share in the distribution.

Oh, the shame of it!

In *Pactolus Prime* Mr. Tourgee has succeeded incomparably, we think, in photographing and vocalizing the feelings of the colored American in regard to the Christian profession and the pagan practice of the dominant forces in the American government. And as an impassioned denunciation of the heartless and godless spirit of caste founded on color, as a scathing rebuke

to weak-eyed Christians who cannot read the golden rule across the color line, as an unanswerable arraignment of unparalleled ingratitude and limping justice in the policy of this country towards the weaker of its two children, that served it so long and so faithfully, the book is destined to live and to furnish an invaluable contribution to this already plethoric department of American literature.

Mr. Cable and Mr. Tourgee represent possibly the most eminent as well as the most prolific among the writers on this subject belonging to the didactic or polemic class. A host of others there are—lesser lights, or of more intermittent coruscations—who have contributed on either side the debate single treatises, numerous magazine articles, or newspaper editorials, advocating some one theory some another on the so-called *race problem*. In this group belongs the author of *An Appeal to Pharaoh*, advocating the deportation absurdity; also the writings of H. W. Grady; "In Plain Black and White," "The Brother in Black," "The South Investigated," "A Defense of the Negro Race," "The Prosperity of the South Dependent on the Elevation of the Negro," "The Old South and the New," "Black and White," etc., etc., among which are included articles from the pen of colored men themselves, such as Mr. Douglass, Dr. Crummell, Dr. Arnett, Dr. Blyden, Dr. Scarborough, Dr. Price, Mr. Fortune, and others. These are champions of the forces on either side. They stand ever at the forefront dealing desperate blows right and left, now fist and skull, now broad-sword and battle-axe, now with the flash and boom of artillery; while the little fellows run out ever and anon from the ranks and deliver a telling blow between the eyes of an antagonist. All are wrought up to a high tension, some are blinded with passion, others appalled with dread,—all sincerely feel the reality of their own vision and earnestly hope to compel their world to see with their eyes. Such works, full of the fever and beat of debate, belong to the turmoil and turbulence of the time. A hundred years from now they may be interesting history, throwing light on a feature of these days which, let us hope, will then be hardly intelligible to an American citizen not over fifty years old.

Among our artists for art's sweet sake, Mr. Howells has recently tried his hand also at painting the Negro, attempting merely a side light in half tones, on his life and manners; and I think the unanimous verdict of the subject is that, in this single department at least, Mr. Howells does not know what he is talking about. And yet I do not think we should quarrel with *An Imperative Duty* because it lacks the earnestness and bias of a special pleader. Mr. Howells merely meant to press the button and give one picture from American life involving racial complications. The kodak does no more; it cannot preach sermons or solve problems.

Besides, the portrayal of Negro characteristics was by no means the main object of the story, which was rather meant, I judge, to be a thumb-nail sketch containing a psychological study of a morbidly sensitive conscience hectoring over a weak and vacillating will and fevered into increased despotism by reading into its own life and consciousness the analyses and terrible retributions of fiction,—a product of the Puritan's uncompromising sense of "*right though the heavens fall*," irritated and kept sore by being unequally yoked with indecision and cowardice. Of such strokes Mr. Howells is undoubtedly master. It is true there is little point and no force of character about the beautiful and irresponsible young heroine; but as that is an attainment of so many of Mr. Howells' models, it is perhaps not to be considered as illustrating any racial characteristics. I cannot help sharing, however, the indignation of those who resent the picture in the colored church,—"evidently," Mr. Howells assures us, "representing *the best colored society*"; where the horrified young prig, Rhoda Aldgate, meets nothing but the frog-like countenances and cat-fish mouths, the musky exhalations and the "bress de Lawd, Honey," of an uncultivated people. It is just here that Mr. Howells fails—and fails because he gives only a half truth, and that a partisan half truth. One feels that he had no business to attempt a subject of which he knew so little, or for which he cared so little. There is one thing I would like to say to my fellow countrymen, and especially to those who dabble in ink and affect to discuss the Negro; and yet I hesitate because

I feel it is a fact which persons of the finer sensibilities and more delicate perceptions must know instinctively: namely, that it is an insult to humanity and a sin against God to publish any such sweeping generalizations of a race on such meager and superficial information. We meet it at every turn—this obtrusive and offensive vulgarity, this gratuitous sizing up of the Negro and conclusively writing down his equation, sometimes even among his ardent friends and bravest defenders. Were I not afraid of falling myself into the same error that I am condemning, I would say it seems an *Anglo-Saxon characteristic* to have such overweening confidence in his own power of induction that there is no equation which he would acknowledge to be indeterminate, however many unknown quantities it may possess.

Here is an extract from Dr. Mayo, a thoroughly earnest man and sincerely friendly, as I believe, to the colored people.

Among these women are as many grades of native, intellectual, moral and executive force as among the white people. The plantations of the Gulf, the Atlantic coast and the Mississippi bottoms swarm with negro women who seem hardly lifted above the brutes. I know a group of young colored women, many of them accomplished teachers, who bear themselves as gently and with as varied womanly charms as any score of ladies in the land. The one abyss of perdition to this class is the slough of unchastity in which, *as a race*, they still flounder, half conscious that it is a slough—the double inheritance of savage Africa and slavery.

Now there may be one side of a truth here, yet who but a self-confident Anglo-Saxon would dare make such a broad unblushing statement about a people *as a race*? Some developments brought to light recently through the scientific Christianity and investigating curiosity of Dr. Parkhurst may lead one to suspect the need of missionary teaching to "elevate" the white race; and yet I have too much respect for the autonomy of races, too much reverence for the collective view of God's handiwork, to speak of any such condition, however general, as

characterizing *the race*. The colored people do not object to the adequate and truthful portrayal of types of their race in whatever degree of the scale of civilization, or of social and moral development, is consonant with actual facts or possibilities. As Mr. Howells himself says, "A man can be anything along the vast range from angel to devil, and without living either the good thing or the bad thing in which his fancy dramatizes him, he can perceive it"—and I would add, can appreciate and even enjoy its delineation by the artist. The average Englishman takes no exception to the humorous caricatures of Dickens or to the satires and cynicisms of Thackeray. The Quilps and the Bernsteins are but strongly developed negatives of our universal human nature on the dark side. We recognize them as genre sketches,—and with the Agneses and Esthers and Aunt Lamberts as foils and correctives, we can appreciate them accordingly: while we do not believe ourselves to be the original of the portrait, there is enough sympathy and fellow feeling for the character to prevent our human relationship from being outraged and insulted. But were Dickens to introduce an average scion of his countrymen to a whole congregation of *Quilps*, at the same time sagely informing him that these represented *the best there was* of English life and morals, I strongly suspect the charming author would be lifted out on the toe of said average Englishman's boot, in case there shouldn't happen to be a good horsewhip handy.

Our grievance, then, is not that we are not painted as angels of light or as goody-goody Sunday-school developments; but we do claim that a man whose acquaintanceship is so slight that he cannot even discern diversities of individuality, has no right or authority to hawk "the only true and authentic" pictures of a race of human beings. Mr. Howells' point of view is precisely that of a white man who sees colored people at long range or only in certain capacities. His conclusions about the colored man are identical with the impressions that will be received and carried abroad by foreigners from all parts of the globe, who shall attend our Columbian Exposition for instance, and who, through the impartiality and generosity of our

white countrymen, will see colored persons only as boot-blacks and hotel waiters, grinning from ear to ear and bowing and curtseying for the extra tips. In the same way Mr. Howells has met colored persons in hotels or on the commons promenading and sparkling, or else acting as menials and lazzaroni. He has not seen, and therefore cannot be convinced that there exists, a quiet, self-respecting, dignified class of easy life and manners (save only where it crosses the roughness of their white fellow countrymen's barbarity), of cultivated tastes and habits, and with no more in common with the class of his acquaintance than the accident of complexion,—beyond a sympathy with their wrongs, or a resentment at being socially and morally classified with them, according as the principle of altruism or of self-love is dominant in the individual.

I respectfully submit that there is hardly a colored church in any considerable city in this country, which could be said in any sense to represent *the best colored society*, in which Rhoda Aldgate could not have seen, when she opened her eyes, persons as quietly and as becomingly dressed, as cultivated in tone and as refined in manner, as herself; persons, too, as sensitive to rough contact and as horribly alive as she could be (though they had known it from childhood) to the galling distinctions in this country which insist on *levelling down* all individuals more or less related to the Africans. So far from the cringing deference which Mr. Howells paints as exhibited to "the young white lady," in nine cases out of ten the congregation would have supposed intuitively that she was a quadroon, so far from the usual was her appearance and complexion. In not a few such colored churches would she have found young women of aspiration and intellectual activity with whom she could affiliate without nausea and from whom she could learn a good many lessons—and, sadly I say it, even more outside the churches whom bitterness at racial inconsistency of white Christians had soured into a silent disbelief of all religion. In either class she would have found no trouble in reaching a heart which could enter into all the agony of her own trial and bitter grief. Nor am I so sure, if she had followed

her first gushing impulse to go South and "elevate" the race with whom she had discovered her relationship, that she would have found even them so ready to receive her condescending patronage.

There are numerous other inadvertent misrepresentations in the book—such as supposing that colored people voluntarily and deliberately prefer to keep to themselves in all public places and that from choice "they have their own neighborhoods, their own churches, their own amusements, their own resorts,"—the intimation that there is "*a black voice*," a black character, easy, irresponsible, and fond of what is soft and pleasant, a black ideal of art and a black barbaric taste in color, a black affinity—so that in some occult and dreadful way one, only one-sixteenth related and totally foreign by education and environment, can still feel that one-sixteenth race calling her more loudly than the fifteen-sixteenths. I wish to do Mr. Howells the justice to admit, however, that one feels his blunders to be wholly unintentional and due to the fact that he has studied his subject merely from the outside. With all his matchless powers as a novelist, not even he can yet "think himself imaginatively" into the colored man's place.

To my mind the quaintest and truest little bit of portraiture from low-life that I have read in a long time is the little story that appeared last winter in the *Harpers*, of the "Widder Johnsing and how she caught the preacher." It is told with naive impersonality and appreciative humor, and is quite equal, I think, both in subject and treatment to the best of Mrs. Stowe's New England dialect stories. It is idyllic in its charming simplicity and naturalness, and delightfully fresh in its sparkling wit and delicious humor. We do not resent such pictures as this of our lowly folk—such a homely and honest "Pomegranate, which, if cut deep down the middle, Shows a heart within blood tinctured of a veined humanity," is always sweet to the taste and dear to the heart, however plain and humble the setting.

A longer and more elaborate work, *Harold*, published anonymously, comes properly in our group second, the didactic novel. It gives the picture of a black Englishman cultured and refined,

brought in painful contact with American,—or rather *un-American*, color prejudice. The point of the book seems to be to show that education for the black man is a curse, since it increases his sensitiveness to the indignities he must suffer in consequence of white barbarity. The author makes Harold, after a futile struggle against American inequalities, disappear into the jungles of Africa, "there to wed a dusky savage," at the last cursing the day he had ever suspected a broader light or known a higher aspiration; a conclusion which, to my mind, is a most illogical one. If the cultivated black man cannot endure the white man's barbarity—the cure, it seems to me, would be to cultivate the white man. Civilize both, then each will know what is due from man to man, and that reduces at once to a minimum the friction of their contact.

In the same rank as *Harold* belongs that improbability of improbabilities, *Doctor Huguet*, by the arch-sensationalist, Ignatius Donnelly. As its purpose is evidently good, I shall not undertake to review the book. Suffice it to say the plot hinges on the exchange of soul between the body of a black chicken-thief and that of a cultivated white gentleman, and sets forth the indignities and wrongs to which the cultured soul, with all its past of refinement and learning, has to submit in consequence of its change of cuticle. The book is an able protest against that snobbishness which elevates complexion into a touchstone of aristocracy and makes the pigment cells of a man's skin his badge of nobility regardless of the foulness or purity of the soul within; the only adverse criticism from the colored man's point of view being the selection of a chicken thief as his typical black man; but on the principle of antitheses this may have been artistically necessary.

I shall pass next to what I consider the most significant contribution to this subject for the last ten years—a poem by Maurice Thompson in *The New York Independent* for January 21, 1892, entitled "A Voodoo Prophecy." From beginning to end it is full of ghoulish imagery and fine poetic madness. Here are a few stanzas of it:

I am the prophet of the dusky race,
The poet of wild Africa. Behold,

The midnight vision brooding in
my face!
Come near me,
And hear me,
While from my lips the words of Fate
are told.

A black and terrible memory masters me,
The shadow and the substance of deep
wrong;
You know the past, hear now what is
to be:
From the midnight land,
Over sea and sand,
From the green jungle, hear my
Voodoo-song:

A tropic heat is in my bubbling veins,
Quintessence of all savagery is mine,
The lust of ages ripens in my reins,
And burns
And yearns,
Like venom-sap within a noxious vine.

Was I a heathen? Ay, I was—am still
A fetich worshipper; but I was free
To loiter or to wander at my will,
To leap and dance,
To hurl my lance,
And breathe the air of savage liberty.

You drew me to a higher life, you say;
Ah, drove me, with the lash of slavery!
Am I unmindful? Every cursed day
Of pain
And chain
Roars like a torrent in my memory.

You make my manhood whole with 'equal
rights'!
Poor empty words! Dream you I honor
them?—
I who have stood on Freedom's wildest
heights?
My Africa,
I see the day
When none dare touch thy garment's
lowest hem.

You cannot make me love you with your
whine
Of fine repentance. Veil your pallid face

In presence of the shame that mantles mine;
 Stand
 At command
 Of the black prophet of the Negro race!

I hate you, and I live to nurse my hate,
 Remembering when you plied the slaver's
 trade

In my dear land . . . How patiently I wait
 The day,
 Not far away,
 When all your pride shall shrivel up and
 fade.

Yea, all your whiteness darken under me!
 Darken and be jaundiced, and your
 blood

Take in dread humors from my savagery,
 Until
 Your will
 Lapse into mine and seal my masterhood.

You, seed of Abel, proud of your descent,
 And arrogant, because your cheeks are
 fair,

Within my loins an inky curse is pent,
 To flood
 Your blood
 And stain your skin and crisp your
 golden hair.

As you have done by me, so will I do
 By all the generations of your race;
 Your snowy limbs, your blood's patrician
 blue
 Shall be
 Tainted by me,
 And I will set my seal upon your face!

Yea, I will dash my blackness down your
 veins,
 And through your nerves my
 sensuousness I'll fling;
 Your lips, your eyes, shall bear the musty
 stains
 Of Congo kisses,
 While shrieks and hisses
 Shall blend into the savage songs I sing!

Your temples will I break, your fountains
 fill,
 Your cities raze, your fields to deserts turn;

My heathen fires shall shine on every hill,
 And wild beasts roam,
 Where stands your home;—
 Even the wind your hated dust shall
 spurn.

I will absorb your very life in me,
 And mold you to the shape of my desire;
 Back through the cycles of all cruelty
 I will swing you,
 And wring you,
 And roast you in my passions' hottest
 fire.

You, North and South, you, East and West,
 Shall drink the cup your fathers gave
 to me;

My back still burns, I bare my bleeding
 breast,
 I set my face,
 My limbs I brace,
 To make the long, strong fight for
 mastery.

My serpent fetish lolls its withered lip
 And bares its shining fangs at thought
 of this:

I scarce can hold the monster in my grip.
 So strong is he,
 So eagerly
 He leaps to meet my precious prophecies.

Hark for the coming of my countless host,
 Watch for my banner over land and sea.
 The ancient power of vengeance is not lost!
 Lo! on the sky
 The fire-clouds fly,
 And strangely moans the windy,
 weltering sea.

Now this would be poetry if it were only truthful. Simple and sensuous it surely is, but it lacks the third requisite—truth. The Negro is utterly incapable of such vindictiveness. Such concentrated venom might be distilled in the cold Saxon, writhing and chafing under oppression and repression such as the Negro in America has suffered and is suffering. But the black man is in real life only too glad to accept the olive branch of reconciliation. He merely asks to be let alone. To be allowed to pursue his

destiny as a free man and an American citizen, to rear and educate his children in peace, to engage in art, science, trades, or industries according to his ability,—and *to go to the wall if he fail*. He is willing, if I understand him, to let bygones be bygones. He does not even demand satisfaction for the centuries of his ancestors' unpaid labor. He asks neither pension, nor dole, nor back salaries; but is willing to start from the bottom, all helpless and unprovided for as he is, with absolutely nothing as his stock in trade, with no capital, in a country developed, enriched, and made to blossom through his father's "sweat and toil,"—with none of the accumulations of ancestors' labors, with no education or moral training for the duties and responsibilities of freedom; nay, with every power, mental, moral, and physical, emasculated by a debasing slavery—he is willing, even glad, to take his place in the lists alongside his oppressors, who have had every advantage, to be tried with them by their own standards, and to ask no quarter from them or high Heaven to palliate or excuse the ignominy of a defeat.

The "Voodoo Prophecy" has no interest then as a picture of the black, but merely as a revelation of the white man. Maurice Thompson, in penning this portrait of the Negro, has, unconsciously it may be, laid bare his own soul—its secret dread and horrible fear. And this, it seems to me, is the key to the Southern situation, the explanation of the apparent heartlessness and cruelty of some, and the stolid indifference to atrocity on the part of others, before which so many of us have stood paralyzed in dumb dismay. The Southerner is not a cold-blooded villain. Those of us who have studied the genus in its native habitat can testify that his impulses are generous and kindly, and that while the South presents a solid phalanx of iron resistance to the Negro's advancement, still as individuals to individuals they are warm-hearted and often even tender. And just here is the difference between the Southerner and his more philosophical, less sentimental Northern brother. The latter in an abstract metaphysical way rather wants you to have all the rights that belong to you. He thinks it better for the country, better for him that justice, universal justice,

be done. But he doesn't care to have the blacks, in the concrete, too near him. He doesn't know them and doesn't want to know them. He really can't understand how the Southerner could have let those little cubs get so close to him as they did in the old days—nursing from the same bottle and feeding at the same breast.

To the Southerner, on the other hand, race antipathy and color-phobia *as such* does not exist. Personally, there is hardly a man of them but knows, and has known from childhood, some black fellow whom he loves as dearly as if he were white, whom he regards as indispensable to his own pleasures, and for whom he would break every commandment in the Decalogue to save him from any general disaster. But our Bourbon seems utterly incapable of generalizing his few ideas. He would die for A or B, but suddenly becomes utterly impervious to every principle of logic when you ask for the simple golden rule to be applied to the class of which A or B is one. Another fact strikes me as curious. A Southern white man's regard for his black friend varies in inverse ratio to the real distance between them in education and refinement. Puck expresses it—"I can get on a great deal better with a nigger than I can with a Negro." And Mr. Douglass puts it: "Let a colored man be out at elbows and toes and half way into the gutter and there is no prejudice against him; but let him respect himself and be a man and Southern whites can't abide to ride in the same car with him."

Why this anomaly? Is it pride? Ordinarily, congeniality increases with similarity in taste and manners. Is it antipathy to color? It does not exist. The explanation is the white man's dread dimly shadowed out in this "Voodoo Prophecy" of Maurice Thompson, and fed and inspired by such books as *Minden Armais* and a few wild theorizers who have nothing better to do with their time than spend it advocating the fusion of races as a plausible and expedient policy. Now I believe there are two ideas which master the Southern white man and incense him against the black race. On this point he is a monomaniac. In the face of this feeling he would not admit he was convinced of the axioms of geometry. The one is personal and present,

the fear of Negro political domination. The other is for his posterity—the future horror of being lost as a race in this virile and vigorous black race. Relieve him of this nightmare and he becomes “as gentle as the sucking dove.” With that dread delusion maddening him he would drive his sword to the hilt in the tender breast of his darling child, did he fancy that through her the curse would come.

Now argument is almost supersensible with a monomaniac. What is most needed is a sedative for the excited nerves, and then a mental tonic, to stimulate the power of clear perception and truthful cerebration. The Southern patient needs to be brought to see, by the careful and cautious injection of cold facts and by the presentation of well-selected object lessons, that so far as concerns his first-named horror of black supremacy politically, the usual safeguards of democracy are in the hands of intelligence and wealth in the South as elsewhere. The weapons of fair argument and persuasion, the precautionary bulwark of education and justice, the unimpeachable supremacy and insuperable advantage of intelligence and discipline over mere numbers—are all in his reach. It is to his interest to help make the black peasant an intelligent and self-respecting citizen. No section can thrive under the incubus of an illiterate, impoverished, cheerless, and hopeless peasantry. Let the South once address herself in good faith to the improvement of the condition of her laboring classes, let her give but a tithe of the care and attention which are bestowed in the North on its mercurial and inflammable importations, let her show but the disposition in her relative poverty merely to utter the benediction, *Be ye warmed and fed and educated*, even while she herself has not the wherewithal to emulate the Pullman villages and the Carnegie munificence, let her but give him a fair wage and an honest reckoning and a kindly God-speed,—and she will find herself in possession of the most tractable laborer, the most faithful and reliable henchman, the most invaluable co-operator and friendly vassal of which this or any country can boast.

So far as regards the really less sane idea that amicable relations subsisting between the races

may promote their ultimate blending and loss of identity, it hardly seems necessary to refute it. Blending of races in the aggregate is simply an unthinkable thought, and the union of individuals can never fall out by accident or hap-hazard. There must be the deliberate wish and intention on each side; and the average black man in this country is as anxious to preserve his identity and transmit his type as is the average white man. In any case, hybridity is in no sense dependent on sectional or national amity. Oppression and outrage are not the means to chain the affections. Cupid, who knows no bolt or bars, is more wont to be stimulated with romantic sympathy towards a forbidden object unjustly persecuted. The sensible course is to remove those silly and unjust barriers which protect nothing and merely call attention to the possibilities of law-breaking, and depend instead on religion and common sense to guide, control, and direct in the paths of purity and right reason.

The froth and foam, the sticks and debris at the watertop may have an uncertain movement, but as deep calleth unto deep the mighty ocean swell is always true to the tides; and whatever the fluctuations along the ragged edge between the races, the home instinct is sufficiently strong with each to hold the great mass true to its attractions. If Maurice Thompson's nightmare vision is sincere on his part, then it has no objective reality; 'tis merely a hideous phantasm bred of his own fevered and jaundiced senses; if he does not believe in it himself, it was most unkind and uncalled for to publish abroad such inflaming and irritating fabrications.

After this cursory glance at a few contributions which have peculiarly emphasized one phase of our literature during the last decade or two, I am brought to the conclusion that an authentic portrait, at once aesthetic and true to life, presenting the black man as a free American citizen, not the humble slave of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—but the *man*, divinely struggling and aspiring yet tragically warped and distorted by the adverse winds of circumstance, has not yet been painted. It is my opinion that the canvas awaits the brush of the colored man himself. It is a pathetic—a fearful—arraignment of

America's conditions of life, that instead of that enrichment from the years and days, the summers and springs under which, as Browning says,

The flowers turn double and the leaves turn flowers,—

the black man's native and original flowers have in this country been all hardened and sharpened into thorns and spurs. In literature we have no artists for art's sake. Albery A. Whitman in "Twasinta's Seminoles" and "Not a Man and Yet a Man" is almost the only poet who has attempted a more sustained note than the lyrics of Mrs. Harper, and even that note is almost a wail.

The fact is, a sense of freedom in mind as well as in body is necessary to the appreciative and inspiring pursuit of the beautiful. A bird cannot warble out his fullest and most joyous notes while the wires of his cage are pricking and cramping him at every heart-beat. His tones become only the shrill and poignant protest of rage and despair. And so the black man's vexations and chafing environment, even since his physical emancipation has given him speech, has goaded him into the eloquence and fire of oratory rather than the genial warmth and cheery glow of either poetry or romance. And pity 'tis, 'tis true. A race that has produced for America the only folk-lore and folk-songs of native growth, a race which has grown the most original and unique assemblage of fable and myth to be found on the continent, a race which has suggested and inspired almost the only distinctive American note which could chain the attention and charm the ear of the outside world—has as yet found no mouth-piece of its own to unify and perpetuate its wondrous whisperings, no painter-poet to distil in the alembic of his own imagination the gorgeous dyes, the luxuriant juices of this rich and tropical vegetation. It was the glory of Chaucer that he justified the English language to itself—that he took the homely and hitherto despised Saxon elements and ideas, and lovingly wove them into an artistic product which even Norman conceit and uppishness might be glad to acknowledge and imitate. The only man who is doing the same for Negro folk-lore is one not to

the manner born. Joel Chandler Harris made himself rich and famous by simply standing around among the black railroad hands and cotton pickers of the South and compiling the simple and dramatic dialogues which fall from their lips. What I hope to see before I die is a black man honestly and appreciatively portraying both the Negro as he is, and the white man, occasionally, as seen from the Negro's standpoint.

There is an old proverb "The devil is always painted *black*—by white painters." And what is needed, perhaps, to reverse the picture of the lordly "man" slaying the lion, is for the lion to turn painter.

Then, too, we need the calm, clear judgment of ourselves and of others born of a disenchantment similar to that of a little girl I know in the South, who was once being laboriously held up over the shoulders of a surging throng to catch her first glimpse of a real live president. "Why Nunny," she cried half reproachfully, as she strained her little neck to see—"It's nuffin but a man!"

When we have been sized up and written down by others, we need not feel that the last word is said and the oracles sealed. "It's nuffin but a man." And there are many gifts the giftie may give us, far better than seeing ourselves as others see us—and one is that of Bion's maxim "*Know Thyself.*" Keep true to your own ideals. Be not ashamed of what is homely and your own. Speak out and speak honestly. Be true to yourself and to the message God and Nature meant you to deliver. The young David cannot fight in Saul's unwieldy armor. Let him simply therefore gird his loins, take up his own parable, and tell this would-be great American nation "*A chile's amang ye takin' notes*" and when men act the part of cowards or wild beasts, this great silent but open-eyed constituency has a standard by which they are being tried. Know thyself, and know those around at their true weight of solid, intrinsic manhood without being dazzled by the fact that littleness of soul is often gilded with wealth, power, and intellect. There can be no nobility but that of soul, and no catalogue of adventitious circumstances can wipe out the stain or palliate the meanness of

inflicting one ruthless, cruel wrong. Tis not only safer, but nobler, grander, diviner,

To be that which we destroy
Than, by destruction, dwell in doubtful
joy.

With this platform to stand on we can with clear eye weigh what is written and estimate what is done and ourselves paint what is true with the calm spirit of those who know their cause is right and who believe there is a God who judgeth the nations.

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

Negro in Literature (1899)

The entertainment given yesterday at the Waldorf-Astoria for the benefit of the Hampton Institute was slow in beginning, audience and principals being alike held back by the storm. One by one came in the cheerful black faces of Hampton students, members of the quartet, who were down to sing spirituals and folksongs; then Henry T. Burleigh, the soloist; Paul Lawrence [sic] Dunbar, the author of a book of poems, *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, who was to give an author's reading; and Charles W. Wood of Tuskegee, who was to read selected pieces.

As this interesting group of men of the Negro race, standing by one of the windows where all outside showed white with flying snow, fell to talking, the reporter joined it. He felt that there were many questions to be asked, much that these men might say if they would. And the reporter plunged right into the middle of a subject, turning to Mr. Dunbar with this question:

"In the poetry written by Negroes, which is the quality that will most appear, something native and African and in every way different from the verse of Anglo-Saxons, or something that is not unlike what is written by white people?"

"My dear sir," replied the poet, "the predominating power of the African race is lyric. In that I should expect the writers of my people to excel. But, broadly speaking, their poetry will not be exotic or differ much from that of the whites."

"But surely, the tremendous facts of race and origin—"

"You forget that for two hundred and fifty years the environment of the negro has been

American, in every respect the same as that of all other Americans."

The reporter still objected: "Isn't there a certain tropic warmth, a cast of temperament that belongs of right to the African race, and should not that element make its lyric expression, if it is to be genuine, a thing apart?"

"Ah, what you speak of is going to be a loss. It is inevitable. We must write like the white men. I do not mean imitate them; but our life is now the same." Then the speaker added: "I hope you are not one of those who would hold the Negro down to a certain kind of poetry—dialect and concerning only scenes on plantations in the South?" This appeared to be a sore point, and the questioner at once truthfully denied having any such desire.

"There are great questions in my mind regarding the forms of poetry," continued Mr. Dunbar. "Do you think it is possible now to invent a new form? Have the old ones completely exhausted the possible supply? Then, I wonder if the Negro will ever reach dramatic poetry?"

"Edwin Booth once said to me," remarked Mr. Wood, "that he considered that the Negro should make the greatest actor in the world—because he had the most soul."

"I don't think that," said Mr. Dunbar. "The black man's soul is lyric, not dramatic. We may expect songs from the soul of the Negro, but hardly much dramatic power, either in writing or in acting."

"Is there a large school of Negro poets?"

"Haven't you read McClellan? Then there's Moore, Carrothers, Whitman, who has just

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"Haven't you read McClellan? Then there's Moore, Carrothers, Whitman, who has just

finished an epic called *The Rape of Florida*. It appears to me, also, that that is not Negro poetry only which is written by Negroes, but all that is written by whites who have received their inspiration from Negro life. The races have acted and reacted on each other. The white man who, as a child, was suckled at the breast of a black mammy has received the strongest influence of his life, perhaps, from the African race. Why, the white people in the South talk like us—they

have imported many of our words into the language—and you know they act like us."

"Which one of the current writers of Negro stories best represents the race?"

"Joel Chandler Harris shows the most intimate sympathy: Mrs. Stuart, too."

"You omit the one who is perhaps most popular."

"You mean Page? Yes, I left him out with intention. His attitude is condescending, always."

CHARLES W. CHESNUTT

The Negro in Books (1916)

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen: With potatoes at two dollars and a half a bushel, eggs at 68 cents a doz., butter at more than 50 cents a lb., bacon at forty-two cents a pound, and soup-bones at twenty-five cents apiece—without the marrow—I should be false to the interests of my publishers, my fellow authors, and myself, had I not accepted Prof. Wright's invitation to come here and speak on behalf of his "Buy-a-Book Movement,"—a very worthy object, not only from the standpoint of the author and publisher, but for broader and deeper and higher reasons. If books meet a real need, as I shall endeavor to show you they do, it follows without saying that authors should be encouraged to write them, and the only effective encouragement for the production of books, is their purchase. No amount of praise, no volume of good words, will be of any benefit to a writer, unless attended by royalties, which are not only the most effective and most highly valued expression of appreciation, but are absolutely essential to promote further publication; for, even though an author might be willing to write for love of a cause, or for the pleasure of self-expression, publishers are hard-headed, cold-blooded people, who must have the wherewithal to pay for typesetting and paper and binding and advertising, and a profit besides. A publisher might take a chance once, but no publisher wants a

second book from the pen of the author of an unsuccessful first book. And so, if the world wants books, it must be willing to pay for them.

Perhaps some of us have never thought of, and therefore never quite realized, the part that books play in our lives. Wise men have said that speech, the spoken word, is the most important faculty which distinguishes men from the lower animals; it gives man the power to communicate and therefore to compare, to reason, to work together for the common good. It may be said with equal truth that the book, the written word, is what has developed the civilized man from the savage. It makes it possible to record the experience of the race, instead of relying merely upon memory, thus enabling men in different places and in different ages to pool their knowledge and experience, and gain the benefit of the accumulation. To the daily newspaper, which on Sundays assumes in its size almost the proportions, and in its contents almost the variety, of an encyclopedia, we look for information about current events. From the weekly and monthly journals we gather current opinion. The riper thoughts of the best writers and thinkers we get in the form of the bound books which are placed in our libraries. Our education is based on books. They are the sources of our knowledge of history, of the sciences; and as we learn other things by

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experience or experiment, we put them in books for the enlightenment of others. Our philosophy we learn from books. Our religion is founded on a Book. We find much of our mental relaxation and recreation and amusement in books. We form our conceptions of the lives and characters of others from what we read about them in books. This is true even of those who seldom read a book, they learn what little they know by association with those who have read and studied books. Through the medium of books each one of us may become the heir of all the wisdom of all the ages, to the extent that we have time and the capacity to acquire it.

Now, this being so, how important it is that books should be good books; that those which gather and dispense current information should gather carefully and record accurately; that the opinions which books disseminate should be based upon carefully ascertained facts, and reasoned out logically and with freedom from prejudice; that the philosophy taught by books should be predicated upon sound reasoning; that, in the lighter forms of literature—the poem, the novel and the play—the sentiment should be clean and wholesome. There have been a few vile books, some of them extremely well written, from a literary viewpoint, which have left a trail of slime behind them for generations. There have been other books, clean enough so far as language is concerned, which have disseminated falsehood and error to the warping of the reader's mind and the injury of those against whom they were directed. And there have been good books, besides the Book of Books, which have been the joy and delight and inspiration of mankind.

Of the books of only one nation, and that a small one, books written many centuries ago, Lord Macaulay said, in tracing their influence upon mankind in after ages:

If we consider merely the subtlety of disquisition, the force of imagination, the perfect energy and elegance of expression, which characterize the great works of Athenian genius, we must pronounce them intrinsically most valuable; but what shall we say when we reflect that from thence have sprung,

directly or indirectly, all the noblest creations of the human intellect; that from hence were the vast accomplishments and brilliant fancy of Cicero the withering fire of Dante; the humor of Cervantes, the comprehension of Bacon; the wit of Butler; the supreme and universal excellence of Shakespeare? All the triumphs of truth and genius over prejudice and power in every country and in every age, have been the triumphs of Athens [as]

wrought through the medium of those immortal books of which Macaulay speaks.

Now, many books, especially in these our modern days, have dealt with the Negro, in large or in small part. And it is the purpose of my talk tonight to recall to your memory something of the way in which the Negro has been dealt with in books.

In the heated debate on slavery which ran through the generation preceding the Civil War, there were many books in defense of that institution, books which branded the Negro as brother to the beast, even denying him a soul, or ordinary intelligence. You can find one of them on the shelves of a large library, and students of history dig them out and wonder at them. There were, even at that day, some books written on the other side, but not so many. For instance, Whittier's *Voices of Freedom*, which are found in his collected poems, were a strong protest against the wrong of slavery and a strong appeal for human brotherhood. The collected speeches and lectures of Wendell Phillips were masterpieces of forensic eloquence. The several autobiographies of Frederick Douglass furnished their contribution to antislavery literature. Lowell's *Biglow Papers* gave some hard raps to the peculiar institutions, and there were others.

All these books dealt with the Negroes as slaves, the only status which, with few exceptions, they had, up to that time occupied in the United States. The abolition of slavery, the enfranchisement of the colored people, their efforts to advance along the avenues thus opened up to them, the efforts of the white South to prevent their upward progress, opened up a wide

field of discussion and argument and gave rise to a flood of books dealing with the "Race Question," or the "Southern Question" or the "Negro Problem," as it is variously called, some of them in the form of serious or didactic books, others in the form of fiction; most of them written by white people with a rather low estimate of the Negro's mind and character, some by white men or women who were friendly to the Negro and wished to help him in his uphill struggle; some few, gradually increasing in number, by colored men and women, of which but one, so far as I am advised, has decried and slandered his own race. I refer to the book by W. H. Thomas, published by Macmillan several years ago. I expressed my opinion of it at the time in one of the literary reviews. Some of the best of the books by colored men on this theme have been those of Dr. Sinclair, Dr. Du Bois, Professor Kelly Miller, and Dr. Washington. George W. Williams wrote a very comprehensive *History of the Negro*. A recently published volume by Dr. C. V. Roman, of Meharry Medical College, entitled *American Civilization and the Negro*, is an unusually well written and comprehensive study of all phases of the question. Some of the more recent books which discuss the race problem incidentally to or as a part of larger themes are Rhodes' *History of the United States*, Professor Josiah Royce's *Race Questions and Other American Problems*, Greeley's *American Conflict*, Dr. Albert Bushnell Hart's *The American Nation*, and Lord Bryce's recent book on South America. Of course there are many others, but you know them as well as I do. Sir Sidney Olivier's *White Capital and Black Labor in the West Indies* is an illuminating study of racial conditions, and how they have been satisfactorily worked out in the British West Indies.

Sir Harry Johnston, the English traveler and publicist, has studied the Negro all over the world, and has written two almost monumental books, one on *The Negro in Africa*, and another on *The Negro in the New World* (\$10.00 apiece—libraries). He approaches the subject without prejudice, with an open mind, states what he has seen with perfect fairness, and draws the conclusion that the Negro or Negroid peoples, especially in the countries to the south

of us, where they have been admitted to *real* equality with the whites, have demonstrated their fitness for all the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in the very highly specialized and complicated civilization of our time. Lord Bryce reaches the same conclusion, after extended travels through South America. Both Johnston and Bryce dispute the claim that the mixture of races tends to deterioration or degeneracy. Mr. Roosevelt's letters during his travels in Brazil last year bear out these conclusions.

But what I am going to speak to you about more particularly tonight is the Negro in creative or imaginative literature, or *belles lettres*, as the French call it, as embodied in fiction and to some extent in poetry. This literature, in its best sense, is the expression of the life of a people. There was a time when imaginative literature was almost wholly founded upon idealism. The author imagined a perfect type of man or woman, a hero or heroine, of transcendent manliness or beauty, all of whose thoughts and deeds were noble; or an abandoned type of villain, all of whose deeds were base and unworthy. In more modern times, in art and literature, men and women are studied as we see them around us: no one perfect, no one hopelessly bad, all swayed by mixed motives, few entirely free from the taint of selfishness, none quite deaf to good impulses.

Now, it is obvious that in depicting character in literature—to draw any true picture of the life of a race or class of men, or of types of any race or class, it is necessary to know the race or class or type thoroughly, its manner of living, of thinking, of feeling; its outlook upon life, its aspirations, its ambitions, its aptitudes, its achievements—all the thousand and one things which go to make up its life.

The Negro, as one of the great divisions of the human family, whom fate has placed and kept in close contact with the white race for centuries, has naturally furnished material for a great deal of imaginative literature. I am going to refer briefly to some of it, and point out how in these writings the Negro has been used, then leave it to you whether or not there has been such a portrayal of his life and character as I have said true realism, and therefore true art,

should give; and if, as I suspect, you shall find there has in large measure not been such a portrayal, I shall ask you to consider the sources from which such a portrayal might reasonably be expected to emanate, and suggest how you can encourage its production.

The literature of a country or of an age, as I have said, is considered, and as a rule is, a fair reflection of the social conditions of that age or country. But conventions, in literature, as in religion, in politics and in social usage, sometimes persist long past the point where they correctly mirror the time. This is particularly true where they are confused by prejudice. An amusing minor instance of this is the sort of dialect that many writers put into the mouths of their colored characters. I solemnly declare that during a long life, some fifteen years of which was spent in the South, just after the Civil War, I have no recollection of ever hearing a Negro say, "It am." Another classic solecism is that which puts into the mouths of colored servants, at the North, in our own day, the word "Massa." I think it safe to say that no colored servant at the North, and few anywhere, unless it be some old relic of antebellum days, ever uses the word "Massa," in any such way as it is employed by a certain school of novelists. It is a concrete personal suggestion of slavery, which even the most stupid Negroes are willing to forget, except as a historical fact, so far as the white people will let them. An imported English butler may refer to his employer as his master, but rarely, if ever, your American Negro. The Negro of a certain type is likely to apply to a white man in some relation of authority over him, or from whom he seeks or has received a favor, some title, such as "boss" or "colonel," or something of the kind, which implies authority without suggesting servility.

Another convention that dies hard and is indeed very much alive, is a contempt for mixed blood, so profound that in almost any novel or story, where such a character appears, whether the scene be located in our own country, in India, in China, in the Pacific Islands, or on any African or American or Asiatic coast, the half-caste, or the man with a touch of the tar-brush, is almost sure to be the villain.

The old theory, so pleasant to the superior race, that a mixture of blood simply results in combining the worst qualities of the parent strains, still persists, in spite of the obvious fact that in every country where racial admixture exists there are many people of that class who will average up in intellect, in manners, in morals and other social virtues, with any element of the population which has had no better opportunities, and the equally obvious fact that in every country, in our own conspicuously so, colored men have attained distinction in many walks of life. To meet a noble, or even a decent, colored character in current American or English fiction is so rare as to create surprise. One evening not long ago, I sat in a moving picture theatre, where the film being exhibited was an admirable production of Flaubert's famous novel, *Salammbô*. When the picture of Mathô's lieutenant and companion, Spendius, for the role of which a full-blood Negro was cast, was first thrown upon the screen, a white woman seated beside me, a well dressed and seemingly refined person, remarked audibly, "Well, look at the coon! He's a spy and a traitor, no doubt," whereas, as the story developed, he was a model of loyalty and devotion to his leader, and in reality, though not in terms, the hero of the piece.

Another persistent convention, which is retained either through superstition or because of its dramatic value, is the theory that a man with a remote strain of dark blood may beget, or a woman similarly dowered, may bear by the other parent,—a pure white person,—a black child. The latest literary crime of this kind was perpetrated by Wallace Irwin in a recent number of *McClure's Magazine*, followed by a deservedly short-lived play built upon it, called *Pride of Race*, in which a popular actor took the part of the near-white hero. It is only fair to say that both the author and the actor made the hero a very fine gentleman, wealthy, cultured, with all the social graces, loved and admired by all his friends, but all in vain to counteract the drop of dark blood, one in thirty-two, which resulted in a Negro baby of the full blood by a white mother. The author had the decency to say that such an instance would not be likely to happen more than once in a million times.

Modern eugenic science declares such a thing impossible. The Mendelian Law, applied to human beings, would not bear out any such theory; there is no scientific data on which to base it; and a course of observation extending over more years than I like to think of, justifies me in saying that I never saw the offspring of a mixed union, where one of the parents was of pure white blood, where the child was darker than the dark parent. Accidents may happen, of course, in the best regulated families, but not that particular kind of accident.

The situation is different in cases where both parents are of mixed blood; we all know that the chances for divergence are much larger in such cases, for scientific reasons which are foreign to my subject, and which it would require too much time to go into.

The Negro plays a small part in the literature of England. In *Othello*, the master of English drama created a fine and noble character, a brave and gallant soldier, whose charms of person and of character were sufficient to win the love of the beautiful lady whom he espoused. His weakness was that of an ardent temperament, which was played upon, with tragic outcome, by a cunning and unscrupulous subordinate. Thackeray occasionally brings in a colored character, as Miss Schwartz, in *Vanity Fair*, the colored daughter of a sugar planter of the West Indies, whose swarthy complexion and crinkly hair are compensated by her millions and her amiable and generous disposition. It is said that Lady Nelson, the wife of Lord Nelson, the hero of Trafalgar, was a woman of this type, whom Nelson married for her money and neglected for the beautiful Emma Hamilton. In Walter Besant and James Rice's novel, *My Little Girl*, the principal character is a mulatto, who, as is usual in fiction, despises his mother and hates his father. He is an army officer, also of West Indian extraction, who thinks more about his color than any one else does, and lets it prey on his mind so as to spoil his life. Grant Allen, in his novel *Black and White*, a West Indian story, has a wide range of colored characters, and shows a keen insight into the psychology of race, both of the pure and mixed types. The story of the "near-white" lawyer and his English

wife ends happily, while the story of the brown doctor and his hopeless passion for the aristocratic lady of the island, has a tragic outcome. Joseph Conrad, in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, has drawn a striking but unpleasant character in the malingerer black sailor.

A familiar type of English story, which some American writers have adapted, and which, like the black baby myth, is maintained because of its dramatic value is the reversion-to-type motive. The black-baby myth is a form of this motive—the physical reversion to type. The other form, of which I am now speaking, is the mental and moral reversion. A native is educated in England, preferably at Oxford or Cambridge. He distinguishes himself in scholarship or athletics and is well received socially. He returns to his native land, either as a missionary or in some subordinate administrative capacity. But the lure of the jungle is stronger than the superficial veneer of culture, and he relapses into barbarism and goes back to his bottle of trade-gin, his loin-cloth, his beads, and his tomtom. I do not recall any instance where he has reverted to cannibalism. The same motive is used with the Indian in America.

In one of Mr. Louis Tracy's numerous novels, *The Flower of the Gorse*, two of the characters, one a rich American, the other his cousin, a London society man, have a remote Negroid strain, and in conformity with literary tradition, one of them runs away with his friend's wife and the other seduces a young French girl and is murdered by her fiancé, who declares, with the reader's entire concurrence, that he has rid the world of a viper.

Henry Seton Merriman's *With Edged Tools* has an awful example of the mixed-blood villain. The action is laid on the west coast of Africa.

But it is of course in America, where the Negro has played so large a part, though mainly a passive one in the history of the country, that the Negro is most frequently met with in fiction, dating from the abolition propaganda. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the example that comes first to every one's mind. In that much praised and much maligned but immortal work are embraced all types of colored people. Uncle Tom, the protagonist of the story, a model of

fidelity and self-sacrifice; the inimitable Topsy, the unfortunate Cassie, the unworthy Sambo and Quimbo, George Harris and Eliza, who were so fair as to be able to "pass for white"—every type has its place, and they are all well drawn and true to nature. No criticism of this immortal work, the success of which is due to its appeal to elemental justice, has ever questioned the correctness of its delineation of Negro character.

Mrs. Stowe wrote other books in like vein, but she had used up most of her material in the one, and the others are but a pale reflection.

Since the days of Mrs. Stowe almost every American writer of promise has recognized the dramatic value of the color motive and has attempted to utilize it, within certain narrow limits to which I shall revert later. One of the most successful of these was Judge Albion W. Tourgée, whose political novel, the *Fool's Errand*, dealing with Reconstruction and the rise and fall of the Ku Klux Klan, met with a popular success, which, for a time, was comparable with that of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and his *Bricks Without Straw* was only less successful. One of his earlier stories along the color line, *Toinette*, first published serially in *The Independent* and afterwards brought out in book form under the title of *A Royal Gentleman*, was on the beautiful-octo-roon theme, of which I shall speak further. Some of you will remember his *Pactolus Prime*, with its philosophic and rich bootblack, who gives all his wealth to his near-white daughter, who solves her problem by going into a convent.

(Ignatius Donnelly.)

Mr. George W. Cable was the next American author of distinction to attack the race problem in fiction. His *Old Creole Days* is a charmingly graceful and sympathetic portrayal of the trials and tribulations of the interesting mixed bloods of New Orleans in the olden days, and the no less interesting white creoles among whom they lived, and from whom they had their being. The stories of Madame Delphine and Tite Poulette are perfect gems in miniature, and had the author written nothing else, would entitle him to his conceded place in the front rank of American storytellers. His *Grandissimes* was a further development of the same theme on a larger canvas, but equally well done. The story of "Bras Coupé"

is a masterpiece; the character of the Negro who defied the lash, defied his master, and who preferred death to slavery, is a refreshing departure from the popular literary convention of the cringing, fawning menial who would lick the hand that struck him. Mr. Cable's later conception of the reconstructed Negro in the character of Cornelius Leggett, the grafting mulatto politician, in his *John March, Southerner*, is less happy and less convincing.

Mr. Howells has tried his hand on the race question, in his very pretty novel, *An Imperative Duty*, as has Professor Bliss Perry in one of his few novels, *The Plated City*. Mrs. Margaret Deland in one of her later novels, has resurrected the reversion-to-type motive, in the person of a colored Harvard College graduate. Walt Whitman in many of his poems showed a profound sympathy with the sufferings of the slave.

Paul Dunbar, though best known as a poet, wrote some short stories of his people in *Old Plantation Days* and *The Strength of Gideon*, and Dr. Du Bois has contributed to the subject recently a well-written novel called *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. And there have been many stories by obscure or little-known writers, many of them colored, founded mainly upon the wrongs of the Negro and mostly without literary value or recognition, but worthy of study as sociological documents and as showing the upward reaching of untried but aspiring minds.

In spite of the magnitude of the subject, it has, however, been seemingly impossible to approach it in fiction from but a few angles. Fundamentally it involves the most dramatic and popular of situations, that of strong contrast in social condition, the same theme as that of Miss Johnson's admirable *Prisoners of Hope* and of numerous novels and folk-lore stories of all lands, where King Cophetua marries the beggar maid or the highborn lady stoops to the low-born nature's nobleman, or where the hero, of humble beginnings, rises to high social standing or political place. It is impossible, in a country where in many states intermarriage between the races is forbidden, and where for marriageable purposes one-sixteenth of Negro blood makes one colored, and where such marriages,

if solemnized without legal sanction, which is denied, constitute "an infamous crime," it is impossible that romantic love, in anything but the beautiful-octo-roon motive, could be a successful theme for American fiction. The subject is considered sordid and low—even the social evil and its resultant diseases are in better taste. W. Pett Ridge, an English writer, has produced a volume of *Tales of Mean Streets*. Possibly some student of humanity in the raw might sometime write some "Tales of Low People," under which titles stories of this kind might be acceptable. For white and black and brown and yellow people do intermarry, sometimes happily, but always with a possibility of tragedy for themselves or their offspring; and if ever race prejudice becomes so modified that the subject can be freely discussed, doubtless its latent possibilities may appeal to aspiring writers, casting about for novel themes.

The faithful-servant motive—generally an old Negro uncle or mammy who loves the white folks better than his or her own black offspring—is one of the commonest types of Negro in fiction. Uncle Tom is the prototype. Thomas Nelson Page, in "Marse Chan" and elsewhere, has apotheosized this type.

Joel Chandler Harris, in Uncle Remus, has delineated a delightful old Negro. There is not much opportunity for characterization in the role played by the old storyteller, but what there is of a pleasing and kindly character. Indeed the use of old Negro men and women in this capacity, as the medium for weird tales and shrewd philosophy, is a common expedient among short story writers. I have used it myself in my *Conjure Woman*. Miss Lucy Pratt's Ebenezer stories, of which a little black school boy is the hero, are pleasing delineations of character.

In the Rab and Dab stories, which first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Mrs. Patience Pennington, in her *A Woman Rice Planter*, has given a delightful study of two little black imps and her efforts to civilize them. Miss Jean Kenyon Mackenzie has also published in the *Atlantic* under the title of *Black Sheep*, some of her experiences as a Presbyterian missionary in the German colony of Kamerun, on the West Coast of Africa, where she has studied, with

friendly Christian sympathy, the Negro in his native forests.

While many writers have pleaded the Negro's cause in a more or less open way in fiction, he has been written down far more often. But it was left to the present generation to develop a writer who, prostituting a noble instrument to an unworthy end, has made the defamation of the Negro his principal theme and the foundation of his literary reputation and his very considerable financial success, in the person of Thomas Dixon, Jr. The popular success of this mediocre melodrama posing as historical literature is sufficient evidence that at least one type of Negro can be made popular in fiction or rather, made the subject of popular fiction.

Now, having seen the kind of books that are written about colored people, let us ask what kind of books we would like to have written about them?

First, in historical and sociological works, we want the facts in regard to them stated, not deductions drawn from preconceived ideas or lingering traditions. When the Negro as a soldier is referred to, we want the facts as to his numbers, his courage, his loyalty and his services, and he need not be afraid to stand by his record on those facts. When he is referred to as a politician, we want the record given as it is. Reconstruction politics were not a brilliant success, but they at least gave education and civil rights to the Negro, and the colored politicians were by no means responsible for all the mistakes of that epoch. We want books which, in recording the history of that period, will state the facts truthfully, take all the circumstances into consideration, and will not make from the record of those days, the deduction that the Negro is unfit to exercise the right to vote or to hold office.

When the Negro as a man and a social unit is referred to, we do not want him referred to *en masse* as lazy, shiftless, and inefficient. Many Negroes are, but many more are not. We do not want it assumed that because he is of humble origin, that he is necessarily a low person—for, as I heard it wittily put the other day, it does not necessarily follow that because a man was born in a stable he is therefore a horse. It is amusing

to read the Southern newspapers, since the beginning of the recent migration of colored laborers from the South to the North, and note their great alarm at and their eagerness to prevent, the loss of this shiftless and inefficient class of labor. It leads the thoughtful and uninformed reader to wonder whether these stories of the Negro's worthlessness are true, and it makes those who know the facts chortle with glee.

When, in imaginative literature, the man of color is referred to as a servant, we would prefer to have him presented now and then as a self-respecting individual, faithful to his duties, of course, respectful to his superiors, but not the servile, groveling menial or the absurd buffoon depicted in so many stories. There are too many of the latter type, it is true, but they are fast ceasing to be the rule, if they ever were. We would like to see colored men in books in some other characters than those of servants and criminals. We would be much pleased to see them depicted now and then as successful business or professional men, our women as clerks, teachers, or stenographers.

When the race-admixture motive is employed in fiction, we would like, now and then, to find a broad-minded, noble-hearted white man, who, having perchance fallen in love with the beautiful octoroon, would not let the shadow of the black baby stand between his happiness and hers. There are several such books. Mr. Howells's *Imperative Duty*, to which I have referred, and Professor Perry's *The Plated City*, are instances in point. We would like to meet in American fiction some of the liberal-minded white people who do not scorn dark blood, in however slight a degree, and some of those still more broad-minded, who do not scorn it in any degree. We know there are such white people, and we would like to meet them in books. A pleasing instance of this kind is found in Sir Conan Doyle's "The Yellow Face" in the *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, where etc.

We would like to read a novel in which the man of mixed blood is not always a traitor and a sneak, a degenerate or a pervert. We would like to read about a colored politician who is not a grafter, willing to sell his vote, himself,

and his people for a very meager mess of pottage; we would like to read about a colored preacher or social worker who would freely give his life for the uplift of his people; of the colored soldier who dies bravely for his country and his flag. We read of such people in the newspapers, and race magazines; we should like to meet them in books.

Of course we could not expect to have all the colored characters in novels be people of these better types. Unfortunately, among colored people as among other racial types, there are plenty of the others, but what we can reasonably ask for is fairness, that the worst types be not used almost entirely, to the exclusion of the better.

And indeed, from the standpoint of the Negro himself, a little idealism, a little romanticism, would not be at all out of place. An occasional black or brown hero, a little braver, a little wiser, a little richer perchance, a little more self-sacrificing than one could reasonably expect to meet often in real life; an occasional black or brown heroine—aside from the octoroon, who is always beautiful in books—who is beautiful and loyal and charming, would be something by way of example or inspiration. Dr. Du Bois in his *Quest of the Silver Fleece*, has taken as hero and heroine, two black cornfield hands—from the standpoint of the average American reader what material could be more unromantic!—and has woven around them an idyllic love story with a happy ending.

Again, we would like to read a book, now and then, in which it is not such an awful tragedy to be colored. It is bad enough, of course; there are many hardships, many handicaps, much of scorn and contumely to contend with, but there are many colored people who, in spite of these things, manage to have a fairly good time and to maintain a reasonable measure of self-respect. Some of them, indeed, can give back quite a bit of scorn for scorning. And the life of the average American colored man is by no means one of undiluted tragedy. And the beautiful octoroon, rejected by the white lover who discovers her origin, doesn't always die, as she does in my *House Behind the Cedars*, or go into a convent, as she does in many other books. She sometimes

marries a good dark man, who treats her well, and lives happily ever after.

In other words, the Negroes we want in books are natural Negroes—all sorts and types, without any color of prejudice to make them unduly bad, and no flavor of friendship to make them unnaturally good.

Now, how are we going to get such books, or such Negroes in books? There is but one way, and that is to encourage writers to write such books and create such characters, by building up a reading public among ourselves who will buy such books. There are some of them already, but up to date, at least, they have not been very popular. Several years ago an author published a novel serially in one of the 15-cent magazines, in which he made a mulatto character—a very decent fellow, by the way—eat his meals in the kitchen of the boarding-house where he roomed. A colored editor or newspaper writer took the matter up with the author and protested that a self-respecting colored man wouldn't do such a thing, that he would either eat at the table with the other boarders, or change his boarding-house. The author replied that it was essential to the development of his plot that this excellent mulatto stop at that particular boarding-house, and that with the friendliest feeling in the world toward the colored race, he had to consider his white readers, who bought his books, and that he had already been criticized for having him at the boarding-house at all!

Mr. Reginald Wright Kauffman, an author who lives at Columbia, in your own state [Pennsylvania], has recently published a novel, entitled *The Mark of the Beast*, in which one of the principal characters is a degenerate white man of good family, who ravishes a young lady, a relative of his own, whom he had vainly sought in marriage, and then remains silent and permits an innocent, amiable, and harmless mulatto to be lynched for his own crime. The author sent me a copy of his book. I complimented him on his courage. The other day I read in the Boston *Transcript* a letter from Mr. Kauffman, in which, among other things, he says:

My story, "The Mark of the Beast," takes a New Englander to the South and revolves

about the lynching of a negro for a crime of which a white man was guilty—and the South doesn't like it. Southern papers refuse advertisements; they shout condemnation; not on moral grounds or on literary; they simply say that I have "indicted the South" and "don't understand the negro problem." What is not an indictment isn't likely to sound like one—to the innocent; but that is enough of my special case. What I want to protest against is a habit of the South, from the vicarious effects of which I am one of many sufferers; the habit for bidding any Northerner to write of the "Negro problem."

Charles W. Chesnutt, for whose *A Conjure Woman* readers will long be indebted, recently put the case to me thus: "The South is really so much the spoiled brat of the American family that if ever a writer sees fit to write about it in anything but an adulatory manner, he is apt to come in for a very sharp scolding." What has spoiled the South? Why, so far as it is concerned, may anybody discuss graft or the absurdly so-called "White Slavery" and nobody child-labor or lynching? No New Yorker, so far as I can recall, scolded me for my exposure of certain New York conditions in "The House of Bondage." Why all this mystery on the part of Southerners, and especially Southern writers, about the "Negro problem?" If there is a "Negro problem" why do Southerners object to its mention? If there is a "Negro problem" that Northern novelists are incapable of telling the truth about, why don't Southern novelists tell the truth about it? They tell nothing, yet the word "problem" implies something to be solved; novels may treat of any other problem, and no problem is to be solved by being let alone.

If we possessed among ourselves, a reading public large enough to buy as many books as Mr. Kauffman or any other friendly white author, or any colored author, would lose the sale of, because of Southern prejudice, many more such books would be written.

But whence can we reasonably expect such books to emanate? Who knows the Negro best, in his home, in his church, in school, in his work, in his play, in all the manifold phases of his life? Could any one but a Scotchman have written *Waverley*? Could any one but an Englishman have written *Pickwick*? Could any one but a Frenchman have written *Les Misérables* or *The Three Guardsmen*? Other things being equal, the life of a people is best recorded by those who know it and have lived it; in the case of the colored people by those who have shared their sorrows and sufferings and disappointments; their hopes; their successes, their joys, who know their aspirations; their social and spiritual strivings, their love and self-sacrifice for their children, their religious life, the gradual but perceptible growth of moral, ethical, and social standards among them; the development among them of the cooperative spirit, in which lies the great social efficiency of the white races of Europe and America. It stands to reason that an author thus equipped, which could only be a colored author, given equal ability and skill to portray character, would portray

it more truthfully than an equally competent man without his special advantages.

The conclusion of the whole matter is that you should encourage colored writers by buying their books, and you should encourage in the same way other writers to write books which are friendly to your race. I am not advocating a school of fiction entirely for colored people—I should no more like to see literature segregated than anything else—and if colored writers write good literature, it will not fail of recognition at the bar of public opinion.

This "Buy-a-Book Movement," I imagine, was conceived with this idea, that colored people should show their appreciation of those of their own number and those of their outside friends who should take the chance of writing books which treat the Negro fairly. Cultivate the habit of buying such books. Buy them for Christmas presents. Ask for them at the Public Libraries. (Refer to printed list.) Read the race magazines. Thus you will not only encourage the writing of good books about the Negro, but will promote the interest of the race and of humanity.

WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE

The Negro in Literature (1924)

True of his origin on this continent, the Negro was projected into literature by his neighbor. He was in American literature long before he was a part of it as a creator. I ought to qualify this last, perhaps, by saying, that as a racial unit during more than two centuries of an enslaved peasantry, the Negro's creative qualities were affirmed in the *Spirituals*. In these, as was true of the European folk-stock, the race gave evidence of an artistic psychology; without this artistic psychology no race can develop vision which becomes articulate in the sophisticated forms and symbols of cultivated expression. Expressing itself with poignancy and a symbolic imagery unsurpassed, indeed, often unmatched, by any folk-group, the race in servitude was

at the same time both the finished shaping of emotion and imagination, and also the most precious mass of raw material for literature America was producing. Quoting the first, third, and fifth stanzas of James Weldon Johnson's "O Black and Unknown Bards," I want you to take it as the point in the assertion of the Negro's way into literature:

O black and unknown bards of long ago,
How came your lips to touch the sacred
fire?
How, in your darkness, did you come to
know
The power and beauty of the minstrel's
lyre?

But whence can we reasonably expect such books to emanate? Who knows the Negro best, in his home, in his church, in school, in his work, in his play, in all the manifold phases of his life? Could any one but a Scotchman have written *Waverley*? Could any one but an Englishman have written *Pickwick*? Could any one but a Frenchman have written *Les Misérables* or *The Three Guardsmen*? Other things being equal, the life of a people is best recorded by those who know it and have lived it; in the case of the colored people by those who have shared their sorrows and sufferings and disappointments; their hopes; their successes, their joys, who know their aspirations; their social and spiritual strivings, their love and self-sacrifice for their children, their religious life, the gradual but perceptible growth of moral, ethical, and social standards among them; the development among them of the cooperative spirit, in which lies the great social efficiency of the white races of Europe and America. It stands to reason that an author thus equipped, which could only be a colored author, given equal ability and skill to portray character, would portray

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How, in your darkness, did you come to
know
The power and beauty of the minstrel's
lyre?

Who first from midst his bonds lifted his eyes?
 Who first from out the still watch, lone and long,
 Feeling the ancient faith of prophets rise
 Within his dark-kept soul, burst into song?

What merely living clod, what captive thing,
 Could up toward God through all its dark-ness grope,
 And find within its deadened heart to sing
 These songs of sorrow, love, and faith and hope?
 How did it catch that subtle undertone,
 That note in music heard not with the ears?
 How sound the elusive reed so seldom blown,
 Which stirs the soul or melts the heart to tears?

There is a wide, wide wonder in it all,
 That from degraded rest and servile toil
 The fiery spirit of the seer should call
 These simple children of the sun and soil.
 O black slave singers, gone, forgot, unfamed,
 You—you, alone, of all the long, long line
 Of those who've sung untaught, unknown,
 unnamed,
 Have stretched out upward, seeking the divine.

Because it was possible to sing thus of a race: of a race oppressed, illiterate, and toil-ridden, it became also by some divine paradox irresistibly urgent to make literary material out of the imagination and emotion it possessed in such abundance.

I can do no more than outline the Negro in literature as he has been treated by American writers of mixed nationalities. I present this word *nationalities* because, though American by a declaration of a unity, one must not overlook the deep and subtle atavistic impulses and energies which have directed, or misdirected, the imagination, in creating character and experience, atmosphere and traits, in the use of the Negro as literary material.

The first conspicuous example, and one which has more profoundly influenced the world than any other, of the Negro in literature was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Here was a sentimentalized sympathy for a downtrodden Race, but one in which was projected a character, in Uncle Tom himself, which has been unequalled to this day. The Negro in literature had its starting point with this book. Published in 1852, it foreran for many years the body of literature which began during Reconstruction and lasted until the publication of Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots*, which began, and was the exponent of, an era of riot and lawlessness in literary expression. Between the Civil War and the end of the century the subject of the Negro in literature is one that will some day inspire the literary historian with a magnificent theme. It will be magnificent not because there is any sharp emergence of character or incidents, but because of the immense paradox of racial life which came up thunderingly against the principles and doctrines of democracy and put them to the severest test that they had known. It was a period when, in literature, Negro life was a shuttlecock between the two extremes of humor and pathos. The Negro was free, and was not free. The writers who dealt with him for the most part refused to see the tragedy of his situation and capitalized his traits of humor. These writers did not see that his humor was a mask for the tragedies which were constantly a turbulent factor in his consciousness. If any of the authors who dealt with the Negro during this period had possessed gifts anywhere near approaching to genius, they would have penetrated this deceiving exterior of Negro life, sounded the depths of tragedy in it, and have produced a masterpiece. Irwin Russell was the first to verify the superficial humor of this Race, and, though all but forgotten today by the reading world, is given the characteristic credit by literary historians for discovering and recording the phantasies of Negro humor. Thomas Nelson Page, a kindly gentleman with a purely local imagination, painted an ante-bellum Negro in his fiction which was infinitely more truthful to the type contemporaneous with his own manhood during the restitution of the overlordship

of the defeated slave-owners in the eighties. Another writer, who of all Americans made the most permanent contribution in dealing with the Negro, was Joel Chandler Harris. Much as we admire this lovable personality, the arts of his achievements were not in himself, but in the Race who supplied his servile pen with a store of fertile folk material. Indeed, the Race was its own artist, and only in its illiteracy lacked the power to record its speech. Joel Chandler Harris was the divinely appointed amanuensis to preserve the oral tales and legends of a Race in the "B'r'er Rabbit" cycle.

The three writers I have mentioned do not by any means exhaust the list of writers who put the Negro into literature during the last half of the nineteenth century. Mr. Howells added a shadowy note to his social record of American life with *An Imperative Duty* and prophesied the fiction of the "color line." But his moral scruples—the persistent, artistic vice in all his novels—prevented him from consummating a just union between his heroine with a touch of Negro blood and his hero. It is useless to consider any others because there were none who succeeded in creating either a great story or a great character out of Negro life. Two writers of greater importance than the three I have named dealing with Negro life, are themselves Negroes, and I am reserving discussion of them for the group of Race writers I shall name presently. One ought to say, in justice to the writers I have mentioned, that as white Americans it was incompatible with their conception of the inequalities between the races to glorify the Negro into the serious and leading position of hero or heroine in fiction. Only one man, that I recall, had both the moral and artistic courage to do this and that was Stephen Crane in a short story called *The Monster*. But Stephen Crane was a man of genius and, therefore, could not besmirch the integrity of an artist.

With Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots*, we reach a distinct stage in the treatment of the Negro in fiction. In this book the Color Line type of fiction is, frankly, and viciously used for purposes of propaganda. This Southern author foresaw an inevitable consequence of the intimate contact and intercourse between the two

races, in this country. He had good evidence upon which to base his fears. He was, however, too late with his cry for race purity—which meant, of course, Anglo-Saxon purity. The cry itself ought to have shamed all those critics who approved it; whose consciences must have taken a twinge in recollecting how the Saxon passion had found so sweetly desirable the black body of Africa. Had Dixon been a thinker, had his mind been stored with the complex social history of mankind, he would have saved himself a futile and ridiculous literary gesture. Thomas Dixon, of a quarter of a century ago, and Lothrop Stoddard of to-day, are a pair of literary twins whom nature has made sport of, and who will ultimately submerge in a typhoon of Truth. For Truth is devastating to all who would pervert the ways of nature.

Following *The Leopard's Spots*, it was only occasionally during the next twenty years that the Negro was sincerely treated in fiction by white authors. There were two or three tentative efforts to dramatize him. Sheldon's *The Nigger*, was the one notable early effort. And in fiction Paul Kester's *His Own Country* is from a purely literary point of view, its outstanding performance. This type of novel failed, however, to awaken any general interest. This failure was due, I believe, to the illogical ideas and experiences presented, for there is, however indifferent and negative it may seem, a desire on the part of self-respecting readers, to have honesty of purpose, and a full vision in the artist.

The first hint that the American artist was looking at this subject with full vision was in Torrence's *Granny Maumee*. It was drama, conceived and executed for performance on the stage, and therefore had a restricted appeal. But even here the artist was concerned with the primitive instincts of the Race, and, though, faithful and honest, in his portrayal, the note was still low in the scale of racial life. It was only a short time, however, before a distinctly new development took place in the treatment of Negro life by white authors. This new class of work honestly strove to endow the Negro with many virtues that were still with one or two exceptions, treating the lower or primitive strata

of his existence. With one or two exceptions referred to, the author could only see the Negro as an inferior, superstitious, half-ignorant, and servile class of people. They did recognize, however, in a few isolated characters an ambitious impulse,—an impulse, nevertheless, always defeated in the force of the story. Again in only one or two instances did these authors categorically admit a cultured, independent layer of society that was leavening the Race with individuals who had won absolute equality of place and privilege with the best among the civilized group of to-day.

George Madden Martin, with her pretentious foreword to a group of short stories, called *The Children of the Mist*,—and this is an extraordinary volume in many ways—quite believed herself, as a Southern woman, to have elevated the Negro to a higher plane of fictional treatment and interest. In succession, followed Mary White Ovington's *The Shadow*, in which Miss Ovington daringly created the kinship of brother and sister between a black boy and white girl, had it brought to disaster by prejudice, out of which the white girl rose to a sacrifice no white girl in a novel had hitherto accepted and endured; Shands' *White and Black*, as honest a piece of fiction with the Negro as a subject as was ever produced by a Southern pen—and in this story, also, the hero, Robinson, making an equally glorious sacrifice for truth and justice, as Miss Ovington's heroine; Clement Wood's *Nigger*, with defects of treatment, but admirable in purpose, wasted though, I think, in the effort to prove its thesis on wholly illogical material; and lastly, T. S. Stribling's *Birthright*, more significant than any of these other books, in fact, the most significant novel on the Negro written by a white American, and this in spite of its totally false conception of the character of Peter Siner. Mr. Stribling's book broke new ground for a white author in giving us a Negro hero and heroine. He found in the Race a material for artistic treatment which was worthy of an artist's respect. His failure was in limiting, unconscious as it was on the part of the author, the capacity of the hero to assimilate culture, and in forcing his rapid reversion to the level of his origin after a perfect Harvard training.

On the other hand, no author has presented so severe an indictment as Mr. Stribling in his painting of the Southern conditions which brought about the disintegration of his hero's dreams and ideals.

Three recent plays should here be mentioned, of the Negro put into literature by white authors: I refer to O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, and *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, and *Goat Alley*. In all these plays, disregarding the artistic quality of achievement, they are the sordid aspects of life and undesirable types of character which are dramatized. The best and highest class of racial life has not yet been discovered for literary treatment by white American authors; that's a task left for Negro writers to perform, and the start has been made.

In closing this phase of my paper let me quote in extenuation of much that I have said in the foregoing a passage from an article in a recent number of *The Independent*, which reads:

During the past few years stories about Negroes have been extremely popular. A Magazine without a Negro story is hardly living up to its opportunities. But almost every one of these stories is written in a tone of condescension. The artists have caught the contagion from the writers and the illustrations are ninety-nine times out of a hundred purely slapstick stuff. Stories and pictures make a Roman holiday for the millions who are convinced that the most important fact about the Negro is that his skin is black. Many of these writers live in the South or are from the South. Presumably they are well acquainted with the Negro, but it is a remarkable fact that they almost never tell us anything vital about him, about the real human being in the black man's skin. Their most frequent method is to laugh at the colored man and woman, to catalogue their idiosyncrasies, their departure from the norm, that is, from the ways of the whites. There seems to be no suspicion in the minds of the writers that there may be a fascinating thought life in the minds of the Negroes, whether of the cultivated or of the most ignorant type.

Always the Negro is interpreted in the terms of the white man. White-man psychology is applied and it is no wonder that the result often shows the Negro in a ludicrous light.

I shall have to run back over the years to where I began to survey the achievement of Negro authorship. The Negro as a creator in American literature is of comparatively recent importance. All that was accomplished between Phyllis Wheatley and Paul Laurence Dunbar, considered by critical standards, is negligible, and of historical interest only. Historically it is a great tribute to the Race to have produced in Phyllis Wheatley not only the slave poetess in eighteenth-century Colonial America, but to know she was as good, if not a better poetess, than Ann Bradstreet, whom literary historians give the honor of being the first person of her sex to win fame as a poet in America.

Negro authorship may, for clearer statement, be classified into three main activities: Poetry, Fiction, and the Essay, with an occasional excursion into other branches. In the drama, practically nothing has been achieved, with the exception of Angelina Grimké's *Rachel*, which is notable for its sombre craftsmanship. Biography has given us a notable life story, told by himself, of Booker T. Washington. Frederick Douglass's story of his life is eloquent as a human document, but not in the graces of narration and psychologic portraiture which has definitely put this form of literature in the domain of the fine arts. In philosophic speculation the Negro has made a valuable contribution to American thought; indeed, with Einstein endeavored to solve the complicated secrets of infinity in Robert Brown's *The Mystery of Space*, a work, which, but for the discernment of a few perceptive critics, has failed to win the recognition it deserves. In aesthetic theory and criticism the Negro has not yet made any worth-while contribution though a Negro scholar. Professor W.S. Scarborough has published a Greek grammar which was adopted as a standard text book. In history and the historical monograph there has been in recent years a growing distinction of performance. It is now almost a half century since Williams's history of

the Negro Race was published, and Trotter's volume on the Negro in music. The historical studies of to-day by Dr. Carter Woodson are of inestimable service in the documenting of the obscure past character and activity of Negro life; and Benjamin Brawley, who, beside his social history of the Negro, has written a study of the Negro in art and literature and a valuable *History of the English Drama*. The literary contributions of the Negro have only begun, but the beginning is significant. His accomplishment has been chiefly in imaginative literature, with poetry, by far, the prominent practice. Next to poetry, comes fiction; and though his preoccupation runs back nearly a century, he gives promise in the future of a greater accomplishment in prose fiction. In the third field of the Negro's literary endeavor, the essay, and discursive article, dealing chiefly with racial problems, there has been produced a group of able writers assaulting and clearing the impeded pathway of racial progress.

Let us survey briefly the advance of the Negro in poetry. Behind Dunbar, there is nothing that can stand the critical test. We shall always have a sentimental and historical interest in those forlorn and pathetic figures who cried in the wilderness of their ignorance and oppression. With Dunbar we have our first authentic lyric utterance, an utterance more authentic, I should say, for its faithful rendition of Negro life and character than for any rare or subtle artistry of expression. When Mr. Howells, in his famous introduction to the *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, remarked that Dunbar was the first black man to express the life of his people lyrically, he summed up Dunbar's achievement and transported him to a place beside the peasant poet of Scotland, not for his art, but precisely because he made a people articulate in verse. The two chief qualities in Dunbar's work are humour and pathos, and in these with an inimitable portrayal, he expressed that era of conscious indecision disturbing the Race between the Civil War and the nineteenth-century. No agitated visions of prophecy burn and surge in his poems. His dreams were anchored to the minor whimsies, to the ineffectual tears of his people deluded by the Torch of a Liberty that

was leading them back into abstract bondage. He expressed what he felt and knew to be the temper and condition of his people. Into his dialect work he poured a spirit, which, for the first time, was the soul of a people. By his dialect work he will survive, not so much because out of this broken English speech he shaped the symbols of beauty or the haunting strains of melody, but because into it he poured the plaintive, poignant tears and laughter of the soul of a Race.

After Dunbar many versifiers appeared all largely dominated by his successful dialect work; I cannot parade them here for tag or comment. Not until James W. Johnson published his Fiftieth Anniversary Ode on the emancipation in 1913, did a poet of the Race disengage himself from the background of mediocrity. Mr. Johnson's work is based upon a broader contemplation of life, life that was not wholly confined within any racial experience, but through the racial he made articulate that universality of the emotions felt by all mankind. His verse possesses a vigor which definitely breaks away from the brooding minor undercurrents of feeling which has previously characterized the verse of Race poets. Mr. Johnson brought, indeed, the first intellectual substance to the content of poetry and a craftsmanship which, less spontaneous than that of Dunbar's was more balanced and precise.

Two other poets have distinguished themselves, though not to the same degree as Mr. Johnson. Fenton Johnson is one of those who began with a very uncertain measure of gifts, but made a brief and sudden development, only to retire as suddenly into the silence; the other poet, Leslie Pinckney Hill, has published one creditable book which has won for him a place among Negro poets, but which is the result of an intellectual determination to verse-making rather than the outpouring of a spontaneous poetic spirit.

Let me here pay tribute to a woman who has proven herself the foremost of all women poets the Race has so far produced: Georgia Douglas Johnson is a lyricist who has achieved much and who ought to achieve a great deal more. She has the equipment which nature gives in

endowing the poetic spirit; her art is adequate but to say this is not to be satisfied with the best use of her gifts. A capture by her of some of the illusive secrets of form would often transmute her substance into the golden miracle of art.

I come now to Claude McKay, who unquestionably is a poet whose potentialities would place him supreme above all poets of the Negro Race. But I am afraid he will never justify that high distinction. His work may be easily divided into two classes: first, when he is the pure dreamer, contemplating life and nature, with a wistful and sympathetic passion, giving expression with subtle and figurative music to his dreams; secondly, when he is the violent and angry propagandist, using his natural poetic gifts to clothe arrogant and defiant thoughts. When the mood of "Spring in New Hampshire" or the sonnet "The Harlem Dancer" possesses him, he is full of that desire, of those flames of beauty which flower above any or all men's harming; in these are the white dreams which shine over the Promised Land of the Race's conquest over its enemies; it is the literature of those magnificent Psalms against which all the assaults of time dissolve, and whose music and whose vision wash clean with the radiance of beauty. How different, in spite of the admirable spirit of courage and defiance, are his poems of which the sonnet "If We Must Die" is a typical example. Passion is not a thing of words—it is an essence of the spirit! He who slaves and burns with beauty is a more triumphant conqueror than he who slaves with a sword that the victim might break.

Too green the springing April grass,
Too blue the silver speckled sky,
For me to linger here, alas,
While happy winds go laughing by,
Wasting the golden hours indoors.
Washing windows and scrubbing floors.

Too wonderful the April night,
Too faintly sweet the first May flowers,
The stars too gloriously bright,
For me to spend the evening hours,
When fields are fresh and streams are
leaping,
Weary, exhausted, dully sleeping.

Let me refer briefly to a type of literature in which there have been many pens with all the glory going to one man. Dr. Du Bois is the most variously gifted writer which the Race has produced. Poet, novelist, sociologist, historian and essayist, he has produced books in all these branches of literature—with the exception I believe, of a formal book of poems,—and being a man of indomitable courage I have often wondered why,—and gave to each the distinction of his clear and exact thinking, and of his sensitive imagination and passionate vision. *The Souls of Black Folk* was the book of an era; it was a painful book, a book of tortured dreams woven into the fabric of the sociologist's document. In this book, as well as in many of Dr. Du Bois's essays, is often my personal feeling that I am witnessing the birth of a poet, phoenix-like, out of a scholar. Between *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Darkwater*, published three years ago, Dr. Du Bois has written a number of books, none more notable, in my opinion, than his novel *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, in which he made *cotton* the great protagonist of fate in the lives of the Southern people, both white and black. In European literature nature and her minions have long been represented in literature as dominating the destinies of man; but in America I know of only two conspicuous accomplishments of this kind,—one, Frank Norris in his dramatization of the influence of *wheat* and the other, Dr. Du Bois's in his dramatization of the influence of *cotton*.

Let me again quote a passage from the aforementioned article from *The Independent*:

The white writer seems to stand baffled before the enigma and so he expends all his energies on dialect and in general on the Negro's minstrel characteristics. . . . We shall have to look to the Negro himself to go all the way. It is quite likely that no white man can do it. It is reasonable to suppose that his white psychology will always be in his way. I am not thinking at all about a Negro novelist who shall arouse the world to the horror of the deliberate killings by white mobs, to the wrongs that condemn a free people to political serfdom. I am not

thinking at all of the propaganda novel, although there is enough horror and enough drama in the bald statistics of each one of the annual Moton letters to keep the whole army of writers busy. But the Negro novelist, if he ever comes, must reveal to us much more than what a Negro thinks about when he is being tied to a stake and the torch is being applied to his living flesh; much more than what he feels when he is being crowded off the sidewalk by a drunken rowdy who may be his intellectual inferior by a thousand leagues. Such a writer, to succeed in a big sense, would have to forget that there are white readers; he would have to lose self-consciousness and forget that his work would be placed before a white jury. He would have to be careless as to what the white critic might think of it; he would need the self-assurance to be his own critic. He would have to forget for the time being, at least, that any white man ever attempted to dissect the soul of a Negro.

What I here quote is both an inquiry and a challenge! Well informed as the writer is, he does not seem to detect the forces which are surely gathering to produce what he longs for.

The development of fiction among Negro authors has been, I might almost say, one of the repressed activities of his literary life. A fair start was made the last decade of the nineteenth century when Chesnutt and Dunbar were turning out both short stories and novels. In Dunbar's case, had he lived, I think his literary growth would have been in the evolution of the Race novel as indicated in "The Uncalled" and the "Sport of the Gods." The former was, I think, the most ambitious literary effort of Dunbar; the latter was his most significant; significant because, thrown against the background of New York City, it displayed the life of the Race as a unit, swayed by the currents of existence, of which it was and was not a part. The story was touched with that shadow of destiny which gave to it a purpose more important than the mere racial machinery of its plot. In all his fiction, Dunbar dealt with the same world which gave him the inspiration for his dialect poems.

It was a world he knew and loved and became the historian of without any revising influence from the world which was its political and social enemies. His contemporary, Charles W. Chesnutt, was to supply the conflict between the two worlds and establish with the precision of a true artist, the fiction of the Color Line.

Charles W. Chesnutt is one of the enigmas in American literature. There are five volumes to his credit, not including his life of Frederick Douglass for the Beacon Biography Series. From first to last, he revealed himself as a fictional artist of a very high order. The two volumes of short stories, *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories*, and *The Conjure Woman*, are exquisite examples of the short story form equal to the best in American literature. Primarily a short story writer, Mr. Chesnutt showed defects in his long novels which were scarcely redeemed by the mastery of style which made them a joy to read. I recall the shock a certain incident in *The House Behind the Cedars* gave me when I first read the book at the time it was published, puzzled that human nature should betray its own most passionate instincts at a moment of the intensest crisis. I realized later, or at least my admiration for Mr. Chesnutt's art, led me to believe that the fault was not so much his art as the problem of the color line. This problem, in its most acute details, was woven into the best novel Mr. Chesnutt has written called *The Marrow of Tradition*. Certainly he did in that work an epic of riot and lawlessness which has served for mere pictorial detail as a standard example. In 1905, Mr. Chesnutt published *The Colonel's Dream*, and thereafter silence fell upon him. I have heard it said that disappointment, because his stories failed to win popularity, was the cause of his following the classic example of Thomas Hardy by refusing to publish another novel. The cases are not exactly parallel because, while Hardy has refused to write another novel following the publication of *Jude, the Obscure*, I have heard it rumored that Mr. Chesnutt has written other stories but will not permit their publication.

From the publication of Chesnutt's last novel until the present year there has been no fiction by the Race, of any importance, with the exception of Dr. Du Bois's *The Quest of the*

Silver Fleece, which was published in 1911. This year of 1924 will have given four new books by writers, which seem to promise the inauguration of an era that is likely to produce the major novelists. Joshua Henry Jones's *By Sanction of Law*, is a book that will hold the attention of readers who demand a thrilling story; it designs no new pattern of fiction, produces no new texture of expression. A vigorous narrative, it piles incident upon incident, with dialogue, love and violence.

Mr. Walter White's novel *The Fire in the Flint*, is a swift moving story built upon the authentic experience of the author, with the terrors and pities of racial conflict.

Two outstanding achievements in the entire range of fiction are the books by Jessie Redmon Fauset and Jean Toomer. Miss Fauset in her novel *There is Confusion*, has created an entirely new milieu in the treatment of the Race in fiction. She has taken a class within the Race, given it an established social standing, tradition, culture, and shown that its predilections are very much like those of any civilized group of human beings. In her story Race fiction emerges from the color line and is incorporated into that general and universal art which detaches itself from prejudice of propaganda and stands out the objective vision of artistic creation. Her beginning is conspicuous; her development may well be surprising.

These rambling remarks on the Negro in literature I may well bring to a close with this public confession that I believe that of all the writers I have mentioned, the one who is most surely touched with genius is Jean Toomer, the author of *Cane*. I believe this, not only on account of what he has actually accomplished in *Cane*, but for something which is partly in the accomplishment and partly in the half-articulate sense and impression of his powers. This young man is an artist; the very first artist in his Race who, with all an artist's passion and sympathy for life, its hurts, its sympathies, its desires, its joys, its defeats, and strange yearnings, can write about the Negro without the surrender or compromise of the artist's vision. It's a mere accident that birth or association has thrown him into contact with the life that he

has written about. He would write just as well, just as poignantly, just as transmutingly, about the peasants of Russia, or the peasants of Ireland, had experience but given him the knowledge of

their existence. "Cane" is a book of gold and bronze, of dusk and flame of ecstasy and pain, and Jean Toomer is a bright morning star of a new day of the Race in literature!

A SYMPOSIUM

The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed (1926)

A Questionnaire

There has long been controversy within and without the Negro race as to just how the Negro should be treated in art—how he should be pictured by writers and portrayed by artists. Most writers have said naturally that any portrayal of any kind of Negro was permissible so long as the work was pleasing and the artist sincere. But the Negro has objected vehemently—first in general to the conventional Negro in American literature; then in specific cases: to the Negro portrayed in *Birth of a Nation*; in MacFall's *Wooings of Jezebel Pettyfer* and in Stribling's *Birthright*; in Octavius Roy Cohen's monstrosities. In general they have contended that while the individual portrait may be true and artistic, the net result to American literature to date is to picture twelve million Americans as prostitutes, thieves and fools and that such "freedom" in art is miserably unfair.

This attitude is natural but as Carl Van Vechten writes us: "It is the kind of thing, indeed, which might be effective in preventing many excellent Negro writers from speaking any truth which might be considered unpleasant. There are plenty of unpleasant truths to be spoken about any race. The true artist speaks out fearlessly. The critic judges the artistic result; nor should he be concerned with anything else."

In order to place this matter clearly before the thinking element of Negro Americans and especially before young authors, *The Crisis* is asking several authors to write their opinions on the following matters:

1. When the artist, black or white, portrays Negro characters is he under any obligations or

limitations as to the sort of character he will portray?

2. Can any author be criticized for painting the worst or the best characters of a group?

3. Can publishers be criticized for refusing to handle novels that portray Negroes of education and accomplishment, on the ground that these characters are no different from white folk and therefore not interesting?

4. What are Negroes to do when they are continually painted at their worst and judged by the public as they are painted?

5. Does the situation of the educated Negro in America with its pathos, humiliation and tragedy call for artistic treatment at least as sincere and sympathetic as *Porgy* received?

6. Is not the continual portrayal of the sordid, foolish and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really and essentially Negroid, and preventing white artists from knowing any other types and preventing black artists from daring to paint them?

7. Is there not a real danger that young colored writers will be tempted to follow the popular trend in portraying Negro character in the underworld rather than seeking to paint the truth about themselves and their own social class?

We have already received comments on these questions from Sinclair Lewis, Carl Van Vechten, Major Haldane MacFall and others. We shall publish these and other letters in a series of articles. *Meantime let our readers remember our contest for \$600 in prizes and send in their manuscripts no matter what attitude they take in regard to this controversy. Manuscripts, etc., will be received until May 1, 1926.*

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Carl Van Vechten

I am fully aware of the reasons why Negroes are sensitive in regard to fiction which attempts to picture the lower strata of the race. The point is that this is an attitude completely inimical to art. It has caused, sometimes quite unconsciously, more than one Negro of my acquaintance to refrain from using valuable material. Thank God, it has not yet harmed Rudolph Fisher! But the other point I raise is just as important. Plenty of colored folk deplore the fact that Fisher has written stories like "Ringtail" and "High Yaller." If a white man had written them he would be called a Negro hater. Now these stories would be just as good if a white man had written them, but the sensitive Negro—and heaven knows he has reason enough to feel sensitive—would see propaganda therein.

You speak of "this side of the Negro's life having been overdone." That is quite true and will doubtless continue to be true for some time, for a very excellent reason. The squalor of Negro life, the vice of Negro life, offer a wealth of novel, exotic, picturesque material to the artist. On the other hand, there is very little difference if any between the life of a wealthy or cultured Negro and that of a white man of the same class. The question is: Are Negro writers going to write about this exotic material while it is still fresh or will they continue to make a free gift of it to white authors who will exploit it until not a drop of vitality remains?

H. L. Mencken

1. The artist is under no obligations or limitations whatsoever. He should be free to depict things exactly as he sees them.

2. No, so long as his portrait is reasonably accurate.

3. I know of no publisher who sets up any such doctrine. The objection is to Negro characters who are really only white men, i.e., Negro characters who are false.

4. The remedy of a Negro novelist is to depict the white man at his worst. Walter white has already done it, and very effectively interesting.

5. This question is simply rhetorical. Who denies the fact?

6. The sound artist pays no attention to bad art. Why should he?

7. If they are bad artists, yes. If they are good, no.

It seems to me that in objecting to such things as the stories of Mr. Cohen the Negro shows a dreadful lack of humor. They are really very amusing. Are they exaggerations? Of course they are. Nevertheless they always keep some sort of contact with the truth. Is it argued that a white man, looking at Negroes, must always see them as Negroes see themselves? Then what is argued is nonsense. If he departs too far from plausibility and probability his own people will cease to read him. They dislike palpable falsifications. Everyone does. But they enjoy caricatures, recognizing them as such.

The remedy of the Negro is not to bellow for justice—that is, not to try to apply scientific criteria to works of art. His remedy is to make works of art that pay off the white man in his own coin. The white man, it seems to me, is extremely ridiculous. He looks ridiculous even to me, a white man myself. To a Negro he must be an hilarious spectacle, indeed. Why isn't that spectacle better described? Let the Negro sculptors spit on their hands! What a chance!

DuBose Heyward

No. 1. If the author's object is the creation of a piece of art I feel that he should not be limited as to the sort of character he portrays. He should attempt that which moves him most deeply.

No. 2. If he is a sincere artist, no.

No. 3. Yes. On the grounds of bad business judgment, if nothing else. I feel that there is a growing public everywhere in America for literature dealing sincerely with any aspect of Negro life. The educated and artistic Negro, if presented with skill and insight, will find his public waiting for him when the publishers are willing to take the chance.

No. 4. Educated Negroes are rapidly arriving at a point where they are their own best refutation of this type of portrayal. They should, and

doubtless will, soon be producing their own authentic literature.

No. 5. Emphatically yes. The point is that it must be treated *artistically*. It destroys itself as soon as it is made a vehicle for propaganda. If it carries a moral or a lesson they should be subordinated to the *artistic* aim.

6, 7. I cannot say. I think the young colored writer in America need not be afraid to portray any aspect of his racial life. And I may say further that I feel convinced that he alone will produce the ultimate and authentic record of his own people. What I have done in *Porgy* owes what social value it has to its revelation of *my* feeling toward my subject. A real subjective literature must spring from the race itself.

Mary W. Ovington

In a recent number of *Harper's*, J. B. Priestley discusses the American novel and describes a snag that has caught many an American writer. Our country contains so much variety in its background that our writers forget that this background is of comparatively little importance and think over-much of local color. They thus create fixed types. But the important thing, Priestley emphasizes, is to note "the immense difference between your neighbors."

With this in mind I can quickly answer a number of your questions. A novel isn't made up of all good or all bad, of all buffoons or all wise men. When a book overemphasizes one type, whether it be the buffoon, the villain or the heroically good young man, it isn't a true book and will soon be forgotten. What publishers, at least the best, want today is art, not propaganda. They don't want to know what the writer thinks on the Negro question, they want to know about Negroes.

Publishers will take books dealing with the educated Negro if he can be written of without our continually seeing his diploma sticking out of his pocket. Just as soon as the writer can believe that his reader knows there are educated Negroes, and doesn't have to be told that they live in pleasant homes and don't eat with their

knives, he can begin seriously to write about them. Surely it is unimportant whether a book deals with the rich or the poor. *Porgy* and *Crown and Bess* are great figures in a powerful love story. John is a strong figure in Waldo Frank's *Holiday*. So is Bob in Walter White's *Fire in the Flint*.

Question six speaks of the "continual portrayal of the sordid, foolish and criminal among Negroes." This has not been true within the past few years. White artists are beginning to see the true Negro and colored writers are beginning to drop their propaganda and are painting reality.

Question seven, the danger of the Negro writer's following the popular trend, is a question every writer has to face. It has nothing to do with color. Are you so poor that you yield to the temptation to copy the trivial success? If you do you'll have plenty of company in this world of cheap popular magazines.

Langston Hughes

I think like this: What's the use of saying anything—the true literary artist is going to write about what he chooses anyway regardless of outside opinions. You write about the intelligent Negroes; Fisher about the unintelligent. Both of you are right. Walpool pictures the better-class Englishman; Thomas Burke the sailors in Limehouse. And both are worth reading. It's the way people look at things, not what they look at, that needs to be changed.

J. E. Spingarn

Are white publishers justified in rejecting novels dealing with the lives of cultivated colored people? If they publish mediocre white novels and reject mediocre colored novels, it is hard on a few colored writers, but should not the rest of us thank our stars that we are spared at least some of the poor books of the world? For surely, whatever the subject of the novel, it should be rejected if it is a mediocre book, and will not

be rejected if it is really a powerful one; we may be sure that in the end a work of genius will find some form of publication.

This is the obvious answer to the crucial question in the questionnaire of *The Crisis*—indeed, an answer too obvious to be satisfactory. Complex problems cannot be solved in this airy way. For a novel, and in fact every other kind of book, is two things: It may be considered a contribution to the *literature* of the world or as a contribution to the *culture* of a race. The problems are so different that *The Crisis* questionnaire would demand a totally different set of answers in each case. From the standpoint of the critic, there is only one answer to the question as to what should be done with a mediocre book; but from the standpoint of Negro culture it may be important that some writers should get a hearing, even if their books are comparatively poor. The culture of a race must have a beginning, however simple; and imperfect books are infinitely better than a long era of silence. If the white publisher hesitates, on the ground that it is his business to be a publisher and not a champion of Negro culture, colored brains should create colored periodicals. The world will not close its ears to the voice of a great writer merely because of the imprint on the title-page.

The tendency today is to overestimate rather than underestimate colored books because of their subject, their delightfully exotic material. Their writers are valued by some people, as Dr. Johnson said of the first women preachers, not because they preached well but because of the surprise that they could preach at all. This will soon pass away; nothing disappears so quickly as a fashion in the subject of books. Great books may be made out of any subject under the sun; and colored writers will more and more have to depend not on their subjects but on their own excellence. In the meanwhile they should realize that all of the complex problems of literature can not be magically solved by a childish formula like that of "art versus propaganda." They must understand that a book may be of high value to a race's culture without being of high rank in the world's literature,

just as a man may be a very useful citizen yet a rather mediocre dentist. The Negro race should not sniff at the *Uncle Tom's Cabins* and the *Jungles* of its own writers, which are instruments of progress as real as the ballot-box, the school-house, or a stick of dynamite.

Walter White

It is unfortunate, it seems to me, that at the very time when Negro writers are beginning to be heard there should arise a division of opinion as to what or what not he should write about. Such a conflict, however, is, I suppose, to be expected. There are those who say that the only interesting material in Negro lives is in the lives of the lower or lowest classes—that upper-class Negro life is in no wise different from white life and is therefore uninteresting.

I venture to question the truth of this statement. Like all other people who have struggled against odds, upper class Negroes have through that very struggle sharpened their sensitiveness to the intense drama of race life in the United States. They never come into contact with the outside world but there is potential drama, whether of comedy or tragedy, in each of those contacts. By this I do not mean simply unpleasant aspects of the lives of these people. This sensitiveness to pain and insult and tragedy has its compensation in a keener awareness and appreciation of the rhythmic beauty and color and joyousness which is so valuable a part of Negro life.

The lives of so-called upper-class Negroes have advantages as literary material, judged even by the most arbitrary standards. "Babbitt" or "Jean Christophe" or any other novel is interesting in direct proportion to the ability of the writer to depict impingement of events and experiences, trivial or great, on the more or less sensitive photographic plates which are the minds of the characters. Life for any Negro in America has so many different aspects that there is unlimited material for the novelist or short story writer. For the reasons I have already given, there is no lack of this material

among upper-class Negroes if one only has the eye to see it.

Suppose we carry this objection to the utilization of experiences of educated Negroes to its logical conclusion. Would not the result be this: Negro writers should not write, the young Negro is told, of educated Negroes because their lives paralleling white lives are uninteresting. If this be true, then it seems just as reasonable to say that all writers, white or colored, should abandon all sources of material save that of lower-class Negro life. Manifestly this is absurd. It makes no difference, it seems to me, what field a writer chooses if he has the gift of perception, of dramatic and human material and the ability to write about it.

Those who would limit Negro writers to depiction of lower-class Negro life justify their contention by saying, "The artist must have the right to choose his material where he will; and the critic can judge him only by the artistic result." These same persons often nullify or negative their contention for freedom by following this assertion immediately with insistence that the Negro writer confine himself to one field. The Negro writer, just like any other writer, should be allowed to write of whatever interests him whether it be of lower or middle, or upper-class Negro life in America; or of white—or Malay—or Chinese—or Hottentot characters and should be judged not by the color of the writer's skin but solely by the story he produces.

I, myself, have not as yet written extensively of prostitutes or gamblers or cabaret habitués. Fortunately, or unfortunately, my life thus far has not given me as intimate a knowledge of these classes as I feel would be necessary for me to write about them. I am not boasting of this innocence, if one chooses to call it that. I am merely stating it as a fact. An honest craftsman, in my opinion, can only pour his knowledge and experience, real or imagined, through the alembic of his own mind and let the creations of his subjective or objective self stand or fall by whatever literary standards are current at the time. I do not mean that Zola or Flaubert had to live as "Nana" or "Emma Bovary" did to achieve subjective treatment of these characters—such

obviously being a physical impossibility. But Zola *did* find himself drawn to write of the experiences of his character "Nana," as did Flaubert to the luckless "Emma." Certainly we could not have condemned either Zola or Flaubert if they had chosen instead to depict women less carnal minded.

To summarize specifically, it seems to me that:

1. The artist should be allowed full freedom in the choice of his characters and material.

2. An artist can rightly be criticized if he portrays only the worst or only the best characters of any group. (I, myself, was lambasted most enthusiastically by the South because Kenneth Harper in *The Fire in the Flint* seemed to me much more intelligent and decent than any of his white fellow townsmen.)

3. Publishers can and should be criticized for refusing to handle manuscripts, *provided they have merit*, that portray Negroes of superior talent because the lives of these Negroes do not vary from white people's.

4. When Negroes are painted only at their worst and judged accordingly by the public, Negroes must write stories revealing the other side and make these stories of such excellence that they command attention. (This is not an advertisement but in this same connection more Negroes must buy books by Negro writers for then sales will cause publishers actively to seek Negro writers of ability.)

5. The situation of the Negro in America is pregnant enough in drama and color and beauty to make of him a subject for artistic treatment.

6. Continual portrayal of any type to the exclusion of all others is not only harmful but bad art.

7. If young Negro writers can be saved or, better, save themselves from too hostile or too friendly critics, editors, publishers or public, from spending all their time and energy in restricted areas, they can have the freedom to explore whatever fields to which their fancy or inclination draws them.

In brief, sycophants and weaklings will follow whatever trend is mapped out for them; genuine artists will write or paint or sing or sculpt whatever they please.

Alfred A. Knopf

I have yours of January 22 and will try to answer your questions promptly and briefly.

1. No.
2. No.
3. This question seems to me to be senseless.
4. To write books—fiction and non-fiction—to supply the deficiency.
5. Yes.
6. I doubt it.
7. I doubt it.

John Farrar

I feel that the Negro should be treated by himself and by others who write about him with just as little self-consciousness as possible. Realizing how untrue Octavius Roy Cohen's stories may be, they have amused me immensely, nor do they mean to me any very great libel on the Negro—any more than an amusing story about the Yankee would seem to me a libel on myself.

On the other hand, I have always thought that Walter White's novel was a trifle one-sided, although I realize that I speak as one who does not truly know conditions in the South.

It therefore seems to me that although I realize it is inevitable under the circumstances that this discussion should arise you will have Negroes writing about the Negro as the Jews have written about the Jews in *Potash and Perlmutter* and other such things, and that racial characteristics are bound to be presented in burlesque as well as real drama; and that, as Mr. Van Vechten has pointed out, the creative spirit, even though it may not be classed as art, will always disregard moral issues such as these.

William Lyon Phelps

1. The only obligation or limitation that an artist should recognize is the truth.

2. He cannot be criticized unless he takes the worst as typical.

3. If a publisher takes the ground mentioned in this question, it would be absurd.

4. The Negroes must protest in print and must hope that by setting a good example in their lives they can correct the false impression.

5. Of course it calls for artistic treatment, sincere and sympathetic, but I have not read *Porgy*.

6. There is a certain danger of this.

7. I think there might be a danger also here.

Vachel Lindsay

1. Neither the black nor the white artist should be under obligations or limitations as to the sort of character he will portray. His own experience and his inmost perception of truth and beauty, in its severest interpretation, should be his only criteria.

2. An author can be criticized for painting the worst or best characters of a group if his portrayal thereby becomes artistically false; he should be free to choose his characters according to his desire and purpose.

3. Publishers assuredly may be criticized for refusing to handle novels portraying Negroes of education and accomplishment, on the ground that these characters are no different from white folk and therefore not interesting. The Negro of this type has an artistic as well as a social right to speak for himself; and what he has to say is all too interesting, as a rule.

4. The work of such magazines as *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* suggests a possible way out. Through his songs, through drama, poetry, and fiction, the Negro should make every effort to put before the public a true picture of the race, in totality; and white folk of sufficient intelligence and courage to recognize the issue as it stands should be enlisted as an auxiliary force to the same end.

5. The situation of the educated Negro in America surely merits all possible sincere and artistic treatment. If such enterprises seem doomed to failure in this country, they should be taken to Canada or England, or to the continental countries, and so finally reach the United States public with their prestige already established.

6. The portrayal of sordid, foolish, and criminal types among Negroes is not convincing the world that such groups alone comprise the essentially Negroid, but it surely is doing a great deal to foster that opinion in the United States, where there are many anxious to believe it. The portrayal of such types by no means damns a race; look at the long line of English, French, Spanish, and Russian novels and plays dealing with such characters; nor does one need to confine the list to those countries exclusively. Such portrayals have their place and deep significance artistically; but they at once become false and evil if used for propagandist purposes, or with ulterior racial motives.

7. Such a danger can scarcely be stated as a general phenomenon. The average young colored writer, if he be honest as an artist, will write the thing that is in his heart to write regardless of so-called "popular trends." Any artist who speaks the truth as he sees it and refuses to compromise with Mammon has none too easy a time; it is not a question of color, it is a question of courage. One has no reason to believe that the sincere black artist will be more easily daunted than a sincere white or brown or yellow artist. The one difficulty that does seem to exist, in the light of a thoughtful reading of recent Negro novels and poems, is that many times an ingrained bitterness tinges work otherwise clearly and beautifully carried out. For that the Negro is not to blame, nor can one state the solution of the problem back of it. The only way out is up; and that seems to be the way which the younger Negro artists, singers and writers have chosen for themselves and for their people. More power to them.

Sinclair Lewis

After reading your letter it suddenly occurred to me that just possibly *all* of the astounding and extraordinarily interesting Negro fiction which is now appearing may be entirely off on the wrong foot. All of you, or very nearly all, are primarily absorbed in the economic and social problems of the colored race. Complicated

though these problems are in detail, yet inevitably they fall into a few general themes; so that there is the greatest danger that all of your novels will be fundamentally alike.

For example, this problem of going over and passing for white must be one which will appeal to all of you. It must needs be much the same in your book or in Walter White's.

Ordinarily I hate committees, conferences, and organizations like the very devil. But I wonder if there isn't a problem here which demands a real and serious conference? Should American Negroes write as Americans or Negroes? Should they follow the pattern of the Jewish authors who are quite as likely to write about Nordics as about fellow Jews; or that of Zangwill, who is of importance only when he is writing about Jews? Should there be a Negro publishing house so that the Negro author can tell all of the ordinary publishing houses to go to the devil? Should there be a club—a comfortable small hotel in Paris to which the American Negroes can go and be more than welcome?

These and a thousand like topics suggest themselves to me as they have, of course, suggested themselves to Dr. Du Bois and yourself. Their very complexity makes me feel that it is impossible to give any definite answer to them. Of this alone I am sure—you cannot, all of you, go on repeating the same novel (however important, however poignant, however magnificently dramatic) about the well-bred, literate, and delightful Negro intellectual finding himself or herself blocked by the groundless and infuriating manner of superiority assumed by white men frequently less white than people technically known as Negroes.

Sherwood Anderson

Naturally I think it a great mistake for Negroes to become too sensitive. If, as a race, you were the ideal people sentimentalists sometimes try to make you how uninteresting you would be.

Why not quit thinking of Negro art? If the individual creating the art happens to be a Negro and some one wants to call it Negro Art let them.

As to Negroes always being painted at their worst I think it isn't true. Suppose I were to grow indignant every time a white man or woman were badly or cheaply done in the theatre or in books. I might spend my life being indignant.

I have lived a good deal in my youth among common Negro laborers. I have found them about the sweetest people I know. I have said so sometimes in my books.

I do not believe the Negroes have much more to complain of than the whites in this matter of their treatment in the arts.

Jessie Fauset

1. No.

2. No. Unless in a long series of articles he invariably chooses the worst types and paints them, even though truthfully, with evident malice.

3. I should think so. And what is more, it seems to me that white people should be the first to voice this criticism. Aren't *they* supposed to be interesting?

4. They must protest strongly and get their protestations before the public. But more than that they must learn to write with a humor, a pathos, a sincerity so evident and a delineation so fine and distinctive that their portraits, even of the "best Negroes," those presumably most like "white folks," will be acceptable to publisher and reader alike.

But above all colored people must be the buyers of these books for which they clamor. When they buy 50,000 copies of a good novel about colored people by a colored author, publishers will produce books, even those that depict the Negro as an angel on earth,—and the public in general will buy 50,000 copies more to find out what it's all about. Most best sellers are not born,—they're made.

5. I should say so.

6. I think this is true. And here I blame the publisher for not being a "better sport." Most of them seem to have an *idee fixe*. They, even more than the public, I do believe, persist in considering only certain types of Negroes inter-

esting and if an author presents a variant they fear that the public either won't believe in it or won't "stand for it." Whereas I have learned from an interesting and rather broad experience gleaned from speaking before white groups that many, many of these people are keenly interested in learning about the better class of colored people. They are quite willing to be shown.

7. Emphatically. This is a grave danger making for a literary insincerity both insidious and abominable.

Benjamin Brawley

1. An artist must be free; he can not be bound by any artificial restrictions. At the same time we heartily wish that so many artists would not prefer today to portray only what is vulgar. There is beauty in the world as well as ugliness, idealism as well as realism.

2. This is really covered by (1). It may be added, however, that anyone, even an artist, becomes liable to criticism when his work gives a distorted idea of truth.

3. This question seems to me involved. However, aside from their other reasons for accepting or rejecting books, publishers can hardly be criticised for refusing to bring out books that do not promise a reasonable return on the investment. They are engaged in a business and not in a missionary enterprise.

4. When Negroes feel that they are imperfectly or improperly portrayed, they should find the way to truthful portrayal through any possible channel. Any plant that is struggling in the darkness must find its way to the light as well as it can.

5. Certainly.

6. Yes.

7. Yes.

General answer: Several of the questions seem to me to suggest that the Negro wants patronage. On the whole I think American publishers will be found to be hospitable; they have certainly been hospitable to the Negro in recent years. What we need to do first of all is to

produce the really finished work of art. Sooner or later recognition will come.

Robert T. Kerlin

1. No. The artist, black or white, must be in sympathy with his creations, or creatures, be they what they may be ethically and ethnically. If he is in sympathy with them, he has nothing to fear regarding the effect of his work. His art will justify itself.

2. No, not if he observes the laws of proportion, relation and emphasis. It is the artist's business to portray not merely the typical, the average, but the ultimate.

3. Publishers can be censured only for commercial stupidity.

4. Produce first-rate artistic works with which to kill travesties, as they are beginning to do.

5. Why not? No theme, absolutely none, offers greater opportunities to the novelist and the poet, whatever their race. It is a human situation. If white artists do not discern the potencies of this material in Negro life, the supreme artists in the near future will be black.

6. Yes, to all three questions: (1) But avowed fiction has not done such dastardly damage here as the daily press; (2) the white "artist" who thus takes his material second hand must be flayed; (3) the duty of the black artist is to be a true artist and if he is such he will show the "sordid," the "foolish," and the "criminal" Negro in the environment and the conditions—of white creation, of course—which have made him what he is. Let the black artist not hesitate to show what white "civilization" is doing to both races.

7. No. The cultivated Negro is up against a world hostile to him, ignorant of him, perplexed, uncomfortable, nonplussed by the contradictions arising. No one knows this better than the cultured Negro. It affords him laughter and tears—and out of these, lit by flames of anger, love, pride, aspiration, comes art, in which both the individual and the race are somehow expressed. The Negro artist is going to continue to be mainly concerned with himself, not with any grotesque caricature of himself—though he will not despise the broken image.

Haldane MacFall

Your critic, Mr. Emmett J. Scott, Junior, has every right to pour contempt on my literary gifts; but he has none to attribute to me "sustained contempt, almost hatred, for Negroes." He is again within his rights to find my novel feeble in wit and humour—though his own writing reveals scant glint of either, which I must suppose he is holding in reserve in order to show up my "sustained contempt, almost hatred, for Negroes." At the same time he admits "flashes of ability." But then he attacks Kemble! Surely as kindly an artist as the Negro ever had to utter the exquisite humour of a greatly humorous race! . . .

When I was a youngster, I was left in command of a company of Zouaves at Port Royal in Jamaica. I was a mere boy. There was brought before me as prisoner a magnificent bronze god of a man whom they called "Long" Burke—he flits through my novel. I stood six feet high; this big fellow stood head and shoulders taller. Well—it appeared that he had knocked the stuffing out of a little black corporal, which is bad for discipline, and, being no hanging judge, I was grieved and worried when, to my relief, the corporal said he wished to add that Burke had always been a good soldier and he, the corporal, may have been over-impatient with him. I took it as a case of attempted murder with a recommendation to mercy. I talked to Burke like a father, and then told him that after what the corporal had said I would only give him a nominal punishment—changed his charge on the crime-sheet to a paltry offence—and, God forgive me, only confined him to barracks for three days. . . . When I got back to my quarters I found an orderly waiting for me to tell me that Long Burke had "gone fantee" into the cocoanut grove with a rifle and ten rounds of ball cartridge to shoot me, and begging me not to go near the grove until Burke had been caught. Anyway, if I hate Negroes, the Negroes did not hate *me*, since they were prepared to risk their lives to save mine from harm. To cut a long story short, they waited until sunset when Burke fell asleep, and they got him—took him to the

guard room—and reported to me. I buckled on the sword of authority and made across the square in the twilight to the guard room. There the Sergeant-major and the Sergeant of the Guard begged me not to go near Burke who was in the cells foaming at the mouth—he had torn his uniform to tatters, and was sitting on the plank bed bare as Venus, scowling and vowing vengeance. Now I knew that this great mad devil of a man could crack me like a nut if he put his mind to it; but I knew equally well that if I did not close with him there and then I should live a life of misery as long as that man lived. And a brain-wave came to me. I called to the Sergeant of the Guard that I wanted to see Burke—what was he a prisoner for?—told him to throw open the door of the “clink,” which he did most reluctantly,—and taking off my sword with a melodramatic air I handed it—in a majestic bluff and a gorgeous funk—to the Sergeant—walked boldly up to Burke who sat as naked as when born, a huge bronze god of sullen wrath on the plank bed—sat down beside him, laying my hand on his shoulder, and said: “Burke, they tell me that you wanted to shoot me—it’s a shabby lie.” I noticed that the Sergeant of the guard was “taking a bead” through the small window in the twilight on poor Burke—and he was a deadly sure shot!

The fellow said never a word; and the thought of that giant taking me by the throat made me feel about as small as I have ever felt. I turned to the open door:

“Sergeant,” I called,—“it’s all too damsilly about Burke. Send for his kit and let him go back to his barrack-room, and tell the men it was only Burke’s joke. Good Lord! if it gets to the ears of the General that I only gave him three days confined to barracks for hitting my corporal, I shall have to leave the army.” . . .

“Burke,” said I,—“you would not see me punished for letting you off penal servitude, would you? Come, old man, get into your trousers, and be a man and a soldier! Damme, I’ve got you down for lance-corporal! Don’t make me look a fool!”

I strolled out of the place, hoping to God he would not jump on my back . . .

Long Burke became the most devoted friend to me for the rest of my service—and he maintained a discipline in my company such as I have never seen bettered. And it was not because of my contempt and hatred for Negroes. . . .

Georgia Douglas Johnson

When it is fully realized that “a man’s a man”—the problems of this sort will cease. Peoples long subjected to travail, depressing and repressing environment, and the long list of handicaps common to men of color, naturally find it difficult to reach the high levels *en masse*. It would be strange, miraculous if they did. The few who do break thru the hell-crust of prevalent conditions to high ground should be crowned, extolled and emulated.

This is the work of the artist. Paint, write, let the submerged man and the world see those who have proven stronger than the iron grip of circumstance.

Let the artist cease to capitalize the frailties of the struggling or apathetic mass—and portray the best that offers. This is naturally unpopular, and why? The thinker knows! To the ignorant it does not matter—yet. Depict the best, with or without approbation and renown.

Countée Cullen

This question of what material the Negro writer should draw upon, and how he should use it, is no simon pure problem with a sure, mathematical conclusion; it has innumerable ramifications, and almost all arguments can be met with a dissenting *but* equally as strong. Opinions will probably be as various as the writers’ several constitutions; moreover, it is a question of whether the work is the *thing*, or its moral, social and educational effect.

I should be the last person to vote for any infringement of the author’s right to tell a story, to delineate a character, or transcribe an emotion in his own way, and in the light of truth as he sees it. That in the one inalienable right into which the Negro author ought to be admitted

with all other authors, as a slight compensation for other rights so described in which does not share. I do believe, however, that the Negro has not yet built up a large enough body of sound, healthy race literature to permit him to speculate in abortion and aberrations which other people are all too prone to accept as truly legitimate. There can be no doubt that there is a fictional type of Negro, an ignorant, burly, bestial person, changing somewhat today though not for the better, to the sensual habitue of dives and loose living, who represents to the mass of white readers the by—all and end—all of what constitutes a Negro. What would be taken as a type in other literatures is, where it touches us, seized upon as representative so long as it adheres to this old pattern. For Negroes to raise a great hue and cry against such misrepresentations without attempting through their artists, to reconstruct the situation seems futile as well as foolish Negro artists have a definite duty to perform in this matter, one which should supersede their individual prerogative without denying those rights. We must create types that are truly representative of us as a people, nor do I feel that such a move is necessarily a genuflection away from true art.

As far as I am concerned the white writer is totally out of the scene. He will write as he pleases, though it offend; and when he does offend, he can always plead the extenuation of a particular incident and of particular characters that appeal to him because of their novelty. He is not under the same obligations to us that we are to ourselves. Nor can he, as a member of a group with a vast heritage of sound literature behind it, quite rise to an understanding of what seems to him an oversensitiveness on our part; he cannot quite understand our disinclination as a people toward our racial defamation, even for art's sake.

I do not feel that we can so severely criticize publishers who reject our work on the score that it will not appeal to their readers. Publishers, in general, are caterers, not martyrs and philanthropists. But if they reject a treatment of educated and accomplished Negroes for the avowed reason that these do not differ from white folk of the same sort, they should reject

those about lower class Negroes for the reason that they do not differ essentially from white folk of the same sort; unless they feel that difference or no difference the only time a Negro is interesting is when he is at his worst. This does not mean that the Negro writer has either to capitulate or turn away from his calling. Even among publishers there are those rare eccentrics who will judge a work on its merits.

The danger to the young Negro writer is not that he will find his aspiration in the Negro slums; I dare say there are as fine characters and as bright dream material there as in the best strata of Negro society, and that is as it should be. Let the young Negro writer, like any artist, find his treasure where his heart lies. If the unfortunate and less favored find an affinity in him, let him surrender himself; only let him not pander to the popular trend of seeing no cleanliness in their squalor, no nobleness in their meanness and no commonsense in their ignorance. A white man and a Southerner gave us *Porgy*, the merits of which few will deny, nor wish away because the story deals with illiterate Negroes. Mr. Heyward gave us a group of men and women; the Negro writer can in strict justice to himself attempt no less than this, whether he writes of Negroes or of a larger world.

J. Herbert Engbeck

Salt Lake City, Utah

I am a bit excited about your magazine. There is in it stimulation for the darker races as well as a prod, a fetching good dig in the ribs, for the pale of face. There is perhaps one thing that needs stress and that is the proposition to forget race. Lay that old bogey man. And now may I give to you just an ordinary, average man's opinion in answer to your questionnaire? I know that my opinion is unsolicited but I wish to let you know that even an ordinary man may think upon the things you ask and to good advantage.

1. The inarticulate artist in me cries out that no man can be judged an artist by his race or creed. Paul Robeson is an artist first and a

Negro next. When I have heard him sing I never think "What a wonderful Negro voice." I forget the qualification of race. The obligation of the artist is not to his race but to his talent.

2. An author can be criticized only when he deliberately falsifies with malice aforethought.

3. Such a publisher is missing his main chance. An absorbing tale can surely be written about Negroes of good education and refinement. A publisher who cannot see that is not on to his onions.

4. Bring out the supreme spectacle of the Nordic's obverse side. That ought to be a good tonic for all races.

5. No one but a numskull could treat him otherwise.

6. No. Wiley and Cohen are hardly artists. They are authors. Perhaps the latter is becoming one. He will I think some day write a real story of the Negro and do it with understanding. There is a false notion among a great number of peoples that the sordid-foolish-criminal side is all there is to the Negro. The Negro will have to fight that down as the Jew has had to fight down the same impression by proving the contrary.

7. The young author may have a tendency to pick-up easy money by writing only of the underworld but the compelling urge of a real artist, be he Negro or some other tint, will not allow mere facetiousness to mar his canvas. Things as he sees them—he paints.

Luck to your mission.

Julia Peterkin

Please excuse my delay in answering your letter of Feb. 24th and the questionnaire which you submitted to me. Many incidental circumstances have intervened and these, along with the exigencies of my own work and the need for careful reflection regarding your inquiries, have prevented an earlier reply.

Let me say at the outset that I am not a propagandist for or against the Negro; that for the most part I have small sympathy with propagandists of any kind or color. In my opinion, the minute any one becomes an advocate he

ceases to be an artist. Propagandists may be able and admirable persons and, on occasion, be actuated by most worthy purposes; but, broadly speaking, it seems to me that special pleading is not conducive to the development of a judicial viewpoint.

I believe that the crying need among Negroes is a development in them of racial pride; and a cessation on their own part as well as on the part of other races, who attempt to portray their character, to estimate their worth according to their success in imitating their white brethren.

The Negro is racially different in many essential particulars from his fellow mortals of another color. But this certainly does not prove that he has not racial qualifications of inestimable value without the free and full development of which a perfected humanity will never be achieved.

Racial antagonisms are not necessarily a matter of color. Religion has produced and still perpetuates them in a most accentuated form. But pride of race has enabled the Hebrew to maintain himself against an age-old proscription; and it establishes him to-day as a recognized leader among the peoples of the earth.

So far as your complaint at the variety of derogatory portrayals of Negro life, character and self-expression, does it occur to an Irishman or a Jew to imagine for a moment that the cultural standing or development of their races are or could be seriously affected by the grotesqueries of "Mr. Jiggs" or "Mr. Potash?" The illiterate may feel irritated, but the Irishman or Jew who knows that his people have racially so lived and wrought and achieved that the world would be impoverished by the loss of their contribution to its civilization, laughs and is not remotely disturbed by these portrayals of Mr. McManus and Mr. Glass.

If America has produced a type more worthy of admiration and honor than the "Black Negro Mammy," I fail to have heard of it. The race that produced them has to its credit an achievement which may well be envied by any people. Without imitating anybody, often sinned against and seldom sinning, they wrote a page in human history that is not only an honor to themselves but

to the Creator of life. Yet when a proposal was made in Congress that the nation erect a monument to commemorate the splendid virtues of these devoted black women, a number of Negroes protested against it, saying that their race wished to forget the days of its bondage.

It seems to me that a man who is not proud that he belongs to a race that produced the Negro Mammy of the South is not and can never be either an educated man or a gentleman.

My answer to all your queries may be summed up in my belief that the Negro must develop in himself and in his race such things as that race distinctly possesses and without which humanity and the civilization which represents it cannot permanently do.

Of course it is better for Mr. DuBose Heyward to write of him with pitying, pathetic sympathy than for Mr. Cohen (who may himself have felt the sting of racial antipathy and ridicule) to picture him as a perpetual exponent of primitive buffoonery. And it would be better for Negro authors to demonstrate that their race has things the white race has not in equal degree and that cannot be duplicated; to magnify these things instead of minimizing them.

A true artist, black or white, will search for these tokens of racial worth and weave around them his contribution to literature.

Yet it seems futile to cavil because one man writes this way and another, that, as varying abilities and inclinations may dictate.

I write about Negroes because they represent human nature obscured by so little veneer; human nature groping among its instinctive impulses and in an environment which is tragically primitive and often unutterably pathetic. But I am no propagandist for or against any race. I devoutly hope I shall never be one. I am interested in humanity *per se* without regard to color or conditions.

Otto F. Mack

Stuttgart, Germany

I am neither an artist nor a writer, yet I have traveled much, am a graduate of the school of

hard knocks, and have thought a great deal. So I would like to say something.

1. No.

2. No.

3. Yes, because these editors show their ignorance in the race question. Every race has its own peculiar talents and abilities. The danger in the United States is not that you have too many original minds and people, but the opposite is the case. No nation or people in the world are being moulded into such a sameness as the people of the United States. And if the Negro writes about the cultured of his race I am sure that these writings will be different from those of white writers and therefore should be welcome. Although the American Negro is, I am sorry to say, being Americanized, I think there will always be a difference between the coloured and white race, even in America. Therefore I think the portrayal of educated coloured folks and their lives will be as interesting if not more so than of the whites.

4. Be true to themselves. The Negro is no worse than the white man, given equal chances. Just here is where the Negro artist and writer must try to counteract the bad influence and as I have said before show up the cultured and good people of his race. If he cannot find white publishers then he must go into the publishing business himself. If the books are well written and the painter is a real artist, painting true to nature, he need not fear for the result.

5. Yes, and more so. The world, especially the European world, should be made acquainted with the condition of the educated Negro in the United States and wherever the Anglo-Saxons rule. He has got to learn to be a fighter and to fight so hard till the conscience of the world is awakened and justice is done the coloured people.

6. I do not think so. Thinking people are beginning to see that a great, almost unspeakable injustice has been and is still being done to the coloured races, and scientists are pointing out that there are no inferior races. That those which appear backward are only so not in kind but in degree.

7. There may be some danger in that the Negro artist must not be afraid and must show

up the coloured races true to nature, the good and the bad sides. Here is where the Negro must show himself master of the situation and must be willing to make the sacrifice for the benefit of his race. Even if for a time his work may be unpopular the time will come, if he is a true artist, when he will win out.

Charles W. Chesnutt

1. The realm of art is almost the only territory in which the mind is free, and of all the arts that of creative fiction is the freest. Painting, sculpture, music, poetry, the stage, are all more or less hampered by convention—even jazz has been tamed and harnessed, and there are rules for writing free verse. The man with the pen in the field of fiction is the only freelance, with the whole world to tilt at. Within the very wide limits of the present day conception of decency, he can write what he pleases. I see no possible reason why a colored writer should not have the same freedom. We want no color line in literature.

2. It depends on how and what he writes about them. A true picture of life would include the good, the bad and the indifferent. Most people, of whatever group, belong to the third class, and are therefore not interesting subjects of fiction. A writer who made all Negroes bad and all white people good, or *vice versa*, would not be a true artist, and could justly be criticised.

3. To the publisher, the one indispensable requisite for a novel is that it should sell, and to sell, it must be interesting. No publisher wants to bring out and no reader cares to read a dull book. To be interesting, a character in a novel must have personality. It is perhaps unfortunate that so few of the many Negro or Negroid characters in current novels are admirable types; but they are interesting, and it is the privilege and the opportunity of the colored writer to make characters of a different sort equally interesting. Education and accomplishment do not of themselves necessarily make people interesting—we all know dull people who are highly cultured. The difficulty of finding

a publisher for books by Negro authors has largely disappeared—publishers are seeking such books. Whether the demand for them shall prove to be more than a mere passing fad will depend upon the quality of the product.

4. Well, what can they do except to protest, and to paint a better type of Negro?

5. The Negro race and its mixtures are scattered over most of the earth's surface, and come in contact with men of other races in countless ways. All these contacts, with their resultant reactions, are potential themes of fiction, and the writer of genius ought to be able, with this wealth of material, to find or to create interesting types. If there are no super-Negroes, make some, as Mr. Cable did in his *Bras Coupé*. Some of the men and women who have had the greatest influence on civilization have been purely creatures of the imagination. It might not be a bad idea to create a few white men who not only think they are, but who really are entirely unprejudiced in their dealings with colored folk—it is the highest privilege of art to depict the ideal. There are plenty of Negro and Negroid types which a real artist could make interesting to the general reader without making all the men archangels, or scoundrels, or weaklings, or all the women unchaste. The writer, of whatever color, with the eye to see, the heart to feel and the pen to record the real romance, the worthy ambition, the broad humanity, which exist among colored people of every class, in spite of their handicaps, will find a hearing and reap his reward.

6. I do not think so. People who read books read the newspapers, and cannot possibly conceive that crime is peculiarly Negroid. In fact, in the matter of serious crime the Negro is a mere piker compared with the white man. In South Carolina, where the Negroes out number the whites, the penitentiary has more white than colored inmates. Of course the propagandist, of whatever integumentary pigment, will, of purpose or unconsciously, distort the facts. My most popular novel was distorted and mangled by a colored moving picture producer to make it appeal to Negro race prejudice.

7. I think there is little danger of young colored writers writing too much about Negro

characters in the underworld, so long as they do it well. Some successful authors have specialized in crook stories, and some crooks are mighty interesting people. The colored writer of fiction should study life in all its aspects. He should not worry about his social class. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the general reading public can be interested today in a long serious novel based upon the social struggles of colored people. Good work has been done along this line with the short story, but colored society is still too inchoate to have developed the fine shades and nuances of the more sophisticated society with which the ordinary novel of manner deals. Pride of caste is hardly convincing in a people where the same family, in the same generation, may produce a bishop and a butler, a lawyer and a lackey, not as an accident or a rarity but almost as a matter of course. On the other hand it can be argued that at the hand of a master these sharp contrasts could be made highly dramatic. But there is no formula for these things, and the discerning writer will make his own rules.

The prevailing weakness of Negro writings, from the viewpoint of art, is that they are too subjective. The colored writer, generally speaking, has not yet passed the point of thinking of himself first as a Negro, burdened with the

responsibility of defending and uplifting his race. Such a frame of mind, however praiseworthy from a moral standpoint, is bad for art. Tell your story, and if it is on a vital subject, well told, with an outcome that commands itself to right-thinking people, it will, if interesting, be an effective brief for whatever cause it incidentally may postulate.

Why let Octavus Roy Cohen or Hugh Wiley have a monopoly of the humorous side of Negro life? White artists caricatured the Negro on the stage until Ernest Hogan and Bert Williams discovered that colored men could bring out the Negro's more amusing characteristics in a better and more interesting way.

Why does not some colored writer build a story around a Negro oil millionaire, and the difficulty he or she has in keeping any of his or her money? A Pullman porter who performs wonderful feats in the detection of crime has great possibilities. The Negro visionary who would change the world over night and bridge the gap between races in a decade would make an effective character in fiction. But the really epical race novel, in which love and hatred, high endeavor, success and failure, sheer comedy and stark tragedy are mingled, is yet to be written, and let us hope that a man of Negro blood may write it.

JOHN FREDERICK MATHEUS

Some Aspects of the Negro Interpreted in Contemporary American and European Literature (1934)

The destiny of the Negroes is in some degree entwined with that of the Europeans. The two races are bound one to the other, without being blended thereby. It is as difficult to separate them completely as to bring them completely together.

"The most frightful of all the evils which threaten the future of the United States rises from the presence of Negroes on their soil."

This quotation from Tocqueville's famous *Démocratie en Amérique*, written a century

ago during the turbulent generation of Andrew Jackson, is in turn taken from a study, made less than a decade ago by Professor Franck L. Schoell, of *The Color Question in the United States*.¹

Both these Frenchmen, though a hundred years apart, have sought to interpret to France, and thus to Europe, the status and life of the black population of the American Republic. Both are impartial, logical. Professor Schoell thoroughly and justly has presented statistical

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externals and the application of reason and science to the delicate problem.

André Siegfried, four years later, in *America Comes of Age*, a book that has gone through many editions, devoted a chapter to "The Colour Problem," attempting also to interpret to his fellow countrymen and the continentals the acute position of the Negro in the United States.²

In 1930 Georges Duhamel assumed the rôle of seer and analyst of the American *mores*. Repercussions of the protests aroused in the United States reveal not so much hypersensitivity as chagrin over plausible half-truths that hurt. No one in colored America, however, will take the least exception to the author's observations and ratiocinations concerning the Negro. They are fair, incontrovertible proof of the bloodless machine that makes, in Monsieur Duhamel's opinion, American civilisation so inferior to European.³

But if American citizens in general take with reservations this new Jeremiah from the Seine in his probings into the American psyche, the American Negro, if not concurring in the revolt against *Scenes of the Future Life*, will do his part in assailing the foreign writers of current fiction who, following the lead of the investigators of the social sciences, essay to give to the world exterior to the United States, and for that matter within its borders, the American Negro psyche.

In any indictment of present-day life in the United States of America the Negro cannot be ignored. The American of African origin composes a little over nine percent, of the population, yet his influence reaches a proportion far in excess of his numerical ratio. Count Keyserling paid him the compliment of observing that the Negro has furnished the unique and distinctive note in the expression of an indigenous American art. He is the father of the blues, creator of jazz, the determinant of characteristic American attitudes; he has reacted upon linguistic and social habits, is of tremendous economic importance, of potential political power and, finally, the background for a literary and dramatic vogue, for a renascence in the plastic arts.

Yet paradoxically the American colored group has never been adequately portrayed or understood by the whites. No white writer has fully sounded Black America, nor for that matter has any Negro author. Silhouettes have been made, minute studies of local centers in the *genre* style, but they err, or perhaps, more correctly, those who read them go astray in concluding that these details are apposite to all American Negroes. This being true, how much less capable then must be the writer from foreign shores to present the true picture of the Negro in the New World.

The first European literary interest in the American English-speaking Negro dates from 1852, when Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Continental notice of the achievement of the Negroes of Haiti at the end of the eighteenth century had found expression in literature through Lamartine's *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, in Wordsworth's sonnet and Harriet Martineau's novel on that surprising black genius, in Hugo's *Bug Jargal*, and the writings of the English emancipators, Wilberforce and Clarkson and their followers. But it was left to Mrs. Stowe's masterpiece to give to Europe the most widely sold, translated and dramatised book of the nineteenth century.

The Irish playwright, Dion Boucicault, in *The Octoroon*, first played at the Winter Garden, New York City, 1859, won popularity in a London version. This play was based somewhat on a novel, *The Quadroon*, by Mayne Reid, published in New York in 1856, and recalls the Paris success of *L'Etrangère*, by Dumas fils, a study of the theme of the near-white in the toils of the American color system.

The interest aroused, however, in the Negro at this time was romantic and sentimental. The story which the abolitionist champion and intrepid colored leader, Frederick Douglass, tells in his autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, illustrates this attitude. While visiting in England a certain sympathetic duchess was profoundly stirred by his recital of escape from slavery, but became coldly haughty when he related that he had served as his master's coachman.

European opinion of the United States during the Civil War days veered between the extremes of Thomas Carlyle, who growled that "the foulest chimney in Christendom was burning out," and Victor Hugo's acclaim of John Brown as a great martyr, comparing him with Christ in an unusual symbolic painting. (Hugo was master of the brush as well as of the pen.)

Three-quarters of a century later, the prolific American *littérateur* and connoisseur, Carl Van Vechten, struck another note that launched a new international interest in the extraordinary at home and oversea success of *Nigger Heaven*. Between Harriet Beecher Stowe and Carl Van Vechten one passes from romantic sentimentalism to objective realism, with streakings of Freudian analyses pornographically adorned. There is the inimitable beauty of the aëry prose of rare Lafcadio Hearn, whose supersensitive nature first capitulated to a mulatto girl of Cincinnati; the quaint cameos of Creole life in Louisiana drawn by George Washington Cable; the antebellum Negro types of Mark Twain of Missouri, of Joel Chandler Harris of Georgia and of Thomas Nelson Page of Virginia; the overdrawn pictures of Judge Albion Tourgée on the side of the Negro; and the silly propaganda of hate of Thomas Dixon, junior, on the side of the Ku Klux Klan and the poor white.

Then came the younger group of enlightened Southerners, as Clement Wood, T. S. Strilling, DuBose Heyward, Julia Peterkin, Paul Green, Roark Bradford, whose *This Side of Jordan* was inspiration for Marc Connelly's phenomenal play of Negro religious conceptions, *Green Pastures*. These writers have manifested a sympathetic interest in the Negro as a human being and within narrow circles have given artistic glimpses of his emotions and daily life.

It is significant, too, that Van Vechten's best-seller came on the wave of a recrudescence of Negro writers, sponsored by that astute critic, scholar and leading sociologist, Charles S. Johnson, then editor of the Negro magazine *Opportunity*. It followed a decade and a half of *The Crisis*, example and stimulant of artistic expression of Negro life under the fearless and militant leadership of William Burghardt Du Bois, long the voice of the Negro intellectual.⁴ It was

contemporary with Alain Locke's *New Negro*, re-emphasised and launched the works of James Welden Johnson, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Jessie Fausset, Claude McKay, Walter White, George Schuyler, Rudolph Fisher, Willis Richardson, and others less widely known.

Because of the popularity and wide acceptance of his thesis of American Negro life, Van Vechten marked a milestone of a new fashion. He presented Negro life as he saw it in Harlem, detached, without propaganda, ironically in some instances, but yielding to a philosophy of defeat as concerns the struggle of the Negro in the hostilities of environing white civilisation.

Unfortunately it seems this has been the philosophy that present-day Europe has accepted, as revealed in current literature treating of the Negro. In short, as regards the American Negro, the Van Vechten picture has been received as the *whole* picture, partly because it may fit in with colonial policy and partly because there has been no counter-pen to present the other side. In America this defeatist philosophy is one commonly taken by white writers of Negro life wherever an attempt is made to interpret Negro struggle. There is always frustration, a futile volting with moth's wings into the searing flame. It is found in Paul Green's plays, as *In Abraham's Bosom*; in Eugene O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings* and *Emperor Jones*. Negro writers even are not free from this pessimism, exhibited, for instance, in Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*.

European ignorance of the African Negro is monumental, and misinformation concerning the American Negro ridiculous, but in most cases not a bigoted prejudice, but sheer lack of knowledge. For example, the writer may cite the surprise of that stolid Britisher who once blandly asked him after an afternoon's chat on the train between Venice and Rome concerning the Negro's status and achievement in America: "But—ah—really now, do you actually speak English among yourselves?"

The geography of America is as hazy in the minds of untravelled Europeans as is the location of the Russian provinces in the average American's store of facts. The presence, function, and condition of the American Negro is

a sealed mystery in most centers of Europe. The too-gullible public credulously accepts the Van Vechten school as presenting the true analysis of the American Negro, a deduction whose premises may lead to the conclusion that the Negro is at best a veneered primitive and at worst a spoiled savage or degenerate.

The pioneer among French writers to give this picture of the American Negro and then to enlarge its scope so that it might include *the Negro* is Paul Morand, impressionistic, symbolic specialist in the exotic⁵ Paul Morand has given his talents to the study of the Negro in the United States, Africa and the West Indies. What is the sum total of his impressions? That the Negro when "civilised" is a superficial emotionalist, ready to return to the practices, if not to the cult, of the Jungle Gods, that he is not far removed from the "raw" Negro nor advanced much above the level of his ancestors from the Congo or the West Coast. One drop of African blood is fatal, for M. Morand makes one of his characters, an octoroon, Mrs. Pamela Freedman, return to the jungle by an impossible atavism.

Mrs. Pamela Freedman of New York has engaged passage on a round-the-world cruise. She passes for a white woman. Accidentally her racial "taint" is discovered. When the boat stops off the coast of Africa to allow passengers to go ashore to sight-see, her written instructions from the ship official stated that the boat would remain from 8.00 A.M. until 10 P.M. It should have read from 8.00 A.M. until 10.00 A.M. (Typical Nordic trick.) She is therefore stranded in Africa. Does she cable home, seek redress? No. Journeying into the interior she reaches a native village, hears the beat of the tom-toms. Presto, change! What happened? Let us quote:

"Negresses are the queens of the black world. . . . She tore off her clothes, her necklace, threw to the ground her rifle, cartridges, tossed to the winds her money. . . . Mamadou (son of the chief) pressed her naked against his naked torso, rubbed her against his skin. . . . Farewell New York! Pamela Freedman had come to the womb of Africa. She was no longer worth a hundred million dollars, she was worth three beeves, as the other women. . . . She was seen to

strike hands together . . . to bend at every cadence of the drum, like the other black women, for now she was one of them!"

What height of folly! Where, M. Morand, have you learned your psychology? Such conduct would be as repugnant to an American Negro woman as it would be to an American white woman.

The most disconcerting volume from the American Negro's point of view is one which appeared in 1930 under the name *Auprès de ma Noire*, by Jean Lasserre.⁶ The author follows the rapid, cinematographic style of Morand, Giraudoux, Jean Cocteau. The story, centered in Harlem, can scarcely claim a plot, but does present rough sketches of the Harlem scene and flashes of the Negro in the South. The author lived for a time in Harlem, mingled intimately with a *certain* class. There lies the danger. The toughs with whom he associated are paraded before us as typical of the American Negro the portraits are true, individually, but if incorporated into a picture of the American Negro the focus will give a blurred image.

The type of the colored woman shown is Mandy. Here are some sentences about her: "She has drunk too much whiskey. She has a slight headache. She must dash some cold water in her face and rinse out her mouth. . . . Her dress is green as an apple, with a big violet bow at the waist."

The male characters frequently shout, "How about a crap game?"

"Negroes always carry their razors in their pockets. They are not Gillette blades either, but veritable cutlasses that would cut the throat of an ox."

"The Rev. Buss Lincoln just back from a morning search for souls to save—whom a pious and energetic mother, who managed the kitchen for Rockefeller, Jr., had sent as far as theological school, only knew of the life he read about in the Bible."

The Rev. Lincoln is vamped by Mandy, lays his bible down and becomes a driveling, drunken sot when the wench deserts him. In brief the picture of the American Negro world of *Auprès de ma Noire* is a hell of opium venders, drug fiends, tipsy sports, puerile ninnies, whose

alcohol costs "two dollars a glass and four days in bed," if not blindness. It is the world of Dance Dives, prostitutes, the "Di-ga-di-ga-do," of monkey shines and ceaseless pursuit of pleasure, sensual pleasure. It is as true as the picture of Therèse Raquin by Zola, yet that adulteress and murderer is not the type of French womanhood.

The Negro in the Latin world is only dimly aware of his blackness. He feels no racial consciousness as he does in the Anglo-Saxon world. Paul Morand doubtless omitted Brazil from his itinerary with purpose. Thirty per cent, of Brazil's population is Negro, but there is no color problem. Consequently there has developed little racial gregariousness, other than that of Brazilian nationalism. Her writers in many notable instances have been of mixed blood. Machado de Assis, for example, poet, dramatist, novelist, critic, shows no African fire, but is always coldly restrained, writing as in his magnificent *A Mosca Azul* ("To the Blue Fly"), a chiseled Parnassian perfection. Castro Alves, who wrote in defense of the Negro during the days of the slave régime in *Vozes d'Africa* ("Voices from Africa") and *Navio Negreiro* ("O Slave Ship"), championed more the cause of oppressed Brazilians rather than the cause of the black race. Coelho Netto, half Indian, half Portuguese, filled as a child by his Negro nurse with stories of African legend, has, as he himself has said, a triple imagination: Negro, Indian, white.⁷ Aluizio Azevedo, in *O Mulato* ("The Mulatto") (1881), is emphasising the Brazilian.

The mulatto poet of Cuba, Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés, better known as Plácido, wrote his immortal sonnet, *Despedida a Mi Madre* ("Farewell to My Mother") and his impassioned *Plegaria a Diós* ("Prayer to God"), which Peninsular critics have pronounced the noblest in Castilian, as a Cuban. His lilting lyrics, his lofty outbursts against tyranny, inspired the cause of his country as much as the military genius of that other Cuban mulatto hero, Antonio Maceo. Gertrudis Gomez de Avellanida, in her early novel *Sab*, pictured the Cuban of mixed blood, but with no theme

of hopelessness. In *Maria Jorge Isaac* paints Negro slaves in a rather patriarchal Columbian setting, in religion, manners, dark Spaniards rather than Negroes.

While the Haitian poets have written with more color awareness, their best expressions, crowned by the French Academy, as Etzer Vilaire's *Nouveaux Poèmes* (1912) and Georges Sylvain's *Morceaux choisis des auteurs Haïtiens*, an anthology (1905), they have followed in the main the traditions of French letters. Their works breathe more of the Seine than either the Congo or the Artibonite. Only today is the brilliant young editor and poet, Jacques Roumain, leading a movement that seeks its inspiration directly from Africa.

Quite generally, then, the writers of Negro birth who seek to express themselves in French, Spanish, or Portuguese, are but dimly conscious of their color, that psychosis being absorbed in their various national psychologies. Writers without Negro blood who interpret the Negro in any of these same media, have thought of him and treated him, until recently, nationally, rather than racially, or at least as a human being first and a Negro after.

But in these later days, when the Anglo-Saxon's color phobia has followed the Panama Canal, interventions in the Caribbean and Central American Republics, there has crept into fiction written about Negroes a note of defeatism and patronising. *El Negro que tiene el alma blanca* ("Black man with a white soul"),⁸ by Alberto Insua, Habana novelist, offers an illustration. The principal character, Pedro Valdés, born of slave parents in Cuba, is taken to Spain by his master's family and there grows up to become a dancer of fame, with the English name Peter Wald. His color weighs him down. He can find no solace, even though he wins millions, and in the end dies of grief for a white girl, his dancing partner, who from a dread aversion turns too late to offer herself as his wife.

Mulatto Johnny,⁹ by Alin Laubreaux, inspired probably by the meteoric flash of Jack Johnson across the pugilistic heavens, makes the same moral, hopeless frustration. The hero is a half-breed of New Hebrides, who has to

leave his island home because of killing a white man who cursed him. After many adventures among cannibals, on an Australian peonage farm, and an almost successful winning of the heavy-weight championship, he learns that the war has come, and with it brought him immunity from punishment. He returns home to find his white father dead, deserted by his black mother for a native man, his home of youthful memories destroyed. There is no hope. He renounces civilisation and returns to the bush, clad in a clout.

So the Latin writers are beginning to reflect the hopelessness taught by Nordic writers in depicting the Negro. The issue of miscegenation in South Africa, as treated by Sarah Millen in *God's Stepchildren*, is a beautiful, ironical, sympathetic but barren picture. Again in the *Coming of the Lord*, the problem of the Jew and the Negro are both dramatically treated, but the end is death. Let the truth be told by all means, but that diamond has more than one facet. Sacha Guitry, in *Blanc et Noir*, is not so sure as Mrs. Millen, and in Charbonneau's pathetic story of *Mambu et son amour* it is the white man who is defeated.

Claire Goll's *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa* ("Jupiter, the Negro, steals Europa") shows the operation of the defeatist influence in a Teutonic conception of the Negro. The author limns the same ultimate bafflement. There, as in Morand, is the fallacy that the Negro is ashamed of his color, plays the sedulous ape, would be a white man. Let us quote a bit:

"So now he had fulfilled that burning wish of every Negro, to marry a white woman and free his offspring from the stigma of being colored."

"As always when the problem of his color rolled back and forth in his mind, he groaned. He shoved his fingers into his kid gloves. How good was it to have white hands! Ah, his children would be a little bright colored, quince-yellow."

The German weekly, *Die Wache*, gives a more optimistic outlook in the November twenty-first issue, containing Friedrich Freksa's study of the Negro woman, in a series of studies of

womankind, "Die Frau in fünf Erdteilen." It will be interesting to compare this statement of fact with Paul Morand's deplorable picture.

"The Negro woman of North America has obtained a success in a special art. The taste of the times for exotic song and dance has brought to her artistic recognition but no social admittance in America. . . . Beside the picture of the oldtime American Negress, the faithful nurse, appears to-day the new type of the discontented, ardent, belligerent colored woman."

The above statement is fit companion for the fate of a little frizzly haired colored girl told in an Italian version of Malot's *Pompon*,¹⁰ a book picked up by chance in Milano for four lire. After many trials Pompon and her lover Casparis are happily united, although her rival is a white girl, an ending that might happen in Italy or in France and even in parts of the Nordic world.

René Maran, that amazing artist, who created *Batouala* and wrote *Dienn, petit chien de la Brousse*, lifts a bit the veil of mystery from the face of the Sphinx. So few have ever attempted to peer behind those unfathomed depths. René Maran is thus the antithesis of Paul Morand. When one has completed *Magie Noire*, if he be white he probably will say, "What a race of children! How inferior to us! So that is what is lurking behind the countenances of black faces I have seen."

"But no," says the Negro who *knows*, who lives the life. "This is no answer. It is caricature, satire, mockery, but not soul stuff."

When one lays aside René Maran's books he weeps.

"For the Negro, yesterday or two centuries are the same thing. What has he behind him? Nothing. His father was as ignorant as his remotest ancestor," comments the author of *Auprès de ma Noire*.

The Negro no past! It envelops him like Medea's poison robe, eating out his vitals. The old men of the tribes glory in the exploits of their fathers, Abyssinia has a great past, and Haiti. As the sound in Antonio Machado's poem of earth falling at an open grave on a wooden box, it is "a serious thing, unutterably serious."

And the future! Even though it be said in *Auprès de ma Noire* that there is no tomorrow for colored people, the Negro does stare ahead, he thinks, from the African chieftains lamenting that there is no "book" for the young men of the tribe so that they may learn from the white man, to the wild dreams of Marcus Garvey.

It is because of the future that the American Negro resents the caricature that masquerades as Negro personality. American Negro artists abroad have waged and are waging battle for its suppression. Florence Mills before her untimely death, Josephine Baker, Adelaide Hall, Ethel Waters, have established a new type of soubrette and danseuse. There have been the triumphs in song and acting of Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson, Madame Evanti, Jules Bladsoe and Florence Cole Talbert; the acclaim recently given in Paris to the musical compositions of Clarence Cameron White, the popularity of the Hampton singers under Dett, and of that victorious team, Layton and Johnson; the scientific recognition accorded in Germany and Italy to Dr. Ernest Just, to Dr. Francis Sumner by the University of Vienna for his research in Freudian psychology, and to Percy Julian, awarded the doctorate in chemistry by this seat of learning. International reference to the research of the *Journal of Negro History*, directed by Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson, the products of such educational institutions as Atlanta, Fisk, and Howard Universities, West Virginia State College, Hampton, Tuskegee, united with the individual effort, bear increasingly powerful evidence, both of the falsity of the burlesque Harlem type as representing the Negro and of the crudity of the philosophy of hopelessness.

If it be true, as was said of Jupiter, that "für die Weissen war jeder Schwarze ein Kaffer" ("to the white man every Negro is a Kaffir"), then without disparaging the Kaffirs, the American Negro seeks to demonstrate its fallacy by revealing the differences and also the fundamental common human qualities in all peoples. That there is need for such concern is plain from the facts as narrated in current

European fiction, following the lead of American progenitors.¹¹

This was one of the strongest motives for American Negro initiative under the leadership of Dr. Du Bois in the Pan-African Congresses. A new movement has been launched in Paris for the intellectual pooling of Negro talent to counteract the possible damage of the tendencies as manifested in present-day fiction so far as it concerns the Negro. Its official organ is *La Revue du Monde Noir*, published at 45 rue Jacob, Dr. Sajous editor, Mlle. Paulette Nardal secretary.¹²

So it is in spite of the insistence of the enemy, intentional or unwitting, the Negro looms a larger and larger figure in the white literary world, as did that weird West Indian Negro in Joseph Conrad's *Nigger of the Narcissus*, whose strange insinuation dominated finally hate, repugnance, intolerance, all that ship and crew from fore to aft, body and soul.

NOTES

1. *La Question des Noirs aux Etats-Unis*, Schoell (Payot, Paris, 1923), chap. vii, p. 155.

2. *America Comes of Age. A French Analysis*. André Siegfried. Translated by H. H. and Doris Hemming (1927).

3. *Scènes de la Vie future*, Georges Duhamel, Mercure de France (Paris, 1930). Chap. xi, "La Séparation des Races."

4. The editor [Nancy Cunard] cannot do otherwise than state here the profoundest and uttermost disagreement with Professor Matheus' qualification of both Dr. Du Bois as militant leader and *The Crisis* as intellectually of any importance whatsoever.

5. *Magic Noire*, Paul Morand (Grasset, Paris, 1928). Translated into English by Hamish Miles, with drawings by Aaron Douglas (Viking Press, New York).

6. *Auprès de ma Noire*, Jean Lasserre (Les Éditions de France, 20 Avenue Rapp, Paris).

7. *Pequena Historia da Literatura Brasileira*, Ronald de Carvalho, 4a Ed. Revista c augmentada (F. Briguiet and Cia., Rio de Janeiro, 1929). *Brazilian Literature*, Dr. Isaac Goldberg.

8. *El Negro que tiene el alma blanca*, Alberto Insua (Madrid).
9. *Mulatte Johnny*, Alin Laubreaux, translated by Coley Taylor (E. P. Dutton and Co., New York).
10. *Pampon*, Ettore Malot (Collezione Sonzogno, Via Pasquirola 14, Milano).

11. This is not true of French travel and anthropological books, such as those by Delafosse, Blaise Cendrars, André Gide, etc.
12. This review ran for six numbers, but has now suspended publication.

EUGENE CLAY

The Negro in Recent American Literature (1935)

Despite the deepening changes occurring in America, most Negro intellectuals have remained indifferent to the increasing leftward movement in American thought. Most of them have continued, undismayed, trying to solve their individual problems within the orbit of capitalism. They have, furthermore, been unable to understand the real tradition of the Negro people.

They do not seem to be able to see the traditions of revolt of their own people. Before 1860, when the vast majority of Negroes were servants or slaves tied to a feudal peasant economy, there were hundreds of insurrections. Due to the uniform material conditions of the plantation economy of the South, the emotions and aspirations of the slaves assumed a growing national unity. In the Reconstruction period the Negro peasantry fought for the division of land of the plantation lords, only to be forced back into serfdom. These are the traditions that the Negro has forgotten. These are the traditions reflected in mass art forms which must be appropriated and carried onward.

The Negro intellectual neither knows of this tradition nor has any realization of the misleading roles played by Booker T. Washington and Dr. Du Bois. He does not see the class nature of literary careers of talented writers such as Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar.

In the period after the World War, during which European countries were on the verge of proletarian upheavals, these intellectuals knew nothing of the social and political character of the events about them. While the Negro people

were being Jim-crowed and lynched, the Negro intellectuals acted as if oblivious of their plight and did not protest.

About this time the Negro was "discovered," the "Harlem tradition" was inaugurated. The social basis for this discovery is not hard to find. The American bourgeoisie had prospered in the re-division of spoils and profits. They wanted new amusements and new thrills. In New York they began to fawn upon and lionize the "new Negro." These "new Negroes" prided themselves on the fact that they could act, sing, paint and write as well as their white-skinned patrons. They had arrived.

When the crisis came the Negro intellectuals should have been among the first to awaken from the lethargy which enveloped the country. Many of them had become de-classed and pauperized; many were forced to stop their studies because of "poor returns on investments"; retrenchments had taken away university positions. But now they must become cognizant of the social forces determining their status, confronted as they are by the new onslaughts upon the miserable living standards of the Negro people, and by the new wave of terror unleashed against them. They must realize that all "Negro problems" are rooted deep in the economic system of the United States, in the perpetuation of the old slave system in the Black Belt, in the oppression of the Negro people as a national minority as well as the whole character of capitalist exploitation of the working masses. Then they will understand the reasons for Jim Crow

and Judge Lynch, then they will know that the salvation of the Negro intellectual lies in his identification with the revolutionary working-class movement throughout the world.

With the deepening of the crisis and the rapid movement of the best known American writers toward the left, the Negro writers cannot remain passive. They must choose. And some are at last beginning to see that only in a new society will their work be of value either to themselves or to humanity.

The most notable example of one who has made the decisive step to the left is Langston Hughes. In his collection of stories, *Ways of White Folks*, there are definite advances in revolutionary perspective. Hughes has not followed in the retrogressive paths of his "new Negro" renaissance colleagues. His works from 1926 to 1931 were links in his evolution, with only occasional retrogressions such as *Dream Keeper* and *Popo and Fifina*. There began to appear in his work an anti-bourgeois-intelligentsia outlook. One could anticipate that Hughes would go further to the left than Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Rudolph Fisher, or Wallace Thurman.

The fourteen stories in the *Ways of White Folks* are not all realistically anti-bourgeois or revolutionary. They do not display the clarity of the volume's best stories, "Father and Son," "Cora Unashamed." Many of these stories appeared in popular magazines and were extolled by the bourgeois critics because their lampooning of Negro bourgeois habits was misinterpreted.

If these stories offend, let them. That is one of their purposes. If they tell white and Negro bourgeoisie alike that the reasons for the failure of true cultural rapport between them is a social and economic reason, all the better. As an effective bludgeon on the pseudo-rapprochement of Negro and white in their artistic relations, many of these stories possess no equal. They are even more effective when they tear away the flimsy veils of patronizing philanthropy. They succeed, too, in destroying time-honored stereotypes such as the "Negro as a faithful servant" and "the contented Negro," and such lies as "blood will tell," "the Negro

fears his companion white worker," "the Negro is congenitally happy," and "salvation [for the white] will come through Negro Art." This is yeoman's service and must be done by Negro and white writers alike.

Why did he choose to portray the characters he did rather than workers? The only valid answer is that he chose the type he knows best. Hughes has to be judged in terms of his relation to his work, in terms of what he as a writer wants to express. We must point out what he fails to express, but only in relation to the work which we are examining. In other words, we must judge the work along with the writer. As long as Hughes' technique and purpose seem to be in an ascending scale, we can hope to see his work progress.

In "Father and Son," one of the most powerfully absorbing stories in the book, the author states his belief in the knowledge that the union of white and black workers will be the single force which will smash American capitalism. "Crucible of the South, find the right powder and you will never be the same again—the cotton will blaze and the cabins will burn and the chains will be broken and men all of a sudden will shake hands—black men and white men like steel meeting steel."

Most of Hughes' poetry is excellent in style and technique. At times the triteness which was noticeable in his earlier work is evident. Often there is a note of forced striving for effect in his handling of revolutionary themes, as in this poem which appeared in the *New Masses*:

Revolution

Great mob that knows no fear
 Come here!
 And raise your hand
 Against this man
 Of iron and steel and gold
 Who's bought and sold
 You
 Each one
 For the last thousand years.
 Come here,
 Great mob that knows no fear

And tear him from limb to limb,
Split his golden throat
Ear to ear,
And end his time forever
Now—
This year—
Great mob that knows no fear.

A poem published in no. 5 of *International Literature*, "Letter to the Academy," is one of the finest things Hughes has ever done.

But please—all you gentlemen with beards who are so wise and old and who write better than we do and whose souls have triumphed (in spite of hungers and wars and the evils about you) and whose books have soared in calmness and beauty aloof from the struggle to the library shelves and the desks of students and who are now classics—come forward and speak upon

The subject of the Revolution.
We want to know what in hell you'd say?

The poetry of Sterling Brown has become progressively more realistic and proletarian. Not only is the handling of his material more deft, but his irony has become more trenchant, the revolutionary implication surer, the humor more Olympian, and the perspective wider. He has forsaken the purer English literary forms, not because of their ineffectiveness, but because his meter is better fitted to the earthy, "down-home" dialect of the workers he knows so well. He wants first to depict his workers, convicts, street walkers, bishops with a clarity which broadens into realism of the highest kind, then to show the way out. Whether this is the correct and the only path depends upon the artist and his motives. For the artist is more than right if he knows that he will knock over too many hurdles by depicting what he doesn't know.

Brown is terribly aware of all the inanities and barbaric mores of black-white society. He can convey this most effectively by exposing the roles of the "fancy Uncle Toms" the "preachers and bishops," the fawning patronizing whites.

This from "Slim Hears the Call" is indicative of his satire and irony:

Lawd, Lawd, Yas, Lawd
I hears de call,
An' I'll answer, good Lawd,
Don't fret none at all.

Gonna be me a bishop
That ain't no lie,
Get my cake down here
An' my pie in the sky.

Saw a buddy th' other day,
Used to know him well
Best coon-can player
This side of hell.

Stayed wid him a while
Watched him do his stuff
Wid a pint of good sense
An' a bushel of stuff.

Begged fo' his dying school
At de conference
Took up nine thousand dollars
An' eighty cents.

An' I swear as sure
As my name's Slim Greer
He reported to de school
Sixteen dollars clear.

I kin be a good bishop
I got de looks
An' I ain't spoiled myself
By reading books.

Don't know so much
'Bout de Holy Ghost,
But I likes de long green
Bettern' most.

I kin talk out dis worl'
As you folks all know
An' I'm good wid de women
Dey'll tell you so.

An' I say to all de Bishops
What is hearin' my song
If de cap fits you brother
Put it on.

His greatest advance has been in his growing insight into the possibility of the unity of white and black workers in the South. Brown knows the South, he knows its customs, its "tall tales," its humor and its peculiarities. He knows the Georgia cracker too. He knows the cracker's limitations, how hidebound he is made by the restricting class relations existing in the deep South. That he sees this clearly is evident from his

Black Worker and White Worker

"It's been a long time since we got together,
Sam."

"A long time—disremember when we did
befo'?"

"Sure you remember when we was kids,
Long time ago—"

"I recollect how you chased me and my
brothers

Out of de crick, an' I recollect when
You rocked us through Cottontown clean
acrost de railroad

We didn't get together, then."

"The Bosses got us both where de bosses
want us

An'dey's squeezin' us both an' dey won't
let go.

We gotta get together, we gotta jerk from
under

Or else we are goners, bo."

"I coulda told you, long ago, Mist' Charles
Bein' onery wan't no way you should
behave

When both of us got more'n our share of
From rockin' cradle to de lastin' grave."

"Shake hands, Sam. We'll be buddies now,
And do our scrappin' side by side from this."

"Well, here's my hand. I never gave it before
Scared I might draw back a wrist."

"But dere's hard time's comin'—wuss'n
hard times now,

An' in de hard times dat I recollect'
De whites stood together on top of our
shoulders

An' gave it to us squar in de neck.

"So I tells you like de bull frog say unto de
eagle
Flying across de stone quarry high in de sky
Don't, don't, big boy, don't do it to me
Not when we're up so high...."

The poetry of Richard Wright is exceptionally fine. There are some faults, but they are due to his youth and zealousness. His work has appeared in *Left Front*, *The Anvil*, *New Masses*, and other left-wing publications. Let me quote from one:

Everywhere,
on tall and smokeless stackpipes,
on the silos of deserted farms,
on the rusty blade of the logger's ax,
on the sooty girders of unfinished
skyscrapers,
the cold dense clammy fog
of discontent is settling....

At first sight the poem seems to contain a profusion of images and to suffer from schematism and clichés. On rereading, one is struck by the complete absence of the usual identity of subject matter with race. Is this desirable? Of course it is, especially in a poem where the subject is workers and not just Negro workers. The revolutionary poet has no need to specialize or ever be racialist enough to ignore other problems. The second startling thing in the poem is its simplicity, a characteristic notoriously absent in present-day revolutionary poetry.

Richard Wright is a poet who has developed rapidly in a short space of time. It is easy to see that he has achieved a surer mastery of technique and image association. *I Have Seen Black Hands* is admittedly one of the finest poems that has appeared in the *New Masses*.

I am black and I have seen black hands
Raised in fists of revolt, side by side with the
white fists of white workers,
And some day—and it is only this which
sustains me—
Some day there shall be millions and
millions of them,
On some red day in a burst of fists on a new
horizon!

In *Come in at the Door*, a novel by a white Mississippian, William March, who wrote *Company K*, we have one of the best novels of our generation. Its significance lies in the radical change in this novelist's conception of Negro character. True, his educated mulatto has a tragic ending, but there is a feeling that here is no perpetuation of the "Tragic Mulatto" stereotype, but rather a single true picture of a frustrated Negro who could not overcome the superstitions in his nature. His portrayal of Chester's father living in wedlock with Chester's nurse, Mitty, bearing him six children, all of them living in the house together, is not only unusual to the South and North alike, it is anathema. Such things might exist, but it is an inexorable law of the South that they are unmentionable. March has performed a valuable service, no matter what his motive. He has written of a degenerating, diseased, and insanity-ridden family, struggling against the inevitable, and there is a courage in the way William March does it.

Unfinished Cathedral is T. L. Stribling's best novel. Here is a stark, cold, bludgeoning portrait of the South by a Southerner who knows and is not afraid to tell. There is nothing revolutionary about this book either. For Stribling's aims don't point that way. Stribling

happens to be a liberated Southern novelist who pillories with driving force. In this novel there is neither the tongue-in-cheek-pity of Carmer's *Stars Fell on Alabama*, nor the folklorish paternalism of Julia Peterkin. Stribling should be given the most credit, however, for his almost revolutionary conception of Negro character. The novel is an amazingly direct indictment of all that has come to be known as traditionally Southern. He shows how the Florida real estate boom, the Scottsboro case, the Klan and fascist organizations, have all become intertwined to symbolize that barbaric hell known as the South. He spares no feelings, many of his Negroes are as Negroes are in the South—militant, educated blacks, pussy-footing Uncle Toms, cringing servants, the hat-in-hand (but laughing behind-the-back) "niggers," and the aroused Negroes to whom injustice has been done. Throughout the book, though often it seems strained and artificial, Stribling shows how genealogically crazy, how racially and biologically mixed his characters are. He shows how closely related the leading aristocrats are to the boys whom he symbolizes as Scottsboro, and how this blood relationship is one of the bases of the Southerners' innate fear of the Negroes.

W. E. B. DU BOIS

The Younger Literary Movement (1924)

There have been times when we writers of the older set have been afraid that the procession of those who seek to express the life of the American Negro was thinning and that none were coming forward to fill the footsteps of the fathers. Dunbar is dead; Chesnutt is silent; and Kelly Miller is mooning after false gods while Brawley and Woodson are writing history rather than literature. But even as we ask "Where are the young Negro artists to mold and weld this mighty material about us?"—even as we ask, they come.

There are two books before me, which, if I mistake not, will mark an epoch: a novel by Jessie Fauset and a book of stories and poems by Jean Toomer. There are besides these, five poets writing: Langston Hughes, Countée Cullen, Georgia Johnson, Gwendolyn Bennett, and Claude McKay. Finally, Negro men are appearing as essayists and reviewers, like Walter White and Eric Walrond. (And even as I write comes the news that a novel by Mr. White has just found a publisher.) Here, then, is promise sufficient to attract us.

We recognize the exquisite abandon of a new day in Langston Hughes' "Song For a Banjo." He sings:

Shake your brown feet, Liza,
Shake 'em Liza, chile,
Shake your brown feet, Liza,
(The music's soft and wile).
Shake your brown feet, Liza,
(The Banjo's sobbin' low),
The sun's goin' down this very night—
Might never rise no mo'.

Countée Cullen in his "Ballad of the Brown Girl" achieves eight lyric lines that are as true as life itself. There is in Claude McKay's "If We Must Die" a strain martial and mutinous. There are other echoes—two from dead poets Jamison and Cotter who achieved in their young

years long life if not immortality. But this essay is of two books.

The world of black folk will some day arise and point to Jean Toomer as a writer who first dared to emancipate the colored world from the conventions of sex. It is quite impossible for most Americans to realize how straightlaced and conventional thought is within the Negro world, despite the very unconventional acts of the group. Yet this contradiction is true. And Jean Toomer is the first of our writers to hurl his pen across the very face of our sex conventionality. In "Cane";¹ one has only to take his women characters *seriatim* to realize this: Here is Karintha, an innocent prostitute; Becky, a fallen white woman; Carma, a tender Amazon of unbridled desire; Fern, an unconscious wanton; Esther, a woman who looks age and bas-tardy in the face and flees in despair; Louise, with a white and a black lover; Avey, unfeeling and unmoral; and Doris, the cheap chorus girl. These are his women, painted with a frankness that is going to make his black readers shrink and criticize; and yet they are done with a certain splendid, careless truth.

Toomer does not impress me as one who knows his Georgia but he does know human beings; and, from the background which he has seen slightly and heard of all his life through the lips of others, he paints things that are true, not with Dutch exactness, but rather with an impressionist's sweep of color. He is an artist with words but a conscious artist who offends often by his apparently undue striving for effect. On the other hand his powerful book is filled with felicitous phrases—Karintha, "carrying beauty perfect as the dusk when the sun goes down,"—

Hair—
Silver-grey
Like streams of stars

Or again, "face flowed into her eyes—flowed in soft creamy foam and plaintive ripples." His emotion is for the most part entirely objective. One does not feel that he feels much and yet the fervor of his descriptions shows that he has felt or knows what feeling is. His art carries much that is difficult or even impossible to understand. The artist, of course, has a right deliberately to make his art a puzzle to the interpreter (the whole world is a puzzle) but on the other hand I am myself unduly irritated by this sort of thing. I cannot, for the life of me, for instance see why Toomer could not have made the tragedy of Carma something that I could understand instead of vaguely guess at; "Box Seat" muddles me to the last degree and I am

not sure that I know what "Kabnis" is about. All of these essays and stories, even when I do not understand them, have their strange flashes of power, their numerous messages and numberless reasons for being. But still for me they are partially spoiled. Toomer strikes me as a man who has written a powerful book but who is still watching for the fullness of his strength and for that calm certainty of his art which will undoubtedly come with years.

NOTE

1. Boni & Liveright, New York.

ALAIN LOCKE

Negro Youth Speaks (1925)

The Younger Generation comes, bringing its gifts. They are the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance. Youth speaks, and the voice of the New Negro is heard. What stirs inarticulately in the masses is already vocal upon the lips of the talented few, and the future listens, however the present may shut its ears. Here we have Negro youth, with arresting visions and vibrant prophecies; forecasting in the mirror of art what we must see and recognize in the streets of reality tomorrow, foretelling in new notes and accents the maturing speech of full racial utterance.

Primarily, of course, it is youth that speaks in the voice of Negro youth, but the overtones are distinctive; Negro youth speaks out of an unique experience and with a particular representativeness. All classes of a people under social pressure are permeated with a common experience; they are emotionally welded as others cannot be. With them, even ordinary living has epic depth and lyric intensity, and this, their material handicap, is their spiritual advantage. So, in a day when art has retreated to classes, cliques, and coteries, and life lacks more and

more a vital common background, the Negro artist, out of the depths of his group and personal experience, has to his hand almost the conditions of a classical art.

Negro genius to-day relies upon the race-gift as a vast spiritual endowment from which our best developments have come and must come. Racial expression as a conscious motive, it is true, is fading out of our latest art, but just as surely the age of truer, finer group expression is coming in—for race expression does not need to be deliberate to be vital. Indeed at its best it never is. This was the case with our instinctive and quite matchless folk-art, and begins to be the same again as we approach cultural maturity in a phase of art that promises now to be fully representative. The interval between has been an awkward age, where from the anxious desire and attempt to be representative much that was really unrepresentative has come; we have lately had an art that was stiltedly self-conscious, and racially rhetorical rather than racially expressive. Our poets have now stopped speaking for the Negro—they speak as Negroes. Where formerly they spoke to others and tried

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to interpret, they now speak to their own and try to express. They have stopped posing, being nearer the attainment of poise.

The younger generation has thus achieved an objective attitude toward life. Race for them is but an idiom of experience, a sort of added enriching adventure and discipline, giving subtler overtones to life, making it more beautiful and interesting, even if more poignantly so. So experienced, it affords a deepening rather than a narrowing of social vision. The artistic problem of the Young Negro has not been so much that of acquiring the outer mastery of form and technique as that of achieving an inner mastery of mood and spirit. That accomplished, there has come the happy release from self-consciousness, rhetoric, bombast, and the hampering habit of setting artistic values with primary regard for moral effect—all those pathetic over-compensations of a group inferiority complex which our social dilemmas inflicted upon several unhappy generations. Our poets no longer have the hard choice between an over-assertive and an appealing attitude. By the same effort they have shaken themselves free from the minstrel tradition and the fowling-nets of dialect, and through acquiring ease and simplicity in serious expression, have carried the folk-gift to the altitudes of art. There they seek and find art's intrinsic values and satisfactions—and if America were deaf, they would still sing.

But America listens—perhaps in curiosity at first; later, we may be sure, in understanding. But—a moment of patience. The generation now in the artistic vanguard inherits the fine and dearly bought achievement of another generation of creative workmen who have been pioneers and path-breakers in the cultural development and recognition of the Negro in the arts. Though still in their prime, as veterans of a hard struggle, they must have the praise and gratitude that is due them. We have had, in fiction, Chesnutt and Burghardt Du Bois; in drama, Du Bois again and Angelina Grimké; in poetry Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, Fenton, and Charles Bertram Johnson, Everett Hawkins, Lucien Watkins, Cotter, Jamison; and in another file of poets, Miss Grimké, Anne Spencer,

and Georgia Douglas Johnson; in criticism and *belles lettres*, Braithwaite and Dr. Du Bois; in painting, Tanner and Scott; in sculpture, Meta Warrick and May Jackson; in acting, Gilpin and Robeson; in music, Burleigh. Nor must the fine collaboration of white American artists be omitted; the work of Ridgeley Torrence and Eugene O'Neill in drama, of Stribling, and Shands and Clement Wood in fiction, all of which has helped in the bringing of the materials of Negro life out of the shambles of conventional polemics, cheap romance and journalism into the domain of pure and unbiassed art. Then, rich in this legacy, but richer still, I think, in their own endowment of talent, comes the youngest generation of our Afro-American culture: in music Diton, Dett, Grant Still, and Roland Hayes; in fiction, Jessie Fauset, Walter White, Claude McKay (a forthcoming book); in drama, Willis Richardson; in the field of the short story, Jean Toomer, Eric Walrond, Rudolph Fisher; and finally a vivid galaxy of young Negro poets, McKay, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, and Countée Cullen.

These constitute a new generation not because of years only, but because of a new aesthetic and a new philosophy of life. They have all swung above the horizon in the last three years, and we can say without disparagement of the past that in that short space of time they have gained collectively from publishers, editors, critics, and the general public more recognition than has ever before come to Negro creative artists in an entire working lifetime. First novels of unquestioned distinction, first acceptances by premier journals whose pages are the ambition of veteran craftsmen, international acclaim, the conquest for us of new provinces of art, the development for the first time among us of literary coteries and channels for the contact of creative minds, and most important of all, a spiritual quickening and racial leavening such as no generation has yet felt and known. It has been their achievement also to bring the artistic advance of the Negro sharply into stepping alignment with contemporary artistic thought, mood, and style. They are thoroughly modern, some of them ultra-modern, and Negro thoughts now wear the uniform of the age.

Through their work, these younger artists have declared for a lusty vigorous realism; the same that is molding contemporary American letters, but their achievement of it, as it has been doubly difficult, is doubly significant. The elder generation of Negro writers expressed itself in cautious moralism and guarded idealizations; the trammels of Puritanism were on its mind because the repressions of prejudice were heavy on its heart. They felt art must fight social battles and compensate social wrongs; "Be representative": put the better foot foremost, was the underlying mood. Just as with the Irish Renaissance, there were the riots and controversies over Synge's folk plays and other frank realisms of the younger school, so we are having and will have turbulent discussion and dissatisfaction with the stories, plays and poems of the younger Negro group. But writers like Rudolph Fisher, Zora Hurston, Jean Toomer, Eric Walrond, Willis Richardson, and Langston Hughes take their material objectively with detached artistic vision; they have no thought of their racy folk types as typical of anything but themselves or of their being taken or mistaken as racially representative. Contrast Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground* with Thomas Nelson Page, or Waldo Frank's *Holiday* with anything of Mr. Cable's, and you will get the true clue for this contrast between the younger and the elder generations of Negro literature; Realism in "crossing the Potomac" had also to cross the color line. Indeed it was the other way round; the pioneer writing of the fiction of the New South was the realistic fiction of Negro life. Fortunately just at the time the younger generation was precipitating out, *Batouala* came to attention through the award of the Prix Goncourt to René Maran, its author, in 1923. Though *Batouala* is not of the American Negro either in substance or authorship, the influence of its daring realism and Latin frankness was educative and emancipating. And so not merely for modernity of style, but for vital originality of substance, the young Negro writers dig deep into the racy peasant undersoil of the race life. Jean Toomer writes:

Georgia opened me. And it may well be said that I received my initial impulse to an

individual art from my experience there. For no other section of the country has so stirred me. There one finds soil, soil in the sense the Russians know it,—the soil every art and literature that is to live must be imbedded in.

The newer motive, then, in being racial is to be so purely for the sake of art. Nowhere is this more apparent, or more justified than in the increasing tendency to evolve from the racial substance something technically distinctive, something that as an idiom of style may become a contribution to the general resources of art. In flavor of language, flow of phrase, accent of rhythm in prose, verse and music, color and tone of imagery, idiom and timbre of emotion and symbolism, it is the ambition and promise of Negro artists to make a distinctive contribution. Much of this is already discernible. The interesting experiment of Weldon Johnson in *Creation: A Negro Sermon*, to transpose the dialect motive and carry it through in the idioms of imagery rather than the broken phonetics of speech, is a case in point. In music such transfusions of racial idioms with the modernistic styles of expression has already taken place; in the other arts it is just as possible and likely. Thus under the sophistications of modern style may be detected in almost all our artists a fresh distinctive note that the majority of them admit as the instinctive gift of the folk-spirit. Toomer gives a musical folk-lilt and a glamorous sensuous ecstasy to the style of the American prose modernists. McKay adds Aesop and peasant irony to the social novel and folk clarity and naïveté to lyric thought. Fisher adds the terseness and emotional raciness of Uncle Remus to the art of Maupassant and O. Henry. Walrond has a tropical color and almost volcanic gush that are unique even after more than a generation of exotic word painting by master artists. Langston Hughes has a distinctive fervency of color and rhythm, and a Biblical simplicity of speech that is colloquial in derivation, but full of artistry. Roland Hayes carries the rhapsodic gush and depth of folk-song to the old masters. Countée Cullen blends the simple with the sophisticated so originally as almost

to put the vineyards themselves into his crystal goblets.

There is in all the marriage of a fresh emotional endowment with the finest niceties of art. Here for the enrichment of American and modern art, among our contemporaries, in a people who still have the ancient key, are some of the things we thought culture had forever lost. Art cannot disdain the gift of a natural irony, of a transfiguring imagination, of rhapsodic Biblical speech, of dynamic musical swing, of cosmic emotion such as only the gifted pagans knew, of a return to nature, not by way of the forced and worn formula of Romanticism, but through the closeness of an imagination that has never broken kinship with nature. Art must accept such gifts, and reevaluate the giver.

Not all the new art is in the field of pure art values. There is poetry of sturdy social protest, and fiction of calm, dispassionate social analysis. But reason and realism have cured us of sentimentality: instead of the wail and appeal, there is challenge and indictment. Satire is just beneath the surface of our latest prose, and tonic irony has come into our poetic wells. These are good medicines for the common mind, for us they are necessary antidotes against social

poison. Their influence means that at least for us the worst symptoms of the social distemper are passing. And so the social promise of our recent art is as great as the artistic. It has brought with it, first of all, that wholesome, welcome virtue of finding beauty in oneself; the younger generation can no longer be twitted as "cultural nondescripts" or accused of "being out of love with their own nativity." They have instinctive love and pride of race, and, spiritually compensating for the present lacks of America, ardent respect and love for Africa, the motherland. Gradually too, under some spiritualizing reaction, the brands and wounds of social persecution are becoming the proud stigmata of spiritual immunity and moral victory. Already enough progress has been made in this direction so that it is no longer true that the Negro mind is too engulfed in its own social dilemmas for control of the necessary perspective of art, or too depressed to attain the full horizons of self and social criticism. Indeed, by the evidence and promise of the cultured few, we are at last spiritually free, and offer through art an emancipating vision to America. But it is a presumption to speak further for those who in the selections of their work in the succeeding sections speak so adequately for themselves.

CARL VAN VECHTEN

Uncle Tom's Mansion (1925)

New York is celebrated for its transitory crazes. For whole seasons its mood is dominated by one popular figure or another, or by a racial influence. We have had Jeritza winters, Chaliapin winters, jazz winters, Russian winters, Spanish winters. During the current season, indubitably, the Negro is in the ascendancy. Harlem cabarets are more popular than ever. Everybody is trying to dance the Charleston or to sing Spirituals, and volumes of arrangements of these folk-songs drop from the press faster than one can keep count of them. At least four important white fiction writers have published

novels dealing with the Negro this fall, while several novels and books of poems by colored writers are announced. Florence Mills, Bill Robinson, Taylor Gordon, Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, and Ethel Waters are all successful on the stage or concert platform. *The New Negro* (Albert and Charles Boni, 1925) should serve as the most practical guidebook to those who are interested in this popular movement.

This is, indeed, a remarkable book. I am not certain but, so far as its effect on the general reader is concerned, it will prove to be the most remarkable book that has yet appeared on

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This is, indeed, a remarkable book. I am not certain but, so far as its effect on the general reader is concerned, it will prove to be the most remarkable book that has yet appeared on

the Negro. Alain Locke, the editor, has done a superb job. Basing his material on the Negro number of the *Survey Graphic*, he has expanded here, cut down there, substituted in the third instance. He has put not merely the best foot of the new Negro forward; he has put *all* his feet forward. Herein is included, in fact, work by every young American Negro who has achieved distinction or fame in the literary world—Rudolph Fisher, Walter White, Jessie Fauset, Eric Walrond, Claude McKay, Countée Cullen, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and many others are represented. There are also contributions from the pens of a few of the older men, James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and William Stanley Braithwaite. Several excellent reasons might be adduced to justify the inclusion of James Weldon Johnson's poem, "The Creation." Not only is it a fine poem, but also it was the poem that broke the chains of dialect which bound Paul Laurence Dunbar and freed the younger generation from this dangerous restraint.

I think the fiction and poetry in this volume will amaze those who are cognizant only in a vague sort of way of what Negro youth is doing. Rudolph Fisher's "The City of Refuge," which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* for February 1925, is, I am convinced, the finest short story yet written by a man of Negro blood, except Pushkin, and Pushkin, save in one instance, did not write stories dealing with Negroes. It is, moreover, an ironical story, a fact perhaps worthy of note, considering that Dr. Fisher is the only American Negro storyteller I know who has employed this device save Charles W. Chesnutt, a writer only too little known, especially among Negroes, who has not published a book for twenty years. *The Wife of His Youth* is an extraordinary collection of short stories. I gape with astonishment when I recall that it was published in 1899. It is no wonder that it fell flat, especially among Negroes, for Negroes are no lovers of irony. They do not, for the most part, even comprehend it and are likely to read literalness where it is not intended.

Negro sensitiveness and fear of ridicule, justifiable enough, God knows, in the circumstances, have driven many a Negro writer into

literary subterfuge. Mr. Locke's reference in his preface to "the gradual recovery from hypersensitiveness and 'touchy' nerves" is both a little optimistic and a little premature. Dr. Fisher, however, has had the courage to treat his subject with the same objectivity that he might if he were dealing with Australians or Hindus. It is not likely that his work, for some time to come, at least, will be widely popular among members of his own race. I hope that any internal pressure brought to bear upon him will not cause him to deviate from his present splendid artistic purpose. It is a pity that Mr. Locke saw fit to include Dr. Fisher's "Vestiges." Inferior work, this, and an anticlimax after "The City of Refuge."

Eric Walrond is an uneven writer. A good deal of his work is actually bad; some of it is passable and a little of it brilliant. "The Palm Porch," in this collection, is by far the best story of his that I have read. It appeared originally in the *New Age* and it is worthy of appearance anywhere. It is perhaps more of a picture than a short story, but it is a picture vividly observed and set down in a coruscant and exotic style. I do not think it will be readily forgotten by anyone who reads it.

Of Jean Toomer's work it is unnecessary to speak at length. The character studies included in this anthology were selected from *Cane*, and they are well chosen. Mr. Braithwaite, justifiably, describes *Cane* as "a book of gold and bronze, of dusk and flame, of ecstasy and pain." Zora Neale Hurston is more or less of a newcomer. She has published comparatively little. The story in this volume, "Spunk," won the second prize in the 1925 short story contest instituted by *Opportunity* magazine. Miss Hurston may be highly commended for her intimate knowledge of dialect and for her expert use of free and natural dialogue, but her work is still somewhat diffuse in form. I think, however, that "Spunk" is far superior to Mr. Matheus's "The Fog," which won the first prize in the same contest.

Countée Cullen and Langston Hughes are the youngest and the best of the contemporary Negro poets. Both have sprung into prominence within the last year. Both are already famous.

Harper's recently issued Mr. Cullen's *Color*, and Alfred A. Knopf will presently publish Mr. Hughes's *The Weary Blues*. I do not think either of these young poets is here represented by his best work, but the level is sufficiently high, in both instances, to offer a taste of their fine talents.

If I were to attempt to discuss adequately the points raised in the various articles in *The New Negro* I could fill an entire number of "Books." The opportunities for controversy are endless. I must suffice content myself with reference to a few of the more prominent papers. "The Negro in American Literature," by William Stanley Braithwaite, presents in a few pages an able survey of the range of American Negro literature from the time of Phillis Wheatley to the contemporary hour. I agree with Mr. Braithwaite's judgments in almost every respect; I would say that he lays exactly the proper emphasis where it belongs. I am especially pleased that he deals so justly with the work of Charles W. Chesnutt, a writer, I repeat, who, in spite of his faults, cannot much longer be neglected, especially by those Negroes who pretend to an interest in the striking literary figures of the race. He came, as Mr. Braithwaite explains, at the wrong time, when the world, white or black, was quite unwilling to accept a realistic representation of the Negro, more especially an ironic realism. There was a demand for the conventional comic or sentimental darkey. It was the day of Paul Laurence Dunbar.

On one point, however, I would take decided issue with Mr. Braithwaite. He repeats the old cliché that Negro novels must be written by Negroes. Now I have said repeatedly that the Negro writer should deal with Negro subjects. In the first place, generally speaking, he knows more about them. In the second place, the Negro world, in spite of a popular misconception to the contrary, is largely unexplored, and if the Negro writers don't utilize the wealth of material at their fingertips, white writers, naturally, will be only too eager to exploit it.

And there is no reason why the white writer should not be successful in this experiment. The difference between the races, as a matter of fact, is largely a matter of an emotional

psychology, created on either side by the social barrier. Nearly all the idiosyncratic reactions of the Negro are caused by an extreme sensitivity, nearly all the reactions of the white man by an excessive self-consciousness, an almost pathetic attempt to do what is decent, so often construed by the alien race as condescension or patronage. Negroes among themselves, I am inclined to believe, behave and react very much as white people, of the same class, behave and react among themselves. In this connection it is well to remember that colored owners of human property in slavery days were among the most cruel masters.

If a white writer is cognizant of these facts I see no reason why he should not undertake to write a Negro novel. Charles W. Chesnutt wrote his novels from the white point of view, and if they are not wholly successful that is not the reason. He understood the point of view well enough. No one has informed the world that Lafcadio Hearn was impertinent when he wrote about the Japanese or Marmaduke Pickthall when he wrote about the Arabs.

I confess I was somewhat startled to discover that Mr. Locke had chosen Miss Jessie Fauset to write an article about the Negro theatre. If I had been the editor of *The New Negro* I am certain that she would have been about the last person I should have considered for the job. Not that Miss Fauset is lacking in literary talent, rather because I have never thought of her in connection with the theatre. My pleasure, perhaps, was doubled in reading her article by the realization that Mr. Locke had been wise in selecting her to write it. It is an extremely stimulating article; ideas spring out of every line. What she has to say is originally expressed and delightfully phrased. On the whole, I think it is the best discussion of the Negro in the theatre with which I am familiar.

With Miss Fauset, too, however, I must interpose a couple of objections. She states that Bert Williams became melancholy because he was constrained by the nature of his race to remain a clown. Here she overlooks a very general condition. All comedians are sad in private life. Is Miss Fauset familiar, I wonder, with the well-known anecdote concerning Grimaldi? Does she

know anything about the personality of Charles Spencer Chaplin? It was not because of his color that Bert Williams was constrained to be funny; no such obstacle has beset the way of that fine actor, Paul Robeson. The fact is that so few authentic clowns are born into the world that when one comes along no manager will consent to his appearance in other than farcical situations.

Miss Fauset states truly, "There is an unwritten law in America that though white may imitate black, black, even when superlatively capable, must never imitate white," and suggestively, referring to the wide range of colors among Negroes, she pleads for a brown Othello, a yellow Butterfly, a near white Hamlet. There is certainly no cogent excuse to offer for the state of a theatre which makes this sort of thing difficult of accomplishment. On one or two occasions it has actually happened. I remember Evelyn Preer's Salome very vividly to this day. The Negro writer, however, has as yet been very feebly represented in the drama; most of the successful colored plays have been written by white men. I should hate to see Negro acting talent turned in this conventional direction, therefore, until the play-writing and histrionic talents of the race have been more fully exploited in actual racial fields. There will never be a true Negro theatre until it is founded on racial heritage. When we have that, by all means let Negroes play anything they please; before we have that I regard it as a mistaken aim to experiment with *The School for Scandal*.

Mr. Locke's paper on the Spirituals is rhapsodic and critical rather than historical. I think he is a little too condescending in his attitude toward the folk poetry of these songs. In this respect, indubitably, they are not on an equal plane with the Blues, themselves far inferior as music. Nevertheless, it would be hard to find folk poetry with deeper feeling or more imaginative imagery than that which exists in some of the Spirituals. He pleads for choral arrangements of the Spirituals after the manner of the arrangements Russian musicians have made of the Russian folksongs, forgetting that the Russian folksong is sung as melody, while the Spirituals, although probably created as melody, so soon fell into harmonic form that they are

scarcely ever sung in any other fashion in that quarter of the country where they were born. I applaud his desire to hear these elaborate choral arrangements, but there will be time enough for that after a few of them are taken down in the authentic manner in which they are at present performed in the South. So far as I know, only quartet versions—and those usually after the singing of college men—have been set down. It is well to remember that a large Negro chorus sings in many more than four parts.

There is an unaccountable omission of the name of J. Rosamond Johnson. I suppose that *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* was not yet off the press when Mr. Locke wrote this article (it is listed in the bibliography), but this is not the first work that Mr. Johnson had accomplished in connection with the Spirituals. As for *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, I should say that it has already done more to popularize these songs, not only with the great public, but also with musicians and critics, than the work of any other ten men. It is not technical books like H. E. Krehbiel's *Afro-American Folksongs* (a very faulty work, moreover, hastily thrown together from casual newspaper articles) or Ballanta-Taylor's pedantic *Saint Helena Island Spirituals* that interest the musician—unless he be actively engaged in arranging versions of the Spirituals—it is the real thing in practical form, just as the true musician is much more interested in the scores of Mozart's operas than he is in thematic guides to them. I have seen more copies of Mr. Johnson's book on the piano racks of my musical friends during the last two weeks than I have seen of Mr. Krehbiel's book in libraries since the day in 1914 when it first appeared.

Mr. Locke supplies three other interesting and provocative contributions. In his preface he paints a brilliant picture of the general intellectual attitude of the new literary figures, contradictory at that, for the New Negro does very little group thinking. "If it ever was warrantable," Mr. Locke very sensibly says, "to regard and treat the Negro *en masse*, it is becoming with every day less possible, more unjust and more ridiculous." In another paper Mr. Locke discusses at length the subject of African primitive sculpture.

But little space remains to devote to the many other excellent papers in this volume. I should like, however, to touch on a few. James Weldon Johnson offers a picture of the growth of the new Harlem, with its economic and cultural achievements and possibilities. Dr. Du Bois is represented by a scholarly account of the American Negro's point of view in regard to the French, German, Belgian, and English colonies in Africa. He points out bitterly that, while the slave trade has ended, these governments find it equally advantageous to exploit their natives in their own land. The condition remains. Elsie Johnson McDougald tells what it means to be a colored woman in the modern business and professional worlds. Walter White describes the psychology arising from race prejudice. He also goes beneath the surface and drags out the fact that this prejudice creates certain internal disagreements among the Negroes themselves. Charles S. Johnson explains why Negroes leave the South: "Enoch Scott was living in Hollywood, Miss., when the white physician and one of the Negro leaders disputed

a small account. The Negro was shot three times in the back and his head battered—all this in front of the high sheriff's office. Enoch says he left because the doctor might some time take a dislike to him." He fills several pages with such incidents.

J. A. Rogers's article about jazz is disappointing and occasionally inaccurate. He has comparatively little to say about the Harlem cabarets—surely among the most interesting features of the Negro's new Mecca—and there should be a great deal more to write about W. C. Handy, the "father of the Blues," Clarence Williams, and other popular composers, but I don't suppose it would be possible to do justice to all sides of the new Negro in one volume.

The bibliography, by no means complete, but certainly the most complete bibliography of the subject available, was compiled by Arthur B. Schomburg, Arthur H. Fauset, and Alain Locke. The volume is bountifully illustrated with reproductions of paintings, many in color, by Winold Reiss, Miguel Covarrubias, and Aaron Douglas, the last a Negro.

H. L. MENCKEN

The Aframerican: New Style (1926)

This book, it seems to me, is a phenomenon of immense significance.* What it represents is the American Negro's final emancipation from his inferiority complex, his bold decision to go it alone. That inferiority complex, until very recently, conditioned all of his thinking, even (and perhaps especially) when he was bellowing most vociferously for his God-given rights. It got into everything that the late Booker Washington ever said or did: the most he could imagine was a Negro almost as good as a white man. It even got into the bitter complainings of the tortured Dr. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois: he seemed to be vastly more intent upon getting Negroes into Pullman cars and Kiwanis than upon finding the Negro soul. Here, at last, it is thrown overboard, without ceremony and

without regret. The Negroes who contribute to this dignified and impressive volume (including Dr. Du Bois himself) have very little to say about their race's wrongs: their attention is all upon its merits. They show no sign of being sorry that they are Negroes; they take a fierce sort of pride in it. For the first time one hears clearly the imposing doctrine that, in more than one way, the Negro is superior to the white man. "Suddenly," says Dr. Locke, the editor, "his mind seems to have slipped from under the tyranny of social intimidation, and to be shaking off the psychology of imitation and implied inferiority."

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**The New Negro: An Interpretation* edited by Alain Locke. New York: Albert and Charles Boni.

Well, where is the evidence to support that superb contumacy? I believe that a great deal of it is to be found between the covers of this very book. Go read it attentively if you still think of the black brother as Sambo and his sister as Mandy—or, indeed, if you think of him as Booker Washington. Here a Negro of a quite new sort, male and female, comes upon the scene—a Negro full of an easy grace and not at all flustered by good society. He discusses the problems of his people soberly, shrewdly and without heat. He rehearses their achievement in the arts, and compares it dispassionately to that of the whites. He speculates upon their economic future with no more than a passing glance at the special difficulties which beset them. He makes frank acknowledgment of their weaknesses. He pokes fun at their follies. And all this he accomplishes with good manners and in sound and often eloquent English. Not once is there any intimation that the thing is being done by people of an inferior race—that the world ought to marvel because such people print a book at all. The whole thing is a masterpiece of self-possession. If it had no other merit, it would be notable for that one alone.

As I have said, go read the book. And, having read it, ask yourself the simple question: could you imagine a posse of *white* Southerners doing anything so dignified, so dispassionate, so striking? I don't mean, of course, Southerners who have cast off the Southern tradition: I mean Southerners who are still tenaciously of the South, and profess to speak for it whenever it comes into question. As one who knows the South better than most, and has had contact with most of its intellectuals, real and Confederate, I must say frankly that I can imagine no such thing. Here, indeed, the Negro challenges the white Southerner on a common ground, and beats him hands down. I call to mind some of the leading sub-Potomac masterminds of the

orthodox faculty. Henderson of North Carolina, Gonzalez of South Carolina, old Williams of Mississippi, the editors of the *Atlanta Journal*, the *Richmond News-Leader*, the *Jackson Daily News*, the *Nashville Banner*—and I range them beside Locke, James Weldon Johnson, Walter F. White, Rudolph Fisher, Kelly Miller, and half a dozen other contributors to the present volume. The contrast is pathetic. The Africans are men of sense, learning, and good bearing; the Caucasians are simply romantic wind-jammers, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

How far the gentlemen of dark complexion will get with their independence, now that they have declared it, I don't know. There are serious difficulties in their way. The vast majority of the people of their race are but two or three inches re-moved from gorillas: it will be a sheer impossibility, for a long, long while, to interest them in anything above porkchops and bootleg gin. Worse, there is a formidable party of Negro intellectuals which shrinks from going it alone. They have enjoyed, for many years, the patronage of sentimental whites, and they are certainly not likely to cast it off. Nevertheless, I believe that this patronage has done far more to hinder the emerging black than to help him. It has forced him to be tenderly considerate of Caucasian *amour propre*, of all sorts of white prejudices, and so it has hampered his free functioning as his own man. The advanced wing of Negroes, having cut the painter, must be prepared to break their backs at the oars. They will find it lonesome in their little skiff, and often dangerous. They will be tempted more than once to turn back. But no race, I believe, ever gets anywhere so long as it permits itself to think of turning back. It must navigate its own course, in fair weather and foul, and it must see its shallop as a dreadnaught, carrying all arms and ready for any combat. Let us, then, sit back tightly, and observe what the colored brothers do next.

CARL VAN DOREN

The Negro Renaissance (1926)

Those white Americans who for sixty years have been insisting that the black American must keep in his place have generally been the sort who in another breath could insist that America is the home of opportunity for all men. If now they are disturbed at seeing that the Negro's place is no longer what it was, perhaps they can be consoled by thinking that the opportunity was even greater than they realized. It was, after all, too much to expect that the colored tenth of the population, whatever its racial handicap, would not be touched by the gospel of progress which the other nine tenths swore by. That tenth has been touched. It has, in fact, learned its lesson so well that certain of its members decline to remain soil-bound peasants or obliging body-servants or even punctual artisans or melodious entertainers, and manage to become experts, capitalists, even scholars and poets. And in doing this they have done, in the face of American expectation, precisely what Americans at large have done during the past century and a half in the face of European expectation. On the eve of the Revolution the Rev. Andrew Burnaby, a fairly well disposed Briton, had announced that "America is formed for happiness, but not for empire." As late as 1844 a British journalist, less well disposed, announced that "as yet the American is horn-handed and pig-headed, hard, persevering, unscrupulous, carnivorous . . . with an incredible genius for lying." If the whole of the nation could so disappoint prophecy, a part of it could hardly lag entirely behind.

The negroes, though delayed by slavery, have not lagged. In the symposium called "The New Negro,"¹ a group of them have undertaken to present their cause after two generations of freedom and to exhibit the best fruits of their achievement. The information of the work is extensive, the reasoning sensible, the temper

all that could be desired. Compared with what the white Americans could have exhibited a century ago, when the total population of the United States was roughly equal to that of the colored Americans to-day, the book does not suffer. The fiction may not equal the best of Irving and Cooper but the verse is higher in workmanship and poetical quality than the verse generally being written in 1826, and the prose discussions put to shame the vexed and feverish provincialism with which Americans then argued their case against Europe. If any evidence is needed the volume is evidence that the new Negro is a civilized and accomplished being, who not only has given to the nation its most joyous dances, which may have a barbaric strain in them, and its most characteristic music, which may be only a folk-art, but who has learned how to write lucid, cogent, and charming prose, which is one of the unmistakable signs of an advanced civilization.

It is no doubt true that the current enthusiasm for Negro life and art is in some degree a fad which cannot stay at the high pitch of the past few months. But when the fad has passed it will leave behind such solid documents by white writers as Dorothy Scarborough's *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs* (Harvard University) and Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson's *The Negro and His Songs* (University of North Carolina) and R. Emmet Kennedy's *Mellows: Negro Work Songs* (A. & C. Boni) and such sensitive fiction as Du Bose Heyward's *Porgy* (Doran), to say nothing of such veracious contributions by colored writers as *The New Negro* and James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (Viking) and Countee Cullen's *Color* (Harper) and Langston Hughes's *The Weary Blues* (Knopf). Something has been poured into the stream of native culture which cannot soon cease to tinge it. Something has been uttered to

enlarge the imaginative sympathy between the races which is an absolute essential of any decent solution of the color problem in America.

Fads, of course, do not come without a reason. If the whites have been hospitable to Negro themes and modes of expression, it is because there was something for them to be hospitable to. It is probable that the historian of the episode will trace its roots to Harlem. So long as the Negroes continued to be in the main a peasant race, they had little opportunity to make themselves heard. To the white governing class they seemed to be primarily comic or, at best, tuneful. With that gift of theirs which is at once discretion and courtesy, they kept to themselves the genuine impulses stirring within them. They developed a folk-lore and a folk-art which was little conditioned by the industrial system of the country as a whole. Then suddenly a greater number of Negroes than had ever before been gathered into any city found themselves in Harlem. They had to struggle against serious difficulties still, but New York was at least cosmopolitan enough to leave them more or less to themselves and to permit them to form as complete a community as they could. A generation before, and the thing might have come too early. Oppressively aware of being freedmen, they might have made a successful effort to lose the traits which could remind them of their former slavery, and might have sunk into a drab, limping uniformity. Whether they might or might not have done this once, they did not do it in the twentieth-century. The new generation had outgrown the earlier habit of self-depreciation, and some of them were outgrowing the later, and healthier, habit of self-assertion. They had the courage to cherish certain picturesque racial elements in their natures and customs. They moved from the point at which they were bound together by a common condition, in Mr. Locke's phrase, to the point at which they were bound together by a common consciousness. And they swiftly flowered into utterance, much as New England, in the early part of the nineteenth-century, flowered into Transcendentalism.

The scale is obviously not yet the same as it was in New England. No mature Emerson,

Hawthorne, Melville, or Thoreau enriches the pages of "The New Negro," although the poetry of Countee Cullen is as good as has been written by any American in his teens or early twenties, and the prose stories of Jean Toomer have exquisite promise. But there was no New-Englander in 1826 who could have produced a better survey of an international complication than Mr. Du Bois has produced in "The Negro Mind Reaches Out," or a better analysis of national conditions than appears in "The New Frontage on American Life" by Charles S. Johnson, or who could have shown himself more learned in various aspects of Americanism than Mr. Locke shows himself in various aspects of Afro-Americanism. In fact, the most striking impression of this book is that the Negro is better as analyst than as artist. Perhaps this is because his greatest artistic endowment lies in the direction of dancing and music, which cannot easily be represented in print. But it is none the less true that he has a remarkable skill in stating his case, a skill which, it may be guessed, has come from a prolonged and bitter knowledge of it. At any rate, the art of the new Negro in America has now a chance to be built upon a very firm critical foundation.

There is bound, however, to be on this plane of art something of the same conflict between white and black as there has always been in the United States between the majority and any minority whatever. A profound national impulse drives the hundred millions steadily toward uniformity. How can the Negro resist the impulse, when the main pattern of life is marked out for him by white institutions, and when, indeed, he can prosper at all only by adjusting himself at most economic, social, and moral points to the prevailing scheme? He cannot mark himself off by special costumes, by a distinctive dialect, by different industries or laws or religions. The best he can do, probably, is to have the courage of certain inherited sentiments and to feel sustained in them by racial consciousness. But this may be a factor of great importance in shaping his future. It may enable him to keep his religion rich and dramatic, instead of thin and formulistic; to permit his public ceremonies, as he does now,

to be as gorgeous as he knows how to make them; to prefer, in his daily manners, variety rather than monotony, high color rather than low color, spontaneous rhythms rather than tight, regimented motions, full laughter rather than guarded snickers, metaphor rather than logical demonstration, comfortable song rather than uncomfortable silence. If the Negro can by some miracle preserve these generous qualities for a century or so, he may become as fertile a soil for all the arts as for dancing and singing. Yet miracles do not happen. The Negro will do a great deal for himself if he carries out

a small part of this program which his friends predict for him. And he will thereby do a great deal for American culture generally. If these things happen, 1925 will be marked in the history of the nation as a memorable year, and as the beginning of a new epoch for the African race.

NOTE

1. *The New Negro*. Edited by Alain Locke. Albert and Charles Boni.

WALTER WHITE

The Negro Renaissance (1926)

A little over three hundred years ago, a handful of Negroes was landed on American soil at Jamestown, Virginia. For two and a half centuries other Africans were brought to America and they and their descendants held in bondage. In Africa, Negro artists, some of them of the same tribes and nations as those who were the ancestors of present-day American Negroes, had carved in ivory or wood gods and symbolic vessels and bowls used in their tribal worship. Many years later a few of these plastic creations were destined to be carried to Paris, and there and elsewhere profoundly influence what we call modern art. In Africa, too, there were given birth songs which are the ancestors, in a different genre, of our present day Negro spirituals. Of folklore there was an abundance—expressed in language which was of the very essence of poetry.

It was not until very recent years, however, that the talent from which sprang these creations met with any considerable encouragement in the United States. It is true that there were individual Negroes who achieved eminence as artists or, more often, achieved patronizing attention. Harry Burleigh as a musician; Bert Williams on the stage; Charles W. Chesnutt as novelist and writer of excellent short stories

of Negro life; Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois as scholar and master of an extraordinarily beautiful and powerful prose style; Paul Lawrence Dunbar as poet; and Booker T. Washington as educator, are a few of the more familiar names of those who attained eminence.

But with the new economic security which the Negro has attained, with the greater willingness of America to receive the gifts the Negro could make and with post-war eagerness for new forms and new sensations came the wave which has hurtled the Negro into a position as artist where, at least in and near New York, he comes dangerously near becoming a fad. In music there is the extraordinary success of Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson, Lawrence Brown, Rosamond Johnson, Taylor Gordon, Julius Bledsoe, and Marian Anderson. In the field of the short story, there are Rudolph Fisher, Jean Toomer, and a number of lesser lights. In the field of novel writing there are not so many, but there are a dozen or so to my knowledge who are attempting the longer flight. On the stage are Paul Robeson again, Charles Gilpin, Evelyn Preer, Miller, and Lyles and many of lesser stature. In every field of the arts Negroes are emerging, adding a richness and colorfulness which America so sorely needs. Book after book

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on Negro spirituals tumbles from the press the best of them, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, a best-seller. Soon, too, there will doubtless appear books on the less well-known but equally vital blues, work songs, and other secular music of the Aframerican.

In no one field, however, has so much been done as in poetry. Perhaps this is the most natural mode of expression next to song that the Negro possesses. To prove this, one needs but to run over the titles of many of the spirituals—for example—"Deep River," "Go Down, Death," "Singing with a Sword in My Hand," "Ride On, King Jesus," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

Nor is this form of expression a new thing. Beginning in 1761 when a Negro girl, eight years old, Phillis Wheatley, was landed at Boston, sold as a slave, and later wrote creditable verse, on down through Countée Cullen and Langston Hughes, the stream has been unbroken though it has changed its course many times. I have been asked in this brief introduction to discuss trends in Negro poetry—always a difficult and dangerous thing to attempt.

There was little distinctive form to poetry written by American Negroes until Paul Laurence Dunbar came upon the scene. Well over one hundred American Negroes have published volumes of verse but until Dunbar, most of them followed the conventional schools which were then current. As has been said many times, Dunbar was the first Negro to view his people objectively. He did his best work in his dialect poems. Through them he was perhaps the first Negro to draw widespread attention to the Negro and to his possibilities as a subject for artistic treatment.

But Dunbar, on the other hand, did a certain amount of harm. Following the attention he received and the fame he gained prior and subsequent to his premature death in 1906, most Negroes who attempted to write verse, and most editors, wanted nothing from Negroes except dialect poems. So far as it goes, dialect has its advantages but, as has been pointed out by James Weldon Johnson, there are only two stops possible with this form—pathos and humor. The mould into which Negro poetry was set by Dunbar was broken only within the last twenty years.

James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, William Stanley Braithwaite, and Claude McKay broke from the dialect school and in doing so caught up and gave form to the writing of poetry by Negroes. Perhaps no other factor was so potent in broadening the fields in which the Negro poet could wander as the publication in 1922 of *The Book of American Negro Poetry* with its introductory essay on *The Creative Genius of the Negro* by the editor of the volume, James Weldon Johnson.

The results of this renaissance just now are being seen through the publication of volumes like *Color* by Countée Cullen and *The Weary Blues* by Langston Hughes, these two writers being by far the best known of the younger school. With many other fields in which he is expending his energy, Mr. Johnson has written little poetry during the last few years. Claude McKay has, too, been silent for a longer while. Jessie Fauset has turned her attention to the writing of novels, while Mr. Braithwaite has devoted most of his time to the editing of his Anthology and to his publishing business.

To take the places of these, others have come—Mr. Cullen, Mr. Hughes, and a number yet to be heard from. In this newer school are not only those who are writing first-rate Negro verse but those who are forming excellent verse which takes no cognizance of race. Though on this point I do not expect agreement, yet I am glad that both Mr. Cullen and Mr. Hughes (and the others) are not going to the other extreme—of casting overboard the gifts of their experiences as Negroes in American life. From this springs a passion, a colorfulness, a strength which gives them most decided advantages over many of their white brothers who are writing verse.

The flower of the bush which has been so long sinking its roots into this rich and abundant soil of Negro life is just beginning to unfold. Mr. Cullen, Mr. Hughes, Anne Spencer, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and others will doubtless produce even more beautiful poetry than they have in the past. And back of them surges up a vast number of others whose voices as yet are faint but who with experience and training will yet be heard from to the enrichment of American poetry.

BENJAMIN BRAWLEY

The Negro Literary Renaissance (1927)

The recent literary striving on the part of young Negro people throughout the country really began in the throes of the World War. After all discount is made, after all the tinsel is brushed away, the fact remains that the grandiose schemes of Marcus Garvey gave to the race a consciousness such as it had never possessed before. The dream of a united Africa, not less than a trip to France, challenged the imagination; and the soul of the Negro experienced a new sense of freedom. To be black ceased to be matter for explanation or apology; instead it became something to be advertised and exploited: thus the changed point of view made for increased racial self-respect. Here at least was a very solid gain.

With the new sense of freedom latent impulses not unnaturally came to the surface. "Suppressed desires" were given rein; and the revised order of things brought into prominence that quality in the Negro—romanticism—which we have all had to note is his greatest gift and also his greatest pitfall. Accordingly, with his innate love of song and the dance, he gave himself to the most intense living. Now romanticism, as one critic has said, is a disease in that it throws emphasis on sensational effects and abnormal states of mind. All America, however, was for the moment abnormal; old modes of thought and conduct were in the crucible; and the popular demand for the exotic and the exciting was best met by a perverted form of music originating in Negro slums and known as jazz. If it was a matter of getting strong effects, no other racial element in the country could possibly compete with the Negro.

Very especially did this romantic temper cultivate a mood that was of the very essence of hedonism and paganism. All of the more serious values in life were left out of account in a reckless abandon to the enjoyment of the moment. Introspection and self-pity ran riot, and there was such psychoanalysis as Freud

himself hardly ever dreamed of. The result was a new form of so-called art known as the "blues," the spirit of which may be seen from the following:—

Everybody in Hoboken town—everybody
an' me
Hopped upon a warehouse that was
swinging around
An' went to sea;
Oh, all day long I's lookin' for trees—
Lookin' for sand, lookin' for land,
'Cause I've got dose awful, weepin', sleepin',
Got dose awful sailin', wailin',
Got dose awful deep sea blues.

Of the temper represented by jazz and the "blues" there were three results in literature and art. The first was a lack of regard for any accepted standards whatsoever. Old forms of composition were thrown overboard; young poets were led to believe that they did not need any training in technique; and a popular form of poetizing known as "free verse" was most acceptable because most unrestrained. In prose the desired outlet became a sharp staccato form of writing that Fanny Hurst and one or two others had used as a vehicle but that attacked the very foundations of grammar. The second result of the dominant mood was a preference for sordid, unpleasant, or forbidden themes. As the hectic, the reckless, or the vulgar became attractive, so did young authors tend to seek their themes in dives or cabarets or with ladies of easy virtue. A third result, a very practical result, was the turning away from anything that looked like good, honest work in order to loaf and to call oneself an artist. If one could betake himself to writing and engage in the task of enlightening a benighted world, all the more could he imagine that he was doing something constructive, and he would be the greater "artist" accordingly, even if he did not know the difference between a dactyl and a spondee. The pity

of it all was that the young author frequently fancied that he was creative when, as a matter of fact, he was simply imitative and coarse.

The first two of the results just mentioned we shall illustrate as we proceed; for the moment let us note especially the last. In the new periodical, *Fire*, in the midst of seven double-column pages entitled "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," there is the following (and I certainly hope the compositor will set it up exactly as we give it to him):

he wondered why he couldn't find
work . . . a job . . . when he had first come
to New York he had . . . and he had only
been fourteen then was it because he was
nineteen now that he felt so idle . . . and
contented . . . or because he was an artist
. . . was one an artist until one became
known . . . of course he was an artist . . .
and strangely enough so were all his
friends . . . he should be ashamed that
he didn't work . . . but . . . was it five years
in New York . . . or the fact that he was
an artist . . .

This is the "very latest thing" in English prose as cultivated by Negro "artists." On the main point, however, that about unwillingness to work, we may note in the same periodical and also in the latest volume by the author, Mr. Langston Hughes, some lines entitled "Elevator Boy," which will hardly do for quoting in this magazine but which end thus:

I been runnin' this
Elevator too long.
Guess I'll quit now.

As to all of which we submit simply that the running of an elevator is perfectly honorable employment and that no one with such a job should leave it until he is reasonably sure of getting something better.

Such is the background and such are some of the more obvious results of the temper that just now characterizes the young Negro writers of the country. These writers, let us note in passing, have been encouraged as perhaps no group of literary young people was ever before encouraged in the history of American letters.

Patronage has extended its hand; prizes offered by *Opportunity* and *The Crisis* have called forth hundreds of manuscripts; and metropolitan critics have sometimes been almost maudlin in their praise of mediocre achievement. Again and again the new striving has been termed a "renaissance," and one was given to understand that the movement had brought forth several writers of unquestioned genius and ability. It is not unfitting then, for us to look into the situation and see just what has actually been accomplished. Naturally the points that have been made will not apply in equal measure to every representative of the school; all in all, however, they will hold, and while we shall find some work of genuine promise, we shall also find a good deal that might with perfect propriety have been left undone.

The first to demand attention is Eric Walrond, whose "Tropic Death" has but recently come from the press. Mr. Walrond was born in British Guiana and in his youth gained wide acquaintance with life in the West Indies. For several years now he has been in the United States, and recently he was business manager of *Opportunity*. As to his book it is hardly too much to say that in a purely literary way, it is the most important contribution made by a Negro to American letters since the appearance of Dunbar's "Lyrics of Lowly Life." Mr. Walrond differs from other writers in the freshness of his material, in the strength of his style, in his skillful use of words, in his compression—in short, in his understanding of what makes literature and what does not. "Tropic Death" is a collection of ten stories or sketches that deal with the tragedy in the lives of the poorer people in the West Indies. Sometimes death comes to the Negro peasant through drought or starvation, sometimes through lingering and loathsome disease; or it may be that a drunken marine pulls a trigger to uphold the established order. The book is not always a pleasant one; nor is it a perfect one. Frequently the suggestion is so veiled that even the diligent reader is puzzled; and certainly a writer of Mr. Walrond's ability can now dispense altogether with hectic writing in gaining his effects. Moreover we cannot help thinking that those stories that move steadily

toward a strong conclusion, such as "Drought" and "Subjection," are much more convincing than those that are more episodic, such as "The White Snake" and "Tropic Death." All told, however, the man who wrote this book knows something about writing; his style is becoming more and more chaste; and, in view of his firm grasp of his material and his clear perception of what is worth while, we feel that there is nothing in fiction that is beyond his capabilities.

Very different, but still demanding serious consideration, is the work of Walter White. Here the scene and setting are much more conventional, and the propaganda is deliberate. In "The Fire in the Flint" there is an abundance of philosophizing; the workmanship, especially near the beginning is often amateurish; and the hero at times seems incorrigibly stupid; but let us be just: before this book gets through it thrusts before the reader a situation that grips with the power of sheer tragedy and that sweeps all before it to a harrowing but inevitable close. "Flight" has been regarded as on the whole not so successful; the first part of the book is not firmly organized and the last part was evidently hastily done. Yet this novel is not without merit. It attempts something a little finer if not stronger than "The Fire in the Flint"; and the middle portion, that detailing the flight of the heroine and her fight back to respectability, holds the interest firmly. In general Mr. White's work preaches perhaps more than it expresses; accordingly, regarded purely from the standpoint of the artistic, it belongs to a different order of writing from that of Mr. Walrond. Preaching, however, has its place; and we recall that "Uncle Tom's Cabin," produced seventy-five years ago, still has power to engage the reader. So we shall have no quarrel with the author of "The Fire in the Flint" on account of his propaganda. The book has vitality, and there is still place in the world for literature with a message.

Perhaps near Mr. Walrond many people would today place Jean Toomer, the author of *Cane*, who has written both prose and verse. With this judgment we cannot quite agree, though this is not to say that Mr. Toomer's work is without merit. Again and again it is strong; but the themes are frequently unpleasant, the

impressionism is often gross, and the effect is sometimes that of a shock rather than that of genuine power. Over the whole accordingly broods an air that borders on the artificial or theatrical. The fact that Mr. Toomer seems most interested in prose while his poetry shows him to the better advantage is in itself significant; it may be that the prose could stand a little more discipline.

Among the poets Claude McKay is outstanding, and it was the little volume, "Harlem Shadows," that by its appearance in 1922 did much to give impetus to the recent literary movement. Of the work of this author we have spoken at other times and places. His poetry is successful because it not only has something vital to say but because it also shows due regard for the technique of versification. The favorite form is the sonnet, and within the narrow confines of this medium the poet manages to express the most intense emotion. His work has not been perfect, but it has often been strong, and altogether one felt justified in placing a high estimate on the author's possibilities.

Through the long night until the silver break
 Of day the little gray feet know no rest;
Through the long night until the silver break
 Has dropped from heaven upon the
 earth's white
 breast,
The dusky, half-clad girls of tired feet
 Are trudging, thinly shod, from street
 to street.

As for saying anything about Countee Cullen, one would seem to need to be just a little brave in view of the prizes that have been showered on this young poet and of his success with the magazines. The fact remains, however, that he has simply not yet mastered the mechanics of his art. His volume, *Color*, as we understand it, brought together the best of his work up to 1925. We have read through that book twice with a fair degree of care, and we regret that we can find in it not one quotable passage. By a quotable passage we mean one that expresses a truth or a mood in such felicitous language that a reader can hardly help remembering it. Such lines or stanzas abound in well-known

classics like Gray's "Elegy" and Lowell's "The Vision of Sir Launfal"; and they are even to be found in Paul Laurence Dunbar—in the first and last stanzas of "The Poet and his Song," for instance, or in the lines entitled "Life." *Color* contains no such things as these; on the contrary, on page after page there is lack of attention to the nature of dental, labial, and guttural sounds. The author does not mind writing such harsh and crowded lines as

By truths of wrongs the childish vision fails
To see; too great a cost this birth entails.

Throughout the volume the insufficiency of the poet's mastery of form is shown by a rather excessive fondness for the old ballad measure. This is very good in its way, but if used in poem after poem tends to become monotonous. And in view of Robert Buchanan's poem on the subject, Mr. Cullen was daring indeed to write on Judas Iscariot. Here, however, are four of the lines:

And when Christ felt the death hour creep
With sullen, drunken lurch,
He said to Peter, "Feed my sheep,
And build my holy church."

These lines raise not only questions of taste but questions of fact. It was not at the time of the "lurching" of his death hour that Christ said to Peter the things quoted. The text about the church came some time before the crucifixion, and that about the sheep after the resurrection. Lest we seem, however, to be unjust to this poet's work, we quote the whole of a poem of six lines, that on Joseph Conrad:

Not of the dust, but of the wave
His final couch should be;
They lie not easy in a grave
Who once have known the sea.
How shall earth's meagre bed enthrall
The hardiest seaman of them all?

One does not have to read this more than once to observe that the fourth line is easily the best. When he asks the reason why this should be so, he finds in it the dominance of liquid sounds in the line. What, however, is to be said about the juxtaposition of dental and labial in

the middle of the first line, or of the harsh consonants in the second, or, worst of all, of the amazing medley of dentals and gutturals in the fifth line? Of course it may be contended that the harshness of the words is to suggest the rugged character of Conrad; but, in view of the fact that this sort of thing runs all through the book, we are not quite convinced.

About Langston Hughes the only thing to observe is that here we have the sad case of a young man of ability who has gone off on the wrong track altogether. We are sure that he can get on the right track, but it will take a strong wrench to put him there, also a little time. When Mr. Hughes came under the influence of Mr. Carl Van Vechten and *The Weary Blues* was given to the world, the public was given to understand that a new and genuine poet had appeared on the horizon. It mattered not that the thing contributed had been done years before by Vachel Lindsay; the book was full of jazz, and that was enough for the public. After all, however, it is not an author's first book that determines his quality, but the second, for the first may be an accident. "Fine Clothes to the Jew" hardly stands the test. In fact, one would have to go a long way to find more of sheer coarseness and vulgarity than are to be found between the covers of this little book. We forbear quotation. We are sorry that Mr. Hughes wrote it, and we hope that he will never write another like it.

And now *Fire*.

About this unique periodical the only thing to say is that if Uncle Sam ever finds out about it, it will be debarred from the mails. We have already given a sample of the prose cultivated by this new venture; but this "Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists" has still other claims to consideration. The very first article ought not to have been written, to say nothing of being published; one of the poems seems to rest mainly on the strength of its swearing; and other contributions are in line with these. The temper and the grammar may both be seen from the following (the italics are ours):

It really makes no difference to the race's welfare what such ignoramuses think, and it

would seem that any author preparing to write about Negroes in Harlem or anywhere else should take *whatever phases of their life that seem the most interesting to him*, and develop them as he pleases.

Just one hundred years ago this year a young poet of England not yet quite eighteen years of age, brought out with his brother a little book called "Poems by Two Brothers." Three years later he brought out another volume, and three years later still another. By this time the critics of England had found him out, and they at last convinced him that he did not as yet have full mastery of his medium. He did not become discouraged, and he did not lose faith in himself; instead he went off for a season of study. He studied ten years before he published again; he studied Greek, Latin, and Italian poetry, and all the forms that that poetry assumed; he read history and philosophy and theology; and he criticised himself unmercifully. When he returned to the scene in 1842 he was the foremost

poet of his country, and he held his place without challenge for fifty years.

The name of that poet was Alfred Tennyson, and we commend his example to the young writers of the Negro race. The so-called renaissance has given us such a book as that by Mr. Walrond, and such work of promise as that by Mr. White and Mr. McKay; and these men would probably have written even if there had been no "renaissance" at all. In general, however, the younger group of writers has been indifferent to the need of taking pains; one after another has refused to master technique; and it is all the more to be lamented that they have been overpraised and that their vulgarity has been mistaken for art. Already, however, the day of jazz is over; charlatanry has defeated itself. He who would be a poet in the new day must not only have a vision; he must labor unceasingly to give that vision beautiful and enduring form. Only thus can there be an abiding contribution to literature; only thus can all the hopes and prizes be justified.

LLOYD MORRIS

The Negro "Renaissance" (1930)

Recently there appeared in the newspapers an item reporting the endowment of a chair to the memory of Ira Aldridge in the new Shakespeare Memorial Theater at Stratford-on-Avon. The funds for this memorial were contributed entirely by colored citizens of the United States in appreciation of the place held by one of their race as a great tragedian in theatrical history. Aldridge died nearly seventy years ago, and the honor which his memory is now receiving serves to remind us that the contemporary contribution of the colored race to the arts is not lacking in a long and honorable tradition. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the "Negro renaissance" of the last few years is rather a renaissance of interest on the part of a white audience than a renaissance of production on the part of Negro artists.

The names of Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson, and Charles Gilpin are thoroughly familiar to lovers of music and the theater. Yet few of their white admirers are apt to think of them as being other than exceptional; as being, in fact, the first members of their race to distinguish themselves in the more serious realms of music and drama. It does not derogate from the honor due them that this impression is false.

Their predecessor, Ira Aldridge, was a picturesque and romantic figure who, seventy or eighty years ago, achieved European celebrity as the "African Roscius." The accounts of his early life are conflicting. One reports him as a mulatto born in Maryland and apprenticed to a German ship carpenter. Another states that he was the son of a native of Senegal who was brought to America as a slave, became a

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Christian, and was later pastor of a church in New York City.

Whatever Aldridge's early life may have been, it is known that he became the servant of Edmund Kean, the famous Shakespearean actor, and that he accompanied Kean to England in the early years of the nineteenth century. Later he returned to America and appeared on the stage in Baltimore without success. He again went to England and made his debut at the Royalty Theatre in London in the role of Othello. He was an instantaneous success and achieved wide popularity. In 1852 he essayed the role of Aaron in "Titus Andronicus," and at Belfast he played Othello to the Iago of Edmund Kean. Before his death in 1867 Aldridge had toured Europe, had been decorated by the emperors of Austria and Russia and the king of Prussia, and had been elected a member of several of the great European academies.

When we speak of the contemporary Negro renaissance, it is of literature that we usually think first, for the contribution of colored writers to recent American fiction and poetry has been substantial and significant. Nearly all readers of poetry have become acquainted with the verse of James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes; nearly everyone who has been concerned with the general revival of poetry in America appreciates the valiant service to art of William Stanley Braithwaite, the critic and anthologist.

Similarly, many readers of fiction are familiar with the names of W.E.B. Du Bois, Claude McKay, Wallace Thurman, Walter White, Nella Larsen Imes, Jessie Fauset. Moreover, long before the younger Negro novelists had begun writing, discerning readers had already discovered the works of Charles W. Chesnutt, the most distinguished of modern American colored novelists, and those of Paul Laurence Dunbar, to whom recognition came chiefly as a poet.

The literary tradition of the colored race is, as we are apt to forget, not only creditable but passably long. The first Negro writer of distinction of whom we have any record was Juan Latino, professor of Latin at the University of Granada, who published a volume of Latin

poems in 1573, and a work dealing with the Escorial in 1576. Latino's first work was thus published twenty years before the earliest published work of Shakespeare. In northern Europe the first Negro to receive a degree from a university was Jacobus Elisa Joannes Capitein, who was made a Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Leyden, and whose thesis for his degree, which ironically enough was a defense of slavery, was published in 1742.

From the time of Latino to the present day the contribution of the colored race to literature has been abundant and unbroken. Negroes have written in Arabic, French, Portuguese, Russian, German, and Spanish. Two writers with colored blood, Pushkin and Dumas, were among the most eminent of nineteenth-century European men of letters. Frederic Marcellin some of whose novels merit translation into English, wrote with distinction of the life of his people in Hayti. And the most celebrated of contemporary Brazilian writers of fiction, Machado de Assais, was a Negro.

The literary tradition of the Negro in the United States begins with Jupiter Hammond, who lived on Long Island, and who, about 1760, began publishing broadsides in verse. A much more picturesque figure, however, was Phillis Wheatley, a Negro slave who was sold in Boston, whose "Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral" was first published in London in 1773 and has since been republished in fifteen editions, the last of which appeared in 1915. The title page of the first edition of her work announces its author as "Negro servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston, in New England." Her verse was sufficiently meritorious to bring her a letter of congratulation from George Washington, and it is pleasant to know that her increasing poetical reputation won her her freedom.

A contemporary of Phillis Wheatley, Benjamin Banneker, similarly attracted the attention of a President. Banneker published, during the years from 1791 to 1796, a series of almanacs which revealed a considerable knowledge of astronomy. President Thomas Jefferson, the foremost of intellectual liberals in America, sent a copy of one of Banneker's almanacs to his

friend, the French philosopher Condorcet, to illustrate his contention that the Negro had the same potentialities as the white man.

A little after Phillis Wheatley there emerged another slave poet named George Horton, whose volume of verse, "The Hope of Freedom," was published in 1827. Following Horton, the next Negro poet to achieve any considerable distinction was Mrs. Frances Harper, whose verse had so widespread a vogue as to sell in the tens of thousands of copies. Mrs. Harper's work was especially popular with the Abolitionists, and she forms a link between the earlier and later colored writers in this country, for she published a novel as late as 1893, when Chesnutt and Dunbar were first beginning to publish.

Mention of the Abolitionists suggests the part which they played in the development of at least one phase of the literary production of the colored race. Under their inspiration more than one hundred slave narratives, some only narrated and some actually written by escaped slaves, were published in England and this country before the Civil War. The most celebrated of slave narratives were the three volumes written by Frederick Douglass: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, published in 1846; *My Bondage and My Freedom*, published in 1855, and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, published in 1882.

The first volume of fiery protest against slavery was *Walker's Appeal Addressed to Colored Citizens of the World*, which was first published in 1829 and ran through three editions. It urged the slaves to rise against their white masters; as may be supposed, copies were promptly destroyed in the South whenever located, and the book has become exceedingly rare.

The first novel of Negro life in America was written by a fugitive slave named William Wells Brown. It was published in England in 1852 under the title of *Clotelle: or the President's Daughter*. When it was published in the United States the title, for obvious reasons, was changed to *Clotelle: or the Colored Heroine*. Eleven years later Brown published another volume, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius and His Achievements*. Meanwhile, in 1857, another novel of Negro life appeared: *The Garies and*

Their Friends, by Frank J. Webb, which carried an appreciative introduction by Harriet Beecher Stowe. These two novels have claims to be considered the predecessors of the many contemporary novels by colored authors which study the relation between the colored and white races in our civilization.

The period after the Civil War saw the publication of a large number of propaganda race novels by colored writers, most of which were privately printed. It witnessed likewise the publication of a large controversial literature attempting to establish that principle of equality of potentiality which Jefferson affirmed to Condorcet. The first important volume of this kind was Major Martin R. Delaney's "Principia of Ethnology," published in 1879, and perhaps the most recent is Dr. Du Bois's "The Gift of Black Folk," published five years ago.

The attention which has been focused upon the novels and poetry of contemporary colored writers has obscured the contribution made by Negroes to other departments of literature and scholarship. For colored writers have written admirable books upon almost every variety of subjects: folklore, sociology, criticism of the arts, history, embryology, African and Polar exploration, law, classical languages and literatures, and philosophy, among them.

The contribution to historical literature begins as early as 1855 with William C. Nell's *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*. The contribution to scientific literature begins in 1847 when Richard Hill, Jamaica Negro, collaborated with P. H. Gosse, the father of Edmund Gosse, on *Birds of Jamaica*. This volume was followed four years later by Gosse's *A Naturalist's Sojourn in Jamaica*, which made liberal acknowledgment of his indebtedness to Hill.

The first book on exploration by a Negro was Major Martin R. Delaney's report of an expedition sent to explore the Niger Valley, which was published in 1861; the most famous is Matthew Henson's *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole*, for which an introduction was written by Peary.

Professor W. S. Scarborough, of Wilberforce University, published a Greek reader in 1881 which for many years was a standard

college textbook. He had been fired to distinguish himself as a classical scholar by having, in his childhood, run across Henry Clay's sarcastic statement that when he had heard a Negro conjugate a Greek verb or decline a Greek noun, he would believe in the potential equality of the Negro mind to the white.

The only Creole grammar in English was written by a Negro scholar, J. J. Thomas, and although it was published in 1869 it has not been superseded. Two standard works on law, Scott's book on interstate extradition and Cosey's book on land titles, are the work of Negro authors. In the field of physics there is Robert T. Browne's *The Mystery of Space, A Study of the*

Hyperspace Movement. In pedagogy, there is Gilbert H. Jones's *Education in Theory and Practice*. And a Negro graduate of West Point, Colonel Charles Young, has written a standard work on military tactics, *Military Morale of Nations and Races*.

The contemporary Negro renaissance in the arts is making a significant and interesting contribution to our culture; there is no longer any doubt of that. But that it is a renaissance of anything more than our interest in the work of colored writers and artists is doubtful. The tradition of creative expression and of scholarship among the colored race is too old to be still considered new.

MARTHA GRUENING

The Negro Renaissance (1932)

"Being a Negro writer in these days is a racket and I'm going to make the most of it while it lasts. I find queer places for whites to go to in Harlem . . . out-of-the-way primitive churches, side-street speakeasies and they fall for it. About twice a year I manage to sell a story. It is acclaimed. I am a genius in the making. Thank God for this Negro Literary Renaissance! Long may it flourish!"

In these words a minor character in Wallace Thurman's *Infants of the Spring* expresses in terms of cynical self-interest what has for some time been only too apparent to some of those interested in the artistic expression of the Negro. Elsewhere in the book its hero is shown in the midst of a black and white gin party. "This," he kept repeating to himself, "is the Negro Renaissance and this is about all the whole damn thing is going to amount to. . . . It is going to be necessary, he thought, to have another emancipation to deliver the emancipated Negro from a new kind of slavery."

Yet it is only seven years ago that some of us who today find an echo of these savage words in our hearts hailed with high hopes the beautiful and colorful volume *The New Negro*,

edited by Alain Locke, and accepted its premise of a younger Negro generation on the threshold of a new era of accomplishment. They were no longer bound together, Locke wrote confidently, "by a common problem, but by a common consciousness" and "shedding the chrysalis of the Negro problem they were achieving something of a spiritual emancipation."

It was inevitable that this prophecy could only be partially fulfilled. From that consciousness of which Locke wrote, and probably far more from individual impulse, unregimented by any such herd instinct, has come in the intervening years some real achievement. And much more might have come if the so-called Negro Renaissance had not been ballyhooed and exploited commercially and socially, until it has been, to a large extent, degraded into a racket. It was always too much to hope that 12,000,000 Americans of any race or color could, in our chaotic civilization, achieve a solidarity of thought and experience which would result in genuine expression. The finest products of the Renaissance have been distinctly individual as, for instance, the extraordinary work of Jean Toomer. But Toomer has published little,

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if anything, since *Cane* appeared in 1923. Meanwhile the mystical and probably mythical concept of a common Negro consciousness has for some time been superseded by a very definite consciousness, common alike to white and black writers of a very definite and marketable fashion in literature and art for all things Negroid. Among Negroes this has resulted, among other things, in the kinds of writing which are the objects of Wallace Thurman's attack.

Infants of the Spring, like Thurman's earlier *The Blacker the Berry*, is in a sense a pioneering book. It is the first serious and aggressive attempt that I know of by a Negro writer to debunk the Negro Renaissance in a thoroughgoing manner. It is bitter, disillusioned, and probably unfair in its wholesale rejection of nearly everything being done by Negro artists and writers. But in spite of this and in spite of its somewhat crude and journalistic writing, there is an exhilaration to be gained from its angry honesty. It will no doubt be glibly denounced as "unconstructive," and indeed, it makes no pretense of being anything else. For it is simply the hearty individual expression of an individual disgust with life in general, and with the Negro Renaissance in particular, by a writer too keenly sincere and individualistic to find an easy escape from its sterility by such frequently suggested and ready-made panaceas as flight into communism, back to a problematical "African Inheritance" or into the ranks of the bourgeois Negro writers who "have nothing to say, and who write only because they are literate and feel they should apprise white humanity of the better classes among Negro humanity."

It is especially by their type of novel and by the uncritical acclamation with which examples of it have been received, I think, that the Negro Renaissance has been debased. One can almost establish a standard novel that will combine the worst features of all of them. Almost inevitably it will have a foreword by some professional foreworder like Carl Van Vechten or maybe Zona Gale, stating among other things how novel and unique it is. If it is in the Carl Van Vechten tradition it will probably have a glossary of Harlemeese and certainly it will include a scene in which a Harlem ball or soirée is invaded by

uplifting or merely curious palefaces, who are promptly knocked out by the ease, beauty, and sophistication of the rainbow-tinted members of the gathering. It is also practically obligatory for at least one member of the white group to make the very natural faux pas of mistaking some Negro light enough to "pass" for a Nordic, and to behave with a complete and pitiable lack of savoir faire when he discovers his mistake. To find this wearisome is not for a moment to deny that such incidents occur frequently in real life; a very great number of light Colored People must have experienced white uncouthness of this kind, but writing suffers as much from a stencil based on such incidents as it does from stencils of the Uncle Tom and Mammy variety to which these same writers very properly object. The real argument of these Negro novels could be summed up in almost every case as follows:

"I am writing this book because most white people still believe that all Colored People are cooks called Mandy or Pullman porters called George—but they aren't. They think we all live in cotton-field cabins or in city slums, but actually some of us live on Edgecombe Avenue or Chestnut Street. We don't all shout at Camp Meetings or even all belong to the Baptist or Methodist Church. *Some of us are Episcopalians*. If you were privileged to visit our homes (which you aren't, for we are just as exclusive as you are) you would find bathtubs, sets of the best authors, and *etcbings* on the walls! That's how refined we are. We have class distinctions, too. Our physicians' wives snub our hairdressers and our hairdressers our cooks, and so on down the line. The daughters of our upper classes are beautiful and virtuous and look like illustrations in *Vogue*. They are also far more attractive than white girls of the same class, for they come in assorted shades of bronze, tan, fawn, beige, hazel, chestnut, amber, cream, gold, lemon, orange, honey, ivory, and persimmon. You would, of course, be attracted to the heroine of this book, but as you are white, you are, in nine cases out of ten, a cad with dishonorable intentions. We'll allow the tenth case out of pure magnanimity. But in any case the heroine would scorn you because in the last chapter she will marry the dark hero and be happy ever after. She might,

being human, have been tempted perhaps for a moment by the wealth and power you represent and by the immunity from insult and discrimination which 'passing' would mean for her, but even if she weren't too noble and loyal to yield to such temptation in the end the call of race would be too strong for her. Joy isn't on your side of the line, nor song, nor laughter, etc., etc." We have heard all this many times before, and we are likely to hear it many times again.

Nearly all these novels have been wholly devoid of literary merit, but they have a certain documentary value in revealing what is on the minds of a large portion of the Negro Intelligentsia, as well as of many Negroes who do not technically belong to it. Among recently published novels Jessie Fauset's *The Chinaberry Tree* is an outstanding example of this type. This, her third novel, like its predecessors is dedicated to the proposition that there are Colored ladies and gentlemen and that these constitute Colored Society. As propaganda this is no sillier than the stale counter-propaganda to which it is a retort, but the fact remains that a rather serious waste of Negro intelligence and sensitivity is still going into the writing of such books. What is obvious from them is that the long frustrated, ambitious, struggling Negroes of the upper and middle classes still accept and jealously cherish the values of capitalistic civilization. They accept these values very much as they move into white neighborhoods as white people abandon them. And in this acceptance there has been much more than the snobbery and silliness which books like Miss Fauset's make pathetically and ludicrously evident. It represents two generations of struggle and achievement away from slavery toward a promised land, a goal which as they near it has all the unsubstantiality of a mirage. One may even concede that the struggle was noble and the achievement praiseworthy, and still feel that new day of the Negro Renaissance, if it comes, will not be made by those unable to detach their emotions from this mirage. Moreover, everything that can be said in favor of this goal was said once and for all, far better and more movingly than it has ever been said since in Du Bois's eloquent *The Souls of Black Folk*. And even

The Souls of Black Folk, somehow, dates a little today. It is, for all its beauty, a little Victorian, moralistic, and slightly rhetorical; but it is moving as its successors are not because it is passionate and militant, where they are merely complacent, because its author was in those days the leader of a forlorn hope, rather than a Negro Babbitt.

Negro Babbitry exists and there is no reason why it should not be depicted; so do Intellectual Negro groups and Negro Smart Sets, but the Negro novels written about them have very generally been novels of neurosis. Instead of novels of Negro life they have been *prospectuses*, designed to sell to white readers the idea of Negro upper classes. But if there have been few if any good novels written about the Negro Bourgeoisie there have been at least three first rate novels about Negro Proletarian life. All three were written by Negro poets. Negro poets have very generally been spare-time poets—and proletarians. They have been cooks, dishwashers, floor-scrubbers, shoe-shiners, waiters, stevedores, Pullman porters, stokers, or have worked at any of the various forms of rough and casual menial labor open to American Negroes.

Langston Hughes is one of these poets, who having spent much of his life in the world of labor has inevitably been close to the life of the masses of his race. It was out of this experience that he wrote *Not Without Laughter*, which is not only uniquely moving and lovely among Negro novels but among books written about America. It is affirmative in a sense in which no other book by an American Negro is, for it is the story of a Negro happily identified with his own group, who because of this identification tells what is essentially, despite the handicaps of poverty and prejudice, the story of a happy childhood. The poverty was never sordid; for one thing it was country poverty in a growing small town of the Middle West, and the child had a backyard to play in, in which there was an apple tree, and flowers as well as clothes lines.

"Here the air was warm with sunlight and hundreds of purple and white morning glories laughed on the back fence. Earth and sky were fresh and clean after the heavy night rain and . . . there was the mingled scent of wet earth

and golden pollen on the breeze that blew carelessly through the clear air." It was poverty, but never sodden or defeated though the child's grandmother toiled all day at her washtub washing the white folk's clothes and his mother sweated all day in the white woman's kitchen, while his handsome, vagabond father went fishing and played the guitar; even though eventually there was no place in Stanton for his pretty, fun-loving Aunt Harriet but the sinful house in the "bottoms" where on

summer evenings little yellow and brown and black girls in pink and blue bungalow aprons laughed invitingly in door-ways and dice rattled with the staccato gaiety of jazz music on long tables in rear rooms; pimps played pool; bootleggers lounged in big, red cars; children ran in the streets until midnight with no voice of parental authority forcing them to an early sleep; young blacks fought like cocks and enjoyed it; white boys walked through the streets winking at Colored girls; men came in autos; old women ate pigs' feet and water-melon and drank beer; whiskey flowed; gin was like water; soft indolent laughter didn't care about anything, and deep nigger-throated voices that had long ago stopped rebelling against the ways of this world rose in song.

It was poverty enlivened by singing and laughter, by strong, if casual, family affection and occasional family quarrels; by carnivals and camp meetings, by lodge meetings and regalia after the day's work was done, for: "Evening's the only time we niggers have to ourselves—Thank God for night—'cause all day you give to the white folks." Simple and touching, yet by some miracle always avoiding sentimentality, the story is told with a happy tenderness which recalls Katherine Mansfield's dictum that in fiction the beginning of art is *remembering*. It has the courage of its tenderness for Negro things, a serene and robust acceptance of the common things, the sights and smells and sounds, the folk-ways and idiosyncrasies of the people who made up one little Colored boy's background; and through this acceptance and evocation of

them it communicates the very feeling and texture of life.

The only other American novel I know which seems to me comparable with *Not Without Laughter* is Willa Cather's *My Antonia*. Both books have, in common, somewhat the same quality of radiant sanity. Both communicate, in spite of relatively small canvases, a feeling of earth and sun and air, of a strong life with deep folk-roots. In both a poetic quality is due in part to the fact that the story is told reminiscently through the eyes of a child reflecting a child's curiosity and sensibility and wonder, and that the child in each case was a potential poet. In both there is ugliness and hardship and pain, but in both these incidents are dominated by a triumphant vitality, an open-eyed resilience in the face of life. And this, too, is a quality that is characteristic of Langston Hughes and which sings through his poems whether he is writing of Beale Street Love or Railroad Blues or of

The steam in hotel kitchens
And the smoke in hotel lobbies
And the slime in hotel spittoons
Part of my life

and is implicit in his high-hearted chant, "I, Too":

I, too, sing America
I am the darker brother
They send me
To eat in the kitchen
When company comes
But I laugh
And eat well
And grow strong.

Tomorrow
I'll sit at the table
When company comes
Nobody'll dare
Say to me
"Eat in the kitchen"
Then.

Besides
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed.

I, too, am America.

Claude Mackay [sic] is another vagabond poet who has brought a somewhat similar experience to rich fruition in his novels *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*. Mackay [sic], too, has worked in the white man's kitchens, and on wharves and trains and the stokeholes of steamers. He has known the life of a down-and-out beachcomber on the waterfront of Marseilles, and that of a poor farm boy in Jamaica. Older and more mature than Hughes, more complex and possibly deeper, he seems to have reached by a more difficult path an adjustment which in Hughes is instinctive. While his early associations seem to have had somewhat the same happy quality as Hughes' childhood and a far more beautiful setting—what hardships there were were due to poverty rather than to color—if one may judge by his writings he seems to have experienced the full cruelties of race and class struggle after his arrival in America in 1912. He was the first of the Negro intellectuals to be a radical in the political and economic sense as well as a militant rebel on behalf of his race. His novels *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* are full of a deep and bitter wisdom, but also full of humor and zest for life. *Home to Harlem* specializes in those aspects of Harlem life that are not mentioned in polite Harlem society, at least if white people are present: Promiscuous and happy love making, drinking, jazzing, shooting and razor flashing; the life of the high yellow "sweet-back" and of the black women who work for him; instinctive, rhythmic life—frequently joyous, but with undertones of cruelty and savagery.

These aspects are presented convincingly through the consciousness of two very different types of Negro—Jake, a simple, uneducated, American working man who delights in most of them, and Ray, the exiled sensitive Haitian student. Ray finds in Harlem the extremes of joy and despair and finally flees from it because he was entangled with a girl and feared that some day "the urge of the flesh and the mind's hankering after the pattern of respectable comfort might chase his high dreams out of him and deflate him to the contented animal that was a Harlem Nigger strutting his stuff. 'No happy-nigger strut for me' he would mutter

when the feeling for Agatha worked like a fever in his flesh. . . . And he hated Agatha and, for escape, wrapped himself darkly in self-love."

Jake returning to Harlem from overseas could find joy on Seventh Avenue where "the lovely trees were a vivid green flame and . . . the smooth bare throats of brown girls were tokens as charming as the first pussy willows." He could find it at the Congo, the amusement place, entirely for the unwashed of the black belt. You could go to the Congo and turn rioting loose in all the tenacious odors of service and the warm indigenous smells of Harlem, fooping or jig jagging the night away. You would if you were a black kid hunting for joy in New York. But,

Ray felt more and his range was wider and he could not be satisfied with the easy simple things that sufficed for Jake. Sometimes he felt like a tree with roots in the soil and sap flowing out and the whispering leaves drinking in the air. But he drank in more of life than he could distill into active animal living. Maybe that was why he felt he had to write.

He was a reservoir of that intense emotional energy so peculiar to his race. Life touched him emotionally in a thousand vivid ways. Maybe his own being was something of a touchstone of the general emotions of his race. Any upset—a terror-breathing, Negro-baiting headline in a metropolitan newspaper or the news of a human bonfire in Dixie could make him miserable and despairingly despondent like an injured child. While any flash of beauty or wonder might lift him happier than a god. It was the simple, lovely touch of life that stirred him most. . . . The warm, rich brown face of a Harlem girl seeking romance . . . a late, wet night on Lenox Avenue when all forms are soft shadowy and the street gleams softly like a still, dim stream under the misted yellow lights. He remembered once the melancholy-comic notes of a 'Blues' rising out of a Harlem basement before dawn. He was going to catch an early train and all that trip he was

sweetly, deliciously happy, humming the refrain and imagining what the interior of the little dark den he heard it in was like. 'Blues' . . . melancholy-comic. That was the key to himself and his race. That strange, child-like capacity for wistfulness and laughter. . . .

Going away from Harlem . . . Harlem! How terribly Ray could hate it sometimes. Its brutality, gang rowdyism, promiscuous thickness. Its hot desires. But, oh, the rich blood-red color of it! The warm accent of its composite voice, the fruitiness of its laughter, the trailing rhythm of its blues and the improvised surprise of its jazz. He had known happiness, too, in Harlem, joy that glowed gloriously upon him like the high noon sunlight of his tropic island home.

Banjo is a bitter and devastating picture of the white man's civilization as it looks to the black man at the bottom of it, and of the free and instinctive life which the irresponsible and uneducated black man can still manage to live in an ever tightening, mechanical white civilization. "For civilization had gone out among these native, earthy people, had despoiled them of their primitive soil, had uprooted, enchainèd, transported and transformed them to labor under its laws, and yet lacked the spirit to tolerate them within its walls."

That this primitive child, this kinky-headed, big-laughing black boy of the world did not go down and disappear under the serried rush of the trampling white feet; that he managed to remain on the scene, not worldly wise, not "getting there," yet not machine-made, nor poor-in-spirit like the regimented creatures of civilization was baffling to civilized understanding. Before the grim, pale rider-down of souls he went his careless way with a primitive hoofing and a grin. From these black boys he could learn to live . . . how to exist as a black boy in a white world and rid his conscience of the used up hussy of white morality. He could not scrap his intellectual life and be entirely like them. He did not want or feel any urge to "go back" that way. . . . Ray wanted to hold on to his

intellectual acquirements without losing his instinctive gifts.

But also he knew that though it was easy enough for Banjo who in all things acted instinctively it was not easy for a Negro with an intellect standing watch over his instincts to take his way through the white man's world . . . but of one thing he was resolved: civilization should not take the love of color, joy, beauty, vitality and nobility out of *his* life and make him like the mass of its poor pale creatures. . . . Could he not see what Anglo-Saxon standards were doing to some of the world's most interesting people? Some Jews ashamed of being Jews. Changing their names and their religion . . . for the Jesus of the Christians! Educated Negroes ashamed of their race's intuitive love of color, wrapping themselves up in respectable gray, ashamed of Congo sounding laughter, ashamed of their complexions . . . ashamed of their strong appetites. No being ashamed for Ray! Rather than lose his soul, let intellect go to Hell and live instinct.

Writing of this kind is, of course, very exasperating to the Negro Intelligentsia. Some of them may protest with justice that they are being *themselves* in conforming to the standards of the white civilization in which they live, since it seems to them good except in so far as it discriminates against them; that they are not merely Negroes but Americans as well, dark Americans, to be sure, but still fulfilling themselves legitimately through the usual American channels. This clash of views is not limited to Colored Americans. Every racial minority in America, with the possible exception of the Irish, is divided between those of its members who wish to sink themselves, their blood and their differences in the majority, and the proudly or defensively race conscious who wish to take their stand on this blood and this difference. Among Colored People, particularly, the logic of facts may actually be with the first group. Owing to the extravagance of anti-Negro prejudice any person, however white, is classed as Colored if he is known to possess a single drop

of Colored blood. A "Negro" thus arbitrarily created is not necessarily being himself any more when he sings spirituals or jazzes, than when he follows what are usually accepted as white behavior patterns. If Negro art has struck deeper roots, as I think it has, in the soil of the race conscious attitude it is because it has been the more affirmative and liberating. Conformity to white standards, on the other hand, has very generally meant conformity to the most standardized elements in our civilization—its negations, its drabness, its gentility. But this is not, I think, inherently or eternally true and even today the best writing is by Negroes in whom this consciousness is transcended. Thus *Not Without Laughter* is not merely a chronicle of Negro family life. The story of hard working, stay-at-home Annjee's helpless love for her vagabond husband, of Harriet's rebellion against her mother's puritanism, the true and sensitive picture of Sandy's boyhood and adolescence are rich and warm and full-flavored because of certain Negro qualities that Langston Hughes knows and loves, but the book's hold on our emotions is independent of these. They merely enhance the truth of what the perceptive artist in Hughes has felt about love between a man and a woman, about the clash of the generations, and the awakening consciousness of a boy. *Home to Harlem* has given us the most poignant and unforgettable picture of the substratum on which our commercial civilization is built in the half-dozen pages which describe

Ray, the Negro student waiter, tossing in a half-waking nightmare in the vermin-infested bunkhouse of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Here Color is an added element of torture and humiliation in the life of the underdog. It makes escape from this life difficult if not impossible, but it is only part of the picture into which Mackay [sic] has distilled the very essence of the horror and despair the cruelty at the roots of our civilization must awaken sometimes in any sensitive mind. Color again is an element, but only one element in the entrancingly comic feud between the Negro cook and the Negro waiters on the dining car which ended with the cook's discomfiture and demotion. Color again plays an important part in the sweeping epic of *Banjo*, but *Banjo* is an immensely rich book because it is far more than a story of Color. It is a story of beachcombing and vagabondage, of the clash not only between black and white, of civilization and primitive races, but of civilization at grips with itself, and of the detached and frequently humorous clarity, with which the beachcomber, black or white, who keeps clear of it except for the occasional necessity of working or panhandling sees it for the thing it is.

"A good story," Ray says at one point, "in spite of those who tell it and those who hear it is like good ore that you might find in any soil—Europe, Asia, Africa, America. The world wants the ore and gets it by a thousand men, scrambling and fighting, dying and digging for it. The world gets its story in the same way."

ALLISON DAVIS

Our Negro "Intellectuals" (1928)

For nearly ten years, our Negro writers have been "confessing" the distinctive sordidness and triviality of Negro life, and making an exhibition of their own unhealthy imagination, in the name of frankness and sincerity. Frankness is no virtue in itself, however, as any father will tell his son, nor is sincerity. A dog or savage is "sincere" about his bestialities, but he is not therefore raised above them. The modern novel

has been frankly and sincerely preoccupied with sex, but has not escaped an insane naturalism. It is a question, then, of the purpose for which one is being sincere. It is quite evident that the sincerity of Milton, of Fielding, and of Dr. Johnson is different in kind from the sincerity of Mr. D. H. Lawrence and Mr. James Joyce. If sincerity is to justify one in exploiting the lowest traits of human nature, and in ignoring

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that sense in man which Cicero says differentiates him from other animals,—his sense for what is decent—then sincerity is a pander to a torpid animalism.

The plea of sincerity, of war against hypocrisy and sham, therefore, is no defence for the exhibitionism of Mr. George S. Schuyler and Mr. Eugene Gordon, nor for the sensationalism of such works as Dr. Rudolph Fisher's *High Yaller* or Mr. Langston Hughes' *Fine Clothes to the Jew*. The first two writers by their coarse frivolousness and scan dalmongering falsely represent that the Negro has no self-respect. A bawling confession from the house-tops is a poor substitute for honest and discriminating self-examination, in race criticism as in religion. Mr. Schuyler and Mr. Gordon may be clever intellectual gymnasts; as such they belong with the vaudeville, and not with the men who set new currents of thought moving in Negro life. Of our Menckenites, however, more later; let us first include in our view those who ought to be termed our Van Vechtenites. Mr. Van Vechten is not responsible for the beginning of our literary effort to appear primitive, but he brought the movement to its complete fruition, and gave it the distinction of his patronage.

Our writers started almost ten years ago to capitalize the sensational and sordid in Negro life, notably in Harlem, by making it appear that Negro life is distinctive for its flaming "color," its crude and primitive emotion. This facile acceptance of the old, romantic delusion of "racial literatures," which goes back beyond Taine all the way to Mme. de Stael, was a convenient mould for the energies of writers who had no tradition to guide them in treating Negro themes. What was more to the point, it interested the sophisticated reading public, at the height of the "jazz age" following the war, because it seemed to bring fresh and primitive forces to a jaded age.

These young writers hit upon two means of injecting primitivistic color in their work; one, the use of the Harlem cabaret and night life, and the other, a return to the African jungles. Since Mr. McKay's *Harlem Dancer*, the cabaret has been an unhealthy obsession with these youths, who in their relative naïveté imagine

that there is something profoundly stirring about the degradation of its habitués. Even the best writers, Mr. McKay, Mr. Cullen, Mr. Hughes, and Dr. Fisher, as well as many of their less gifted imitators, have exploited the cabaret. The jazz band became the model which the Negro poet sought to imitate. It is particularly unfortunate that Mr. James Weldon Johnson should yield to this jazzy primitivism in choosing the title *God's Trombones* for a work purporting to represent the Negro's religious fervor. Of course here, as always, the Negro movement must be seen in relation to the broader current of American literature. Mr. Waldo Frank, Mr. Scott Fitzgerald, and a host of other white authors were at the same time popularizing the jazz complex. In illustration, moreover, Mr. Miguel Covarrubias and Mr. Winold Reiss did more than Mr. Aaron Douglas and Mr. Richard Bruce to represent the Negro as essentially bestialized by jazz and the cabaret.

In this mad rush to make the Negro exhibit his sensational and primitivistic qualities, our young writers did not lack white support. Mr. Carl Van Doren encouraged them in this fashion: "But if the reality of Negro life is itself dramatic, there are of course still other elements, particularly the emotional power with which Negroes live—or at least to me seem to live. What American literature decidedly needs at the moment is color, music, gusto, the free expression of gay or desperate moods. If the Negroes are not in a position to contribute these items, I do not know what Americans are." Mr. Max Rheinhardt spoke of the necessity for the Negro dramatist's remaining true to the original spontaneity of his race by portraying "pure emotion, almost independent of words or setting." This myth of the spiritual and artistic virtue of spontaneous emotion in the Negro was enthusiastically supported by Mr. Carl Van Vechten. I think that the severest charge one can make against Mr. Van Vechten is that he misdirected a genuine poet, who gave promise of a power and technique exceptional in any poetry,—Mr. Hughes. Mr. Van Vechten disclaims any influence upon Mr. Hughes first book, *The Weary Blues*, for which he wrote a preface expressing undiluted primitivism. The evident reply

is that the drop from the best poems of this first book to any of those in *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, which Mr. Van Vechten undoubtedly *did* influence, is the real proof of his having finally misdirected Mr. Hughes.

Now came the devastating result of the primitivism which our Negro writers had concocted and made a holy cause. *Nigger Heaven* was the *lelos*, the perfect flowering of the "cabaret school." By means of the same sensational primitivism and the creation of half a dozen cabarets which Harlem could never boast, Mr. Van Vechten warped Negro life into a fantastic barbarism. What was most pernicious in *Nigger Heaven* was the representation that the Negro upper class is identical with the pleasure seekers and cabaret-rounders. *Nigger Heaven* was the logical out-come of the forces our "intellectuals" had championed for five years, and in a very real sense these "intellectuals" were responsible for its writing and its success. With its appearance there arose in the minds of many Negro writers and readers some doubt concerning the whole movement toward "color" and exhibitionism. The most prominent writers, however, could not evade the natural result of their own practice, and defended Mr. Van Vechten on the ground of artistic sincerity, for which they found proof chiefly in his mixing socially with Negroes. Here again the pretense of sincerity justified the most unalleviated sensationalism. In fact, the total effect of the whole movement was that Negroes are sincerely bestial.

An atavistic yearning for the African jungles, which was entirely simulated, was the second device of these poets for adding "color" to the Negro. The desire of young poets to "dance naked under palm trees," and to express themselves in jungle loves has been the favorite device for making poetry authentically Negroid. Tom-toms, love-dances, strange passions and savage urges have been the paraphernalia of almost every budding poetaster. Even Mr. Cullen made especial use of the jungle urge in his early and best known poems, "Heritage" and "The Shroud of Color." This whole primitivistic interpretation of the Negro is the white man's facile point of view, and our Negro "intellectuals"

wanted to appear as the white man would have them. The most important assertion of the related primitivism of cabaret and jungle is the work of a white poet, Mr. Lindsay's *Congo*. There is nothing more foreign to the Negro's imagination than this yearning for savage Africa, and it is a false note every time it is struck by a Negro poet. The African tradition which we want to uncover and make fruitful is certainly not that of savagery, but of self-containment, fortitude, and culture.

At times the poets achieved something beautiful and significant in spite of their material and creed. Mr. McKay's poem, "Harlem Shadows" touches on nobility and a higher imaginative view than most American realistic poetry ever reaches. The title poem of Mr. Hughes' *The Weary Blues* created a representative symbol for the frustration and inertia into which Negro life is penned. There were poems in McKay, Cullen, and Hughes which gave evidence of a higher understanding of Negro life, but this quality of their imagination was not developed. Mr. Hughes especially chose to exploit the meretricious themes of jazz, instead of developing the powers shown in such poems as "Aunt Sue's Stories" and "When Sue Wears Red." The indubitable gift of Mr. Hughes and of one or two other poets was sacrificed to a dogma, which necessitated their being atavistic and "colorful" at the expense of a full and experimental development of their imagination. The untrammeled self-expression which the supporters of the movement claimed for it was actually freedom only to be as *primisivistic* as one liked. There was no freedom from the creed that a Negro poet ought to be barbaric.

II

Our primitivistic poets and storytellers have been ousted from the stage lately by a rising group of young critics, writing for magazines and Negro newspapers. They are Menckenites, largely inspired by their master's attack upon Negro preachers and "misleaders," and his heralding of the self-critical Negro. Now the

genuine critic is the individual who can fix upon the excellent and significant in the welter of all that is obvious and passing, and who can reveal how this seed may be made fruitful. Even though he must expose what is trivial or pernicious, he moves from a perception of what is true. Such a critic will illustrate his higher standards by the point from which he attacks false standards. His criticism, then, is vital, even in the act of denying. We do not look to him for reform and solutions, but we do expect him to give currency to real and high principles. In applying these standards with an *esprit de finesse* to the ever shifting flux of the energies which make for chaos, he will give perspective to the so-called "men of action."

A vital grasp upon standards, then, and the ability to apply them flexibly to the "gushing forth of novelties" which is the other side of life are the qualifications of the critic. Our Negro "intellectuals" have tried to substitute a display of their own and the race's eccentricities for these virtues. Mr. Schuyler and Mr. Gordon are likely to become the forerunners of a line of young critics, who will pose as the thoughtful and emancipated Negro. They will pretend to represent a positivistic and experimental attitude toward the Negro's situation, to replace the religious fatalism and inferiority complex of our older leaders. It is precisely this specious liberalism in our little Menckenites, which makes them dangerous. The Negro to-day is at a critical and strategic point of transition, where the cry of intellectual emancipation will lead him after false lights, unless he is willing to be thoroughly critical. We must avoid the recurrent, human tendency to exchange one extreme for another. Complete trust of all that parades as intelligence, and an effort to be hypercritical are not the proper cure for an inferiority complex. Smartness and a superficial cynicism are not substitutes for reflection and vision.

Mr. Schuyler and Mr. Gordon are interested only in expressing themselves, their cleverness without taste, their radicalism without intelligence, their contempt for Negro leaders and our upper class, uninformed by serious principles. The most obvious fact concerning Mr. Schuyler's

articles is their coarse flippancy which he no doubt means to be a protective hardening for the sensitiveness and race-consciousness of Negroes. But to become hardened to such terms as "smoke," "Ziggaboo," "crow," "dinge," "shine," or to take refuge in thumbing one's nose by hurling back "cracker," "peckerwood," and "hill-billy," is not to gain stoical strength, but to lose self-respect. The qualities which have kept the Negro's spirit unbroken are a gift for irony of a broader kind, and an everlasting fortitude.

Reflection and contemplation, alone, can insure the critic's virtues of perspective and balance. Reflection is made evident by one's discrimination, one's power of making vital distinctions. What Mr. Schuyler, Mr. Gordon, and their school, as well as Mr. Mencken, lack, is just this faculty of discriminating judgment. Mr. Schuyler especially reveals his lack of all standards in his frivolous and universal cynicism. In his indiscriminate jeering at all efforts to ameliorate white animosity and injustice, and at the efforts of such men as "Dr. Lampblack of the Federal Society for the Exploitation of Lynching, who will eloquently hold forth for the better part of an hour on the blackamoor's gifts to the Great Republic, and why therefore, he should not be kept down," Mr. Schuyler betrays his own intellectual muddle.

Mr. Gordon's innocence of any standards and his intellectual confusion are illustrated by his naive theory that the tradition which the Negro wants to preserve is that of the black-face minstrel and the Stephen Foster folk. *The Negro's Inhibitions*, so far as it is at all honest and serious, is an unconscious *reductio ad absurdum* of the primitivistic creed. The Negro is to treasure his eccentricities simply because they are spontaneous and differentiate him from the white man! If Mr. Gordon had any real perception he would have found ideals based upon the character of the Negro which distinguish him from the white man in a more fundamental sense. The qualities which have moulded the Negro are not emotional crudeness and colorful spontaneity; they are fortitude, an oriental spirituality and unworldliness, and a faculty of laughing at any tendency towards self-pity which more

than anything human approaches the laughter of Mr. O'Neil's Lazarus!

Without intelligent standards, then, our Menckenites still insist upon expressing themselves. What they really set up for our improvement, in the place of standards, is their own personality. The virtue of their writing they believe to lie in the brilliance and iconoclastic smartness with which they demolish what is obviously ignorant and mean. Every man or movement treated is warped and caricatured by the necessity for displaying their own temperament. Mr. Schuyler expresses his fantastic misconception of the affluence recently acquired by Negro writers, in this fashion: "the black scribblers, along with the race orators, are now wallowing in the luxury of four-room apartments, expensive radios, Chickering pianos, Bond Street habiliments, canvas-back duck, pre-war Scotch, and high yellow mistresses." And Mr. Schuyler is "wallowing" in his own temperament! Similarly Mr. Gordon's representation that most Negroes are blind apes of everything in the white world is only a reflection of his individual desire to pose before the white public. So long as we have had romantic confessionalists, we have been acquainted with those who desire "to publish themselves," in Emerson's phrase; but when they set themselves up as serious critics, they become public dangers.

III

Our "intellectuals," then, both those in literature and those in race criticism, have capitalized the sensational aspects of Negro life, at the expense of general truth and sound judgment. Primitivism has carried the imagination of our poets and storytellers into the unhealthy and abnormal. A sterile cynicism has driven our Menckened critics into smart coarseness. With regard to the primitivists, the first thing to

be settled is whether our lives are to be interpreted with relation to the Negro race or the human race. Are there any traits peculiar to Negro character, and if so, are those traits especially crude emotions? It will appear, I think, that the qualities of fortitude, irony, and a relative absence of self-pity are the most important influences in the lives of Negroes, and that these qualities are the secret strength of that part of us which is one with a universal human nature. Our poets and writers of fiction have failed to interpret this broader human nature in Negroes, and found it relatively easy to disguise their lack or a higher imagination by concentrating upon immediate and crude emotions.

Our critic "intellectuals" also lack this quality of elevation. Mr. Schuyler, Mr. Gordon, and their imitators (at two removes from Mr. Mencken!) are preoccupied with the sordid and trivial aspects of Negro life. On the whole, the facts of Negro life are sordid; they have been so for three hundred years, as a result of slavery, and will very likely remain so for sometime to come. *We are going on our grit*, and it is these higher secret powers which I have indicated, (call them spiritual or chemical, as you like) which we must preserve and apply intelligently to our future development. Self-respect is vital if we are to retain our courage, and self-respect is precisely the quality which these critics lack. "Such conceits as clownage keeps in pay" are their qualifications, and the Negro has had enough clowning,—from his leaders down. I have already defined the true critic as the individual who holds fast to his perception of what is excellent and real, in the midst of appearances, and who applies his standards with discrimination to the flux of actual life. The genuinely qualified critics of Negro life will fix upon the inner strength of Negro character as illustrated in the last three hundred years, and, discounting the trivial and irrelevant, will reinterpret these persistent characteristics for the new Negro to whom he will be as an eye.

CLAUDE McKAY

For a Negro Magazine (1934)

Ten years ago all the literary circles of America were enlivened by talk of a Negro Renaissance. Appreciative and interpretative articles in newspaper and magazines were duly followed by a fat little crop of Negro books by white and colored authors. The vogue for Negro music attained its peak. African Negro sculpture found a place in modern art circles beside the art of other peoples.

Looking back to that period today the Negro Renaissance seems to have been no more than a mushroom growth that could send no roots down in the soil of Negro life.

About this apparent setback there are many opinions. Some think that the field was over unscrupulously exploited. Others that the national interest in the artistic expression of the Negro was only a passing fad.

But we believe that any genuine artistic expression can transcend a fad; that the Negro's contribution to literature and art should have a permanent place in American life; that American life will be richer by such contribution; and that it should find an outlet and a receptive audience.

Therefore, our aim is to found a magazine to give expression to the literary and artistic aspirations of the Negro; to make such a magazine of national significance as an esthetic interpretation of Negro life, exploiting the Negro's racial background and his racial gifts and accomplishments.

We want to encourage Negroes to create artistically as an ethnological group irrespective of class and creed. We want to help the Negro as writer and artist to free his mind of the shackles imposed upon it from outside as well as within his own racial group.

We mean to go forward in the vanguard of ideas, trends, thoughts and movements. But we are not demanding that the creative Negro should falsely accept nostrums and faiths that he does not understand. We realize that there are creative persons whose reaction to life is instinctive and emotional like actors who say their lines grandly without knowing what they really are about. We are not demanding that writers and artists should be more intellectual and social-minded in their work than they are constitutionally capable of being.

Nevertheless we have standards to which we will hold our contributors, such as:

Sincerity of purpose

Freshness and keenness of perception

Adequate form of expression

The magazine is to be established under the editorship of Claude McKay, who has often been referred to as a pioneer of the so-called Negro Renaissance.

Mr. McKay has returned to this country after over 11 years' residence abroad, during which time he has traveled extensively and written a number of novels. He has not only kept in close touch with the social and artistic trends of American Negro life in their purely racial as well as radical phases, but he has also an international outlook on the Negro besides a store of experience from his long residence in different countries of Europe and [Africa].

From his mature experiences and broad outlook we believe that he will forge an adequate and keen instrument for the expression of genuine Negro talent.

ERIC WALROND

Art and Propaganda (1921)

Ernest Boyd in the Literary Review criticizes the judges who awarded the coveted "Prix Goncourt" to Rene Marin, the Martiniquan Negro, whose "Batouala" they adjudged the best French novel of the year. Tied to the conventions of literature, Boyd found too many African words in the book; it is replete with crotches and quavers and demisemiquavers. Ignoring the rules of rhetoric, the author plunges along at a desperate rate, forgetful of the landmarks of style, form, clarity. With all these things Mr. Boyd finds fault. Also, he sniffs at the introduction to the work, which is a carping, merciless indictment of the brutal colonial system of France. As far as Mr. Boyd can see, what on earth has all this to do with a work of art, a penetrating study of a savage chieftain? Incidentally, Mr. James Weldon Johnson throws a ray of light on the subject. Mr. Johnson tells us there is a tendency on the part of Negro poets to be propagandic. For this reason it is going to be

very difficult for the American Negro poet to create a lasting work of art. He must first purge himself of the feelings and sufferings and emotions of an outraged being, and think and write along colorless sectionless lines. Hate, rancor, vituperation—all these things he must cleanse himself of. But is this possible? The Negro, for centuries to come, will never be able to divorce himself from the feeling that he has not had a square deal from the rest of mankind. His music is a piercing, yelping cry against his cruel enslavement. What little he has accomplished in the field of literature is confined to the life he knows best—the life of the underdog in revolt. So far he has ignored the most potent form of literary expression, the form that brought Marin the Goncourt award. When he does take it up, it is not going to be in any half-hearted, wishy washy manner, but straight from the shoulder, slashing, murdering, disemboweling! In the manner of H. L. Mencken!

WILLIS RICHARDSON

Propaganda in the Theatre (1924)

The stage, the screen, the press, the pulpit, and, in fact, every instrument that has the ear and eye of the public, has been used at one time or the other, and very effectively, in the interests of propaganda. Such photoplays as "Civilization" used to get election results, and "The Birth of a Nation," used for creating anti-Negro feeling, have had their day and served their petty purposes. Many other screen productions of less fame have done their part in arousing the enthusiasm or creating the feeling their authors and producers wanted them to create; but since this paper is to deal with the spoken drama, we shall here let the records of the silent drama rest.

In dealing with the spoken drama one does not have to think very long to become aware that this is one of the very best means of getting an idea before the public. A propaganda play is a play written for the purpose of waging war against certain evils existing among the people, in order to cause those people who are in sympathy with the play's purpose to be up and doing, and in order to gain the sympathy of those people who have seldom, or never, thought upon the subject. To cut the description down, a propaganda play is a play written for some purpose other than the entertainment of an audience.

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Bernard Shaw, who is the most important person in the drama at the present time, is, with

the possible exception of Eugene Brieux, the drama's leading propagandist. Since Shaw's writing of "Widowers' Houses" and "Mrs. Warren's Profession," propaganda in the theatre has been very much alive. In "Widowers' Houses" he strikes a mighty blow at greedy landlordism, at the same time pointing to the fact that the young man and woman of property are slaves to their wealth. "Mrs. Warren's Profession" is a harsh criticism of the system which compels a single woman to choose between the two evils of working for starvation wages and selling herself.

Eugene Brieux, that other great propagandist of the theatre, has given us play after play, each of which has been a masterly criticism of some evil in our present system. "The Red Robe" and "Damaged Goods" are the best known of these plays. "Damaged Goods" is known to the general public because of the public's curious desire to see the Frenchman lay bare the evils of venereal diseases. His masterpiece, "The Robe," is not so well known. Here Brieux shows all the greed of the judges for greater power, and their unfair methods of gaining the influence which gives such power.

Maxim Gorki surely had a deeper reason for writing "The Lower Depths" than simply the depiction of the characters of poverty-stricken Russians. He wanted to show the "smug citizens," as he called them, how the other half lived, so that perhaps they might question the wherefore and why of their less fortunate brother's condition.

Gerhart Hauptmann's "Weavers" is another forceful document against capitalistic greed. Although the claim is that the play is unsuitable for stage presentation, it still ranks as the masterpiece of the greatest writer in Germany at the present time.

Arnold Bennett, in one of his works for the theatre, *What the Public Wants*, takes his scene to one of the *Five Towns* and presents us with a play flaying yellow journalism.

James B. Fagan, with a theme similar to Bennett's and with material better chosen and more universal than that used by the author of the "Five Towns," gives us a better play in *The*

Earth, a play which stands out as the everlasting enemy of the nefarious newspaper article.

When I recalled the two last mentioned plays I thought it would be an excellent thing if some of us who have the ability to write in the drama would write a few plays against the yellow journalism in America which arouses prejudice against us, which promotes riots, which in the guise of friendship strikes at us from every angle and raises a mountain of obstacles in the pathway of our progress.

No sane person would doubt for a moment that the condition of the Negro race in America ought to be changed; and as long as the powers that be refuse to enforce the laws, there is nothing to be done but bring the matter before the public mind for the purpose of changing the opinion of the people. For years those who have been interested in the making of this change have worked upon public opinion with nearly every available method from the prayer meeting to the indignation meeting. How much service either of these methods has rendered, I leave to the judgment of others; but the stage is one medium which has not been used to any extent.

When Miss Grimké wrote "Rachel" we thought we had a good beginning of propaganda plays, but the idea seems to have ended there save in the case of the small but earnest efforts of Mrs. Carrie Clifford in Washington and other energetic little people like her in many cities. Mrs. Clifford's little plays have been far from masterpieces, as she readily acknowledges, but they have been something; and if those like her in other cities would follow her example on a gradually increasing scale we should soon have a powerful medium for propaganda. How much might have been gained if such a beginning as "Rachel" had been followed by three or four such plays each year? I wonder if people do not go to the theatre with more unprejudiced minds than they sit down to read a newspaper or magazine. Anyone who reads these paragraphs can easily see that I am not one of those who believe that a propaganda play is no play at all, and the plays of many of the leading playwrights in the world to-day are

excellent refutations of any who hold such a strict opinion.

With propaganda plays I think wonders may be done for the cause of the Negro. On the stage his desire and need for social equality (without which there is no other equality), for equality before the law, equality of opportunity, and all his other desires may be shown. Every phase and condition of life may be depicted from that of Maeterlinck's old man sitting quietly in the lamp light to that which Swinburne describes when he sings of

Fierce midnights and famishing morrows
And the loves that complete and control
All the joys of the flesh, all the sorrows
that wear out the soul.

The lives and problems of the educated with their perfect language and manners may be shown as well as the lives and problems of the

less fortunate who still use the dialect. To many of you educated and cultured among us who,

While in your pride ye contemplate
Your talents, power, and wisdom,

may object to the use of dialect on the stage, I say, that neither fifty years nor a thousand years from slavery is sufficiently long to enable a man to completely forget his mother tongue. We know nothing of the language our African ancestors spoke; we have learned the English language, but the dialect of the slave days is still the mother tongue of the American Negro.

So, to be able to sit in your stall at the theatre and witness the interesting things in the lives of your kinsmen, no matter what may be their condition of life, speech, or manners, passing before you on the stage, ought to be a source of great pleasure to each and every one of you.

W.E.B. DU BOIS

Criteria of Negro Art (1926)

The question comes next as to the interpretation of these new stirrings, of this new spirit: Of what is the colored artist capable? We have had on the part of both colored and white people singular unanimity of judgment in the past. Colored people have said: "This work must be inferior because it comes from colored people." White people have said: "It is inferior because it is done by colored people." But today there is coming to both the realization that the work of the black man is not always inferior. Interesting stories come to us. A professor in the University of Chicago read to a class that had studied literature a passage of poetry and asked them to guess the author. They guessed a goodly company from Shelley and Robert Browning down to Tennyson and Masefield. The author was Countee Cullen. Or again the English critic John Drinkwater went down to a Southern seminary, one of the sort which finishes young white

women of the South. The students sat with their wooden faces while he tried to get some response out of them. Finally he said, "Name me some of your Southern poets." They hesitated. He said finally, "I'll start out with your best: Paul Laurence Dunbar!"

With the growing recognition of Negro artists in spite of the severe handicaps, one comforting thing is occurring to both white and black. They are whispering, "Here is a way out. Here is the real solution of the color problem. The recognition accorded Cullen, Hughes, Fauset, White, and others shows there is no real color line. Keep quiet! Don't complain! Work! All will be well!"

I will not say that already this chorus amounts to a conspiracy. Perhaps I am naturally too suspicious. But I will say that there are today a surprising number of white people who are getting great satisfaction out of these younger Negro writers because they think it is

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going to stop agitation of the Negro question. They say, "What is the use of your fighting and complaining; do the great thing and the reward is there." And many colored people are all too eager to follow this advice; especially those who weary of the eternal struggle along the color line, who are afraid to fight and to whom the money of philanthropists and the alluring publicity are subtle and deadly bribes. They say, "What is the use of fighting? Why not show simply what we deserve and let the reward come to us?"

And it is right here that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People comes upon the field, comes with its great call to a new battle, a new fight and new things to fight before the old things are wholly won; and to say that the beauty of truth and freedom which shall some day be our heritage and the heritage of all civilized men is not in our hands yet and that we ourselves must not fail to realize.

There is in New York tonight a black woman molding clay by herself in a little bare room, because there is not a single school of sculpture in New York where she is welcome. Surely there are doors she might burst through, but when God makes a sculptor He does not always make the pushing sort of person who beats his way through doors thrust in his face. This girl is working her hands off to get out of this country so that she can get some sort of training.

There was Richard Brown. If he had been white he would have been alive today instead of dead of neglect. Many helped him when he asked but he was not the kind of boy that always asks. He was simply one who made colors sing.

There is a colored woman in Chicago who is a great musician. She thought she would like to study at Fontainebleau this summer where Walter Damrosch and a score of leaders of art have an American school of music. But the application blank of this school says: "I am a white American and I apply for admission to the school."

We can go on the stage; we can be just as funny as white Americans wish us to be; we can play all the sordid parts that America likes to assign to Negroes; but for anything else there is still small place for us.

And so I might go on. But let me sum up with this: Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white Americans in the novels and essays they have written. What would people in a hundred years say of black Americans? Now turn it around. Suppose you were to write a story and put in it the kind of people you know and like and imagine. You might get it published and you might not. And the "might not" is still far bigger than the "might." The white publishers catering to white folk would say, "It is not interesting"—to white folk, naturally not. They want Uncle Toms, Topsies, good "darkies," and clowns. I have in my office a story with all the earmarks of truth. A young man says that he started out to write and had his stories accepted. Then he began to write about the things he knew best about, that is, about his own people. He submitted a story to a magazine which said, "We are sorry, but we cannot take it." "I sat down and revised my story, changing the color of the characters and the locale and sent it under an assumed name with a change of address and it was accepted by the same magazine that had refused it, the editor promising to take anything else I might send in providing it was good enough."

We have, to be sure, a few recognized and successful Negro artists; but they are not all those fit to survive or even a good minority. They are but the remnants of that ability and genius among us whom the accidents of education and opportunity have raised on the tidal waves of chance. We black folk are not altogether peculiar in this. After all, in the world at large, it is only the accident, the remnant, that gets the chance to make the most of itself; but if this is true of the white world it is infinitely more true of the colored world. It is not simply the great clear tenor of Roland Hayes that opened the ears of America. We have had many voices of all kinds as fine as his and America was and is as deaf as she was for years to him. Then a foreign land heard Hayes and put its imprint on him and immediately America with all its imitative snobbery woke up. We approved Hayes because London, Paris, and Berlin approved him and not simply because he was a great singer.

Thus it is the bounden duty of black America to begin this great work of the creation of beauty, of the preservation of beauty, of the realization of beauty, and we must use in this work all the methods that men have used before. And what have been the tools of the artist in times gone by? First of all, he has used the truth—not for the sake of truth, not as a scientist seeking truth, but as one upon whom truth eternally thrusts itself as the highest hand-maid of imagination, as the one great vehicle of universal understanding. Again artists have used goodness—goodness in all its aspects of justice, honor, and right—not for sake of an ethical sanction but as the one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest.

The apostle of beauty thus becomes the apostle of truth and right not by choice but by inner and outer compulsion. Free he is but his freedom is ever bounded by truth and justice; and slavery only dogs him when he is denied the right to tell the truth or recognize an ideal of justice.

Thus all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent.

In New York we have two plays: "White Cargo" and "Congo." In "White Cargo" there is a fallen woman. She is black. In "Congo" the fallen woman is white. In "White Cargo" the black woman goes down further and further and in "Congo" the white woman begins with degradation but in the end is one of the angels of the Lord.

You know the current magazine story: a young white man goes down to Central America and the most beautiful colored woman there falls in love with him. She crawls across the whole isthmus to get to him. The white man says nobly, "No." He goes back to his white sweetheart in New York.

In such cases, it is not the positive propaganda of people who believe white blood divine, infallible, and holy to which I object. It is the denial of a similar right of propaganda to those

who believe black blood human, lovable, and inspired with new ideals for the world. White artists themselves suffer from this narrowing of their field. They cry for freedom in dealing with Negroes because they have so little freedom in dealing with whites. Du-Bose Heywood writes "Porgy" and writes beautifully of the black Charleston underworld. But why does he do this? Because he cannot do a similar thing for the white people of Charleston, or they would drum him out of town. The only chance he had to tell the truth of pitiful human degradation was to tell it of colored people. I should not be surprised if Octavius Roy Cohen had approached the *Saturday Evening Post* and asked permission to write about a different kind of colored folk than the monstrosities he has created; but if he has, the *Post* has replied, "No. You are getting paid to write about the kind of colored people you are writing about."

In other words, the white public today demands from its artists, literary and pictorial, racial pre-judgment which deliberately distorts truth and justice, as far as colored races are concerned, and it will pay for no other.

On the other hand, the young and slowly growing black public still wants its prophets almost equally unfree. We are bound by all sorts of customs that have come down as second-hand soul clothes of white patrons. We are ashamed of sex and we lower our eyes when people will talk of it. Our religion holds us in superstition. Our worst side has been so shamelessly emphasized that we are denying we have or ever had a worst side. In all sorts of ways we are hemmed in and our new young artists have got to fight their way to freedom.

The ultimate judge has got to be you and you have got to build yourselves up into that wide judgment, that catholicity of temper which is going to enable the artist to have his widest chance for freedom. We can afford the truth. White folk today cannot. As it is now we are handing everything over to a white jury. If a colored man wants to publish a book, he has got to get a white publisher and a white newspaper to say it is great; and then you and I say so. We must come to the place where the work of art when it appears is reviewed and acclaimed by

our own free and unfettered judgment. And we are going to have a real and valuable and eternal judgment only as we make ourselves free of mind, proud of body and just of soul to all men.

And then do you know what will be said? It is already saying. Just as soon as true art emerges; just as soon as the black artist appears, someone touches the race on the shoulder and says, "He did that because he was an American, not because he was a Negro; he was born here; he was trained here; he is not a Negro—what is a Negro anyhow? He is just human; it is the kind of thing you ought to expect."

I do not doubt that the ultimate art coming from black folk is going to be just as beautiful, and beautiful largely in the same ways, as the art

that comes from white folk, or yellow, or red; but the point today is that until the art of the black folk compels recognition they will not be rated as human. And when through art they compel recognition then let the world discover if it will that their art is as new as it is old and as old as new.

I had a classmate once who did three beautiful things and died. One of them was a story of a folk who found fire and then went wandering in the gloom of night seeking again the stars they had once known and lost; suddenly out of blackness they looked up and there loomed the heavens; and what was it that they said? They raised a mighty cry: "It is the stars, it is the ancient stars, it is the young and everlasting stars!"

ALAIN LOCKE

Art or Propaganda? (1928)

Artistically it is the one fundamental question for us today.—Art or Propaganda. Which? Is this more the generation of the prophet or that of the poet; shall our intellectual and cultural leadership preach and exhort or sing? I believe we are at that interesting moment when the prophet becomes the poet and when prophecy becomes the expressive song, the chant of fulfillment. We have had too many Jeremiahs, major and minor; and too much of the drab wilderness. My chief objection to propaganda, apart from its besetting sin of monotony and disproportion, is that it perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it. For it lives and speaks under the shadow of a dominant majority whom it harangues, cajoles, threatens, or supplicates. It is too extroverted for balance or poise or inner dignity and self-respect. Art in the best sense is rooted in self-expression and whether naive or sophisticated is self-contained. In our spiritual growth genius and talent must more and more choose the role of group expression, or even at times the role of free individualistic expression,—in a word must choose art and put aside propaganda.

The literature and art of the younger generation already reflects this shift of psychology, this regeneration of spirit. David should be its patron saint: it should confront the Phillistines with its five smooth pebbles fearlessly. There is more strength in a confident camp than in a threatened enemy. The sense of inferiority must be innerly compensated, self-conviction must supplant self-justification and in the dignity of this attitude a convinced minority must confront a condescending majority. Art cannot completely accomplish this, but I believe it can lead the way.

Our espousal of art thus becomes no mere idle acceptance of "art for art's sake," or cultivation of the last decadences of the over-civilized, but rather a deep realization of the fundamental purpose of art and of its function as a tap root of vigorous, flourishing living. Not all of our younger writers are deep enough in the sub-soil of their native materials,—too many are pot-plants seeking a forced growth according to the exotic tastes of a pampered and decadent public. It is the art of the people that needs to be cultivated, not the art of the coteries.

our own free and unfettered judgment. And we are going to have a real and valuable and eternal judgment only as we make ourselves free of mind, proud of body and just of soul to all men.

And then do you know what will be said? It is already saying. Just as soon as true art emerges; just as soon as the black artist appears, someone touches the race on the shoulder and says, "He did that because he was an American, not because he was a Negro; he was born here; he was trained here; he is not a Negro—what is a Negro anyhow? He is just human; it is the kind of thing you ought to expect."

I do not doubt that the ultimate art coming from black folk is going to be just as beautiful, and beautiful largely in the same ways, as the art

that comes from white folk, or yellow, or red; but the point today is that until the art of the black folk compels recognition they will not be rated as human. And when through art they compel recognition then let the world discover if it will that their art is as new as it is old and as old as new.

I had a classmate once who did three beautiful things and died. One of them was a story of a folk who found fire and then went wandering in the gloom of night seeking again the stars they had once known and lost; suddenly out of blackness they looked up and there loomed the heavens; and what was it that they said? They raised a mighty cry: "It is the stars, it is the ancient stars, it is the young and everlasting stars!"

ALAIN LOCKE

Art or Propaganda? (1928)

Artistically it is the one fundamental question for us today.—Art or Propaganda. Which? Is this more the generation of the prophet or that of the poet; shall our intellectual and cultural leadership preach and exhort or sing? I believe we are at that interesting moment when the prophet becomes the poet and when prophecy becomes the expressive song, the chant of fulfillment. We have had too many Jeremiahs, major and minor; and too much of the drab wilderness. My chief objection to propaganda, apart from its besetting sin of monotony and disproportion, is that it perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it. For it lives and speaks under the shadow of a dominant majority whom it harangues, cajoles, threatens, or supplicates. It is too extroverted for balance or poise or inner dignity and self-respect. Art in the best sense is rooted in self-expression and whether naive or sophisticated is self-contained. In our spiritual growth genius and talent must more and more choose the role of group expression, or even at times the role of free individualistic expression,—in a word must choose art and put aside propaganda.

The literature and art of the younger generation already reflects this shift of psychology, this regeneration of spirit. David should be its patron saint: it should confront the Phillistines with its five smooth pebbles fearlessly. There is more strength in a confident camp than in a threatened enemy. The sense of inferiority must be innerly compensated, self-conviction must supplant self-justification and in the dignity of this attitude a convinced minority must confront a condescending majority. Art cannot completely accomplish this, but I believe it can lead the way.

Our espousal of art thus becomes no mere idle acceptance of "art for art's sake," or cultivation of the last decadences of the over-civilized, but rather a deep realization of the fundamental purpose of art and of its function as a tap root of vigorous, flourishing living. Not all of our younger writers are deep enough in the sub-soil of their native materials,—too many are pot-plants seeking a forced growth according to the exotic tastes of a pampered and decadent public. It is the art of the people that needs to be cultivated, not the art of the coteries.

Propaganda itself is preferable to shallow, truckling imitation. Negro things may reasonably be a fad for others; for us they must be a religion. Beauty, however, is its best priest and psalms will be more effective than sermons.

To date we have had little sustained art unsubsidized by propaganda; we must admit this debt to these foster agencies. The three journals which have been vehicles of most of our artistic expressions have been the avowed organs of social movements and organized social programs. All our purely artistic publications have been sporadic. There is all the greater need then for a sustained vehicle of free and purely artistic expression. If *HARLEM* should happily till this need, it will perform an honorable and constructive service. I hope it may, but should it not, the need remains and the path toward it will at least be advanced a little.

We need, I suppose in addition to art some substitute for propaganda. What shall that be? Surely we must take some cognizance of the fact that we live at the centre of a social problem.

Propaganda at least nurtured some form of serious social discussion, and social discussion was necessary, is still necessary. On this side: the difficulty and shortcoming of propaganda is its partisanship. It is one-sided and often prejudging. Should we not then have a journal of free discussion, open to all sides of the problem and to all camps of belief? Difficult, that,—but intriguing. Even if it has to begin on the note of dissent and criticism and assume Menckian scepticism to escape the commonplaces of conformity. Yet, I hope we shall not remain at this negative pole. Can we not cultivate truly free and tolerant discussion, almost Socratically minded for the sake of truth? After Beauty, let Truth come into the Renaissance picture,—a later cue, but a welcome one. This may be premature, but one hopes not,—for eventually it must come and if we can accomplish that, instead of having to hang our prophets, we can silence them or change their lamentations to song with a Great Fulfillment.

ALAIN LOCKE

Propaganda—or Poetry? (1936)

As the articulate voices of an oppressed minority, one would naturally expect the work of Negro poets to reflect a strongly emphasized social consciousness. That is the case, if gauged by their preoccupation with the theme of race. But whereas the race consciousness factor has been strong for obvious reasons, more generalized social-mindedness has been relatively weak in Negro poetry, and until recently the form of it which we know today as class consciousness has been conspicuously absent.

Before broaching an interpretation, let us look at the facts. Negro expression from the days of Phyllis Wheatley was pivoted on a painfully negative and melodramatic sense of race. Self-pity and its corrective of rhetorical bombast were the ground notes of the Negro's poetry for several generations. The gradual

conversion of race consciousness from a negative sense of social wrong and injustice to a positive note of race loyalty and pride in racial tradition came as a difficult and rather belated development of spiritual maturity. This and its group analogue—a positively toned morale of group solidarity—was the outstanding feature of Negro development of the post-World War period. I would not recant my 1925 estimate of this, either as a symptom of cultural maturity or as a sign of a significant development in the Negro folk consciousness. However, I would not confuse this upsurging of race consciousness with a parallel maturing of social consciousness, such as seems recently to be taking place. I do think, however, that the Negro could only be spurred on to the development of social consciousness in his creative expression through

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the previous intensification and change of tone of his racial consciousness.

But for a long while it was quite possible for the Negro poet and writer to be a rebel and protestant in terms of the race situation and a conforming conventionalist in his general social thinking. Just as it was earlier possible for many Negroes to be anti-slavery but Tory, rather than Whig in their general politics. The average Negro writer has thus been characteristically conservative and conformist on general social, political, and economic issues, something of a traditionalist with regard to art, style, and philosophy, with a little salient of racial radicalism jutting out in front—the spear-point of his position. Many forces account for this, chief among them the tendency the world over for the elite of any oppressed minority to aspire to the conventionally established values and court their protection and prestige. In this the Negro has been no exception, but on that very score is not entitled to exceptional blame or ridicule.

There is an additional important factor in accounting for the lack of social radicalism in the Negro's artistic expression. This comes from the dilemma of racialism in the form in which it presents itself to the American Negro. Let me state it, with grateful acknowledgments, in the words of Rebecca Barton's admirable but little known study, "Race Consciousness and the American Negro."

The Negroes have no distinctive language to help foster their uniqueness. Their religion is the same fundamentally as that of the white group. There is no complete geographical isolation or centralization in one part of the country. On leaving their particular community they find themselves in a white world which suggests that the only claim they have for being a distinctive group is their color, and that this is nothing to arouse pride. Their manners, habits and customs are typically American, and they cannot escape from a certain economic and cultural dependence on the white people. They have not as much inner content to nurture their separate group life in America as national groups composed of immigrants

from the Old World. Too great insistence upon withdrawing into their race would be an unhealthy escape, and would damage the chances of group efficiency by a balanced adjustment to the larger environment. . . . On the other hand, race values are too important not to preserve, and if the Negroes tried to identify themselves completely with white America, they feel that there would be a cultural loss. The skepticism as to any uniqueness of race temperament which has biological roots may be justified, but there is plenty in the distinctive social experience of the group to account for it and to give it tangible substance. The solution becomes one of being both a Negro and an American. It is the belief of many that this middle course can be taken, that the Negro can still be his individual self and yet cooperate in American life. If the building up of some group tradition is encouraged only as long as it is harmonious with fuller participation in national culture, then it can be a center from which creative activity can radiate. From this point of view, the racialism of the Negro is no limitation or reservation with respect to American life; it is only a constructive effort to build the obstructions in the stream of his progress into an efficient dam of social energy and power.

It is this flaming dilemma that has narrowed and monopolized the social vision of the Negro artist. Race has been an obsession with him, and has both helped and hampered his spiritual progress. However, it is absurd to expect him to ignore it and cast it aside. Any larger social vision must be generated from within the Negro's race consciousness, like the adding of another dimension to this necessary plane of his experience. The deepening social consciousness of Negro poets actually follows this expected course from its earliest beginning even to the present.

As early as 1914, Fenton Johnson flared out with a mood of emotional revolt and social indictment that was half a generation ahead of its time. Johnson went much further than the usual rhetorical protest against social injustice; he

flung down a cynical challenge and a note of complete disillusionment with contemporary civilization. His contemporaries were too startled to catch the full significance of "Tired" and "The Scarlet Woman."

Tired

I am tired of work; I am tired of building
up somebody else's civilization.
Let us take a rest, M'Lissy Jane.
I will go down to the Last Chance Saloon,
drink a gallon or two of gin, shoot a
game or two of dice and sleep the rest of
the night on one of Mike's barrels.
You will let the old shanty go to rot, the
white people's clothes turn to dust, and
the Calvary Baptist Church sink to the
bottomless pit.
You will spend your days forgetting you
married me and your nights hunting the
warm gin Mike serves the ladies in the
rear of the Last Chance Saloon.
Throw the children into the river;
civilization has given us too many. It is
better to die than it is to grow up and
find out that you are colored.
Pluck the stars out of the heavens. The stars
mark our destiny. The stars marked my
destiny.
I am tired of civilization.

The Scarlet Woman

Once I was good like the Virgin Mary and
the Minister's wife.
My father worked for Mr. Pullman and
white people's tips, but he died two days
after his insurance expired.
I had nothing, so I had to go to work.
All the stock I had was a white girl's
education and a face that enchanted the
men of both races.
Starvation danced with me.
So when Big Lizzie, who kept a house for
white men, came to me with tales of
fortune that I could reap for the sale of
my virtue I bowed my head to Vice.
Now I can drink more gin than any man for
miles around.
Gin is better than all the water in Lethe.

Claude McKay's vibrant protests of a few years later deserve mention, although in social philosophy they are no more radical because the indignation is fired by personal anger and the threat of moral retribution. McKay was a rebel, but an individualistic one. And so, for the most part was Langston Hughes, except in his later phase of deliberate proletarian protest. In his earlier poetry, Hughes has a double strain of social protest; the first, based on a curious preoccupation (almost an obsession) with the dilemma of the mulatto, and the other, a passionate description of the suppressed worker. But in both, Hughes' reaction is that of an ironic question mark or the mocking challenge of a folk laughter and joy which cannot be silenced or suppressed. "Loud-mouthed laughers in the hands of Fate": Hughes throws his emotional defiance into the teeth of oppression. He rarely extends this mood to systematic social criticism or protest, often suggests, instead of a revolutionary solution, emotional defiance and escape—as in

Cross

My old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I'm sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well.

My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I'm gonna die,
Being neither white nor black?

and

A bright bowl of brass is beautiful to the
Lord.
Bright polished brass like the cymbals
Of King David's dancers,
Like the wine cups of Solomon.
Hey, boy!
A clean spittoon on the altar of the
Lord....
At least I can offer that.

This is hardly more socialistic than Countee Cullen's well-turned epigram

For a Certain Lady I Know

She even thinks that up in Heaven,
Her class lies late and snores,
While poor black Cherubs rise at seven
To do celestial chores.

or Waring Cuney's

The Radical

Men never know
What they are doing.
They always make a muddle
Of their affairs,

They always tie their affairs
Into a knot
They cannot untie.
Then I come in
Uninvited.

They do not ask me in;
I am the radical,
The bomb thrower,
I untie the knot
That they have made,
And they never thank me.

These were the moods of 1927–31; and though they are not Marxian or doctrinal, their emotional logic is significantly radical. They have one great advantage over later more doctrinal versification—they do have poetic force and artistry.

Right here we may profitably take account of an unfortunate insistence of proletarian poetry on being drab, prosy and inartistic, as though the regard for style were a bourgeois taint and an act of social treason. Granted that virtuosity is a symptom of decadence, and preciousity a sign of cultural snobbishness, the radical poet need not disavow artistry, for that is a hallmark of all great folk-art. The simplicity, calm dignity and depth of folk art have yet to be constructively considered by the bulk of the proletarian exponents of our present scene. This decline in poetic force, terseness and simplicity is noticeable in the majority of the overtly radical

Negro poetry. In his later poems that more directly espouse the cause of the masses, Langston Hughes, for example, is much less of a poet; he is often merely rhetorical and melodramatic rather than immersed in the mood. "Scottsboro Limited" (1932) marks with him the definite transition from the folk concept to the class concept. But instead of the authentic folk note, the powerful and convincing dialect, the terse moving rhythm of his lyric and his "blues" period, or the barbed and flaming ironies of his earlier social challenge, we have turgid, smouldering rhetoric, rimed propaganda, and the tone of the ranting orator and the strident prosecutor. I have two criticisms in passing, made in the interests of effective expression of the very reactions in question and the radical objectives themselves. The fire of social protest should flame, not smoulder; and any expression on behalf of the Negro masses should exhibit the characteristic Negro folk artistry.

That is why we should scan the horizon for the appearance of a true spokesman for the black masses, an authentic voice of the people. As yet, he seems not at hand. But a succession of younger poets points in his direction. Richard Wright, Frank Marshall Davis, Sterling Brown show a gradually nearer approach to the poetry that can fuse class consciousness with racial protest, and express proletarian sentiment in the genuine Negro folk idiom. And with this we approach a really effective and probably lasting poetry. Even Hughes moves on between 1933 and 1935, from the turgid tractate drawl of his "Letter to the Academy" (1933):

But please—all you gentlemen with beards
who are so wise and old, and who write
better than we do and whose souls have
triumphed (in spite of hungers and wars
and the evils about you) and whose
books have soared in calmness and
beauty aloof from the struggle to the
library shelves and the desks of students
and who are now classics—come
forward and speak upon
The subject of the Revolution.
We want to know what in the hell you'd say?

to the terser, homelier, more effective “Ballad of Roosevelt”:

The pot was empty,
The cupboard was bare.
I said, Papa
What's the matter here?
“I'm waitin' on Roosevelt, son,
Roosevelt, Roosevelt,
Waitin' on Roosevelt, son.”

But when they felt those
Cold winds blow
And didn't have no
Place to go—
Pa said, “I'm tired
O' waitin' on Roosevelt,
Roosevelt, Roosevelt,
Damn tired o' waitin on Roosevelt.”

Similarly, much of Richard Wright's poetry is mere strophic propaganda, little better for being cast in the broken mold of free verse than if it were spoken in plain pamphlet prose. Of course, this is not always so. “I Have Seen Black Hands,” for all its obvious Whitman derivation, is powerful throughout, and, in several spots, is definitely poetic. The final strophe, lifted out of the descriptive potpourri of the earlier sections by a really surging rhapsodic swell, is convincing and exceeds propagandist dimensions:

I am black and I have seen black hands
Raised in fists of revolt, side by side with
the white fists of white workers,
And some day—and it is only this which
sustains me—
Some day there will be millions and
millions of them,
On some red day in a burst of fists on a new
horizon!

But Wright is capable of the still finer, though entirely non-racial note of

Everywhere,
On tenemented mountains of hunger,
In ghetto swamps of suffering,
In breadline forest of despair,
In peonized forest of hopelessness

The red moisture of revolt
Is condensing on the cold stones of human
need.

Frank Howard Davis, of Chicago,² for all that he boasts of a “perch on Parnassus” and confesses an urge “to take little, pale, wan, penny a-piece words and weave them into gay tapes-tries for beauty's sake,” has an etcher's touch and an acid bite to his vignettes of life that any “proletarian poet” or Marxian critic might well envy and emulate. For he speaks of

Black scars disfigure
the ruddy cheeks of new mornings in
Dixie
(lynched black men hanging from green
trees)
Blind justice kicked, beaten, taken for a ride
and left for dead
(have you ever heard of Scottsboro,
Alabama?)
Your Constitution gone blah-blah, shattered
into a thousand pieces like a broken
mirror
Lincoln a hoary myth
(how many black men vote in Georgia?)
Mobs, chaingangs down South
Tuberculosis up North
—So now I am civilized
What do you want, America? . . .
Kill me if you must, America
All at once or a little each day
It won't matter. . . .
Yet today is today
Today must be emptied like a bucket before
it dries into history
Today is an eagle, lingering a while, ready to
fly into eternity,
Today I live
Today I tell of black folk who made America
yesterday, who make America now
Today I see America clawing me like a tiger
caged with a hare
Today I hear discords and crazy words in
the song America sings to black folk
So today I ask—
What do you want, America?

How different, even in the similarity of theme, is this from James Weldon Johnson's pale rhetoric of yesterday:

How would you have us—
As we are,
Our eyes fixed forward on a star?
Or clanking chains about your feet?

No more apt illustration could be given of the change in the last fifteen years of the tone and gamut of the Negro poet's social consciousness. But let us follow Frank Davis a step further in his social analysis which is as accurate as his social description is trenchant: from his "Georgia's Atlanta."

As omnipresent as air
are the Complexes
reminding white folk of superiority
keeping black folk subdued.
God
it so happens
either sleeps in the barn
or washes dishes for the Complexes.

Black Shirts—B.Y.P.U.'s
Ku Klux Klan—Methodist Conventions
Colleges—chaingangs
Millionaires—Breadlines
and taxes for the poor
(out of every dollar. . . .)
take twenty five cents
to feed the Complexes
who keep white folk, black folk separate).

"Yas suh—Yas suh"
"You niggers ain't got no business bein' out
past midnight"
"I know it's so . . . a white man said it"
"That black gal you got there, boy, is good
enough for any white man. Is she youah
wife or youah woman? . . ."
"S'cuse me, Boss"
"You niggers git in th' back of this streetcah
or stand up"
"We's got seats reserved for you white folks
at ouah church Sunday night"
"He's a good darky"
"I know'd mah whitefolks'd git me outa dis
mess from killin' dat no good nigguh"

"I've known one or two of you Nigras who
were highly intelligent."

These, in case you don't know, are extracts from the official book on race relations as published by the Complexes.

Is it necessary to call attention to the even-handed, unsparing chastisement meted out to white and black alike? Or to the unanswerable realism? Or to the devastating irony, or the calm courage? For all its sophisticated underpinning, I construe this as more instinctively and idiomatically an expression of Negro social protest than an officially proletarian screed. It comes from the vital heart of the Negro experience and its setting; it smacks neither of Marx, Moscow nor Union Square.

Similarly undoctrinated, and for that reason, in my judgment, more significant and more effective, are Sterling Brown's recent poems of social analysis and protest. The indictment is the more searching because of its calm poise and the absence of melodramatic sweat and strain. Not all of Mr. Brown's poems reach this altitude, but the best do. So that where the earlier Negro poetry of protest fumes and perorates, these later ones point, talk and reveal: where the one challenges and threatens, the other enlightens and indicts. Today it is the rise of this quieter, more indigenous radicalism that is significant and promising. Doubly so, because along with a leftist turn of thought goes a real enlargement of native social consciousness and a more authentic folk spokesmanship. Judged by these criteria, I find today's advance point in the work of Sterling Brown. Without show of boast or fury, it began in the challenge of "Strong Men":

Walk togedder, chillen,
Dontcha git weary. . . .
They bought off some of your leaders.
You stumbled, as blind men will. . . .
They coaxed you, unwontedly
soft-voiced. . . .
You followed a way
Then laughed as usual.
They heard the laugh and wondered;
Uncomfortable;
Unadmitting a deeper terror . . .

The strong men keep a-comin on
Gittin' stronger . . .

Later there was the unconventional appeal of "Strange Legacies" to the folk hero, unconquered in defeat:

John Henry, with your hammer;
John Henry, with your steel driver's pride,
You taught us that a man could go down
 like a man,
Sticking to your hammer till you died.
Brother, . . .
You had what we need now, John Henry.
Help us get it.

But in yet unpublished poems, the proletarian implications of "Mr. Samuel and Sam" become more explicit as the color line and its plight are definitely linked up with the class issue:

Listen, John Cracker:
Grits and molasses like grease for belts
Coffee-like chicory and collards like Jimson,
And side-meat from the same place on the
 hog
Are about the same on both sides of the
 track.

Listen, John, does Joe's riding ahead in the
 "Jimmy"
Sweeten so much the dull grits of your
 days?
When you get where you're going, are you
 not still
John, the po' cracker, Joe, the po' nig?

And profounder, still, the calm indictment of his "Decatur Street", entirely within the black Ghetto physically, but underscoring it as but a segment of a common American tragedy:

The picture of content should be complete
I sing the happy pickaninnies
Underneath the Georgia moon. . . .

M'ole man is on de chaingang
Muh mammy's on relief

Down at the Lincoln Theatre, little Abe is
 set free again,
Hears music that gets deep-down into his
 soul:

"Callin' all cars,—callin' all cars," and the
 prolonged hiss—
"Black Ace, Black Ace!" And his thin voice
 screams
When the tommy-guns drill and the
 bodies fall,
"Mow them down, mow them
 down—" gangsters or "G" men
So long as folks get killed, no difference
 at all,
So long as the rattling gun-fire plays little
 Abe his song.

And the only pleasure exceeding this
Will come when he gets hold of the
 pearl-handled gat
Waiting for him, ready, at Moe Epstein's.
Gonna be the Black Ace himself before de
 time ain't long.

Outside the theatre he stalks his pa'dner,
Creeps up behind him, cocks his thumb,
Rams his forefinger against his side,
"Stick 'em up, damn yuh," his treble whines.

The squeals and the flight
Are more than he looked for, his laughter
 peals.
He is just at the bursting point with delight.
Black Ace. "Stick 'em up, feller . . . I'm the
 Black Ace."

Oh to grow up soon to the top of glory,
With a glistening furrow on his dark face,
Badge of his manhood, pass-key to fame.
"Before de time ain't long," he says,
"Lord, before de time ain't long."

The young folks roll in the cabins on the
 floor
And in the narrow unlighted streets
Behind the shrouding vines and lattices
Up the black, foul allies, the unpaved roads
Sallie Lou and Johnnie Mae play the spies.
Ready, giggling, for experiments, for their
 unformed bodies
To be roughly clasped, for little wild cries,
For words learned of their elders on display.
"Gonna get me a boy-friend," Sallie Lou say
"Got me a man already," brags Johnnie
 Mae

This is the schooling ungrudged by the state,
Short in time, as usual, but fashioned to last
The scholars are apt and never play truant.
The stockade is waiting . . . and they will not be late.

Before, before the time ain't very long.

In the stockade: "Little boy, how come you hyeah?"

"Little bitty gal, how old are you?"
"Well, I got hyeah, didn't I?—Whatchu keer!"

"I'm goin' on twelve years old."

Say of them then: "Like Topsy, they just grew."

It is not enough to think of this as a modern equivalent of "the slave in the dismal rice-swamp" and the Abolitionist moral threat of "Woe be unto ye!" For here it is the question of a social consciousness basic, mature, fitted not to the narrow gauge of the race problem but to the gauge and perspective of our whole contemporary scene. In such a mould poetic and artistic expression can be universal at the same time that it is racial, and racial without being partial and provincial.

A recent writer, of doctrinaire Marxist leanings, insists that as a matter of strict logic the racial note and the class attitude are incongruous. So the proletarian poet should not be a racialist; and the common denominator of the art of our time is to be the "class angle."

I think, in addition to documenting some notable changes in the social consciousness of recent Negro poets, the burden of this evidence is against such a doctrinaire conclusion and in favor of a high compatibility between race-conscious and class-conscious thought. The task of this younger literary generation is not to ignore or eliminate the race problem, but to broaden its social dimensions and deepen its universal human implications. And on the whole, at least so far, the more moving expression seems to have come from the side of the racial approach broadened to universality than from the poetry conceived in doctrinaire Marxist formulae and applied, like a stencil, to the racial problem and situation. The one has the flow and force of reality and the vital tang of life itself; the other, the clank and clatter of propaganda, and for all its seriousness, the hollow echoes of rhetoric. The Negro poet has not so long outgrown the stage of rhetoric; let us hope that the new social philosophy will not stampeude our artists into such a relapse. Especially, since the present prospects are that some of the finest and most effective expressions of social protest in contemporary art will come from the younger Negro poet and his colleagues.

NOTES

1. Busck Press; Copenhagen, 1934.
2. *Black Man's Verse*; Black Cat Press, Chicago, 1935, 53.50.

RICHARD WRIGHT

Blueprint for Negro Writing (1937)

The Role of Negro Writing: Two Definitions

Generally speaking, Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to white America. They

entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the knee-pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people. For the most part these artistic ambassadors were received as though they were French poodles who do clever tricks.

This is the schooling ungrudged by the state,
 Short in time, as usual, but fashioned to last
 The scholars are apt and never play truant.
 The stockade is waiting . . . and they will
 not be late.

Before, before the time ain't very long.

In the stockade: "Little boy, how come you hyeah?"
 "Little bitty gal, how old are you?"
 "Well, I got hyeah, didn't I?—Whatchu keer!"
 "I'm goin' on twelve years old."

Say of them then: "Like Topsy, they just grew."

It is not enough to think of this as a modern equivalent of "the slave in the dismal rice-swamp" and the Abolitionist moral threat of "Woe be unto ye!" For here it is the question of a social consciousness basic, mature, fitted not to the narrow gauge of the race problem but to the gauge and perspective of our whole contemporary scene. In such a mould poetic and artistic expression can be universal at the same time that it is racial, and racial without being partial and provincial.

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White America never offered these Negro writers any serious criticism. The mere fact that a Negro could write was astonishing. Nor was there any deep concern on the part of white America with the role Negro writing should play in American culture; and the role it did play grew out of accident rather than intent or design. Either it crept in through the kitchen in the form of jokes; or it was the fruits of that foul soil which was the result of a liaison between inferiority-complexed Negro "geniuses" and burnt-out white Bohemians with money.

On the other hand, these often technically brilliant performances by Negro writers were looked upon by the majority of literate Negroes as something to be proud of. At best, Negro writing has been something external to the lives of educated Negroes themselves. That the productions of their writers should have been something of a guide in their daily living is a matter which seems never to have been raised seriously.

Under these conditions Negro writing assumed two general aspects: 1) It became a sort of conspicuous ornamentation, the hallmark of "achievement." 2) It became the voice of the educated Negro pleading with white America for justice.

Rarely was the best of this writing addressed to the Negro himself, his needs, his sufferings, his aspirations. Through misdirection, Negro writers have been far better to others than they have been to themselves. And the mere recognition of this places the whole question of Negro writing in a new light and raises a doubt as to the validity of its present direction.

The Minority Outlook

Somewhere in his writings Lenin makes the observation that oppressed minorities often reflect the techniques of the bourgeoisie more brilliantly than some sections of the bourgeoisie themselves. The psychological importance of this becomes meaningful when it is recalled that oppressed minorities, and especially the petty bourgeois sections of oppressed minorities, strive to assimilate the virtues of the

bourgeoisie in the assumption that by doing so they can lift themselves into a higher social sphere. But not only among the oppressed petty bourgeoisie does this occur. The workers of a minority people, chafing under exploitation, forge organizational forms of struggle to better their lot. Lacking the handicaps of false ambition and property, they have access to a wide social vision and a deep social consciousness. They display a greater freedom and initiative in pushing their claims upon civilization than even do the petty bourgeoisie. Their organizations show greater strength, adaptability, and efficiency than any other group or class in society.

That Negro workers, propelled by the harsh conditions of their lives, have demonstrated this consciousness and mobility for economic and political action there can be no doubt. But has this consciousness been reflected in the work of Negro writers to the same degree as it has in the Negro workers' struggle to free Herndon and the Scottsboro Boys, in the drive toward unionism, in the fight against lynching? Have they as creative writers taken advantage of their unique minority position?

The answer decidedly is *no*. Negro writers have lagged sadly, and as time passes the gap widens between them and their people.

How can this hiatus be bridged? How can the enervating effects of this long standing split be eliminated?

In presenting questions of this sort an attitude of self-consciousness and self-criticism is far more likely to be a fruitful point of departure than a mere recounting of past achievements. An emphasis upon tendency and experiment, a view of society as something becoming rather than as something fixed and admired is the one which points the way for Negro writers to stand shoulder to shoulder with Negro workers in mood and outlook.

A Whole Culture

There is, however, a culture of the Negro which is his and has been addressed to him; a culture which has, for good or ill, helped to clarify his consciousness and create emotional attitudes

which are conducive to action. This culture has stemmed mainly from two sources: 1) the Negro church; 2) and the folklore of the Negro people.

It was through the portals of the church that the American Negro first entered the shrine of Western culture. Living under slave conditions of life, bereft of his African heritage, the Negroes' struggle for religion on the plantations between 1820–60 assumed the form of a struggle for human rights. It remained a relatively revolutionary struggle until religion began to serve as an antidote for suffering and denial. But even today there are millions of American Negroes whose only sense of a whole universe, whose only relation to society and man, and whose only guide to personal dignity comes through the archaic morphology of Christian salvation.

It was, however, in a folklore moulded out of rigorous and inhuman conditions of life that the Negro achieved his most indigenous and complete expression. Blues, spirituals, and folktales recounted from mouth to mouth; the whispered words of a black mother to her black daughter on the ways of men; the confidential wisdom of a black father to his black son; the swapping of sex experiences on street corners from boy to boy in the deepest vernacular; work songs sung under blazing suns—all these formed the channels through which the racial wisdom flowed.

One would have thought that Negro writers in the last century of striving at expression would have continued and deepened this folk-tradition, would have tried to create a more intimate and yet a more profoundly social system of artistic communication between them and their people. But the illusion that they could escape through individual achievement the harsh lot of their race swung Negro writers away from any such path. Two separate cultures sprang up: one for the Negro masses, unwritten and unrecognized; and the other for the sons and daughters of a rising Negro bourgeoisie, parasitic and mannered.

Today the question is: Shall Negro writing be for the Negro masses, moulding the lives and consciousness of those masses toward new goals,

or shall it continue begging the question of the Negroes' humanity?

The Problem of Nationalism in Negro Writing

In stressing the difference between the role Negro writing failed to play in the lives of the Negro people, and the role it should play in the future if it is to serve its historic function; in pointing out the fact that Negro writing has been addressed in the main to a small white audience rather than to a Negro one, it should be stated that no attempt is being made here to propagate a specious and blatant nationalism. Yet the nationalist character of the Negro people is unmistakable. Psychologically this nationalism is reflected in the whole of Negro culture, and especially in folklore.

In the absence of fixed and nourishing forms of culture, the Negro has a folklore which embodies the memories and hopes of his struggle for freedom. Not yet caught in paint or stone, and as yet but feebly depicted in the poem and novel, the Negroes' most powerful images of hope and despair still remain in the fluid state of daily speech. How many John Henrys have lived and died on the lips of these black people? How many mythical heroes in embryo have been allowed to perish for lack of husbanding by alert intelligence?

Negro folklore contains, in a measure that puts to shame more deliberate forms of Negro expression, the collective sense of Negro life in America. Let those who shy at the nationalist implications of Negro life look at this body of folk-lore, living and powerful, which rose out of a unified sense of a common life and a common fate. Here are those vital beginnings of a recognition of value in life as it is *lived*, a recognition that marks the emergence of a new culture in the shell of the old. And at the moment this process starts, at the moment when a people begin to realize a *meaning* in their suffering, the civilization that engenders that suffering is doomed.

The nationalist aspects of Negro life are as sharply manifest in the social institutions of

Negro people as in folklore. There is a Negro church, a Negro press, a Negro social world, a Negro sporting world, a Negro business world, a Negro school system, Negro professions; in short, a Negro way of life in America. The Negro people did not ask for this, and deep down, though they express themselves through their institutions and adhere to this special way of life, they do not want it now. This special existence was forced upon them from without by lynch rope, bayonet, and mob rule. They accepted these negative conditions with the inevitability of a tree which must live or perish in whatever soil it finds itself.

The few crumbs of American civilization which the Negro has got from the tables of capitalism have been through these segregated channels. Many Negro institutions are cowardly and incompetent; but they are all that the Negro has. And, in the main, any move, whether for progress or reaction, must come through these institutions for the simple reason that all other channels are closed. Negro writers who seek to mould or influence the consciousness of the Negro people must address their messages to them through the ideologies and attitudes fostered in this warping way of life.

The Basis and Meaning of Nationalism in Negro Writing

The social institutions of the Negro are imprisoned in the Jim Crow political system of the South, and this Jim Crow political system is in turn built upon a plantation-feudal economy. Hence, it can be seen that the emotional expression of group-feeling which puzzles so many whites and leads them to deplore what they call "black chauvinism" is not a morbidly inherent trait of the Negro, but rather the reflex expression of a life whose roots are imbedded deeply in Southern soil.

Negro writers must accept the nationalist implications of their lives, not in order to encourage them, but in order to change and transcend them. They must accept the concept of nationalism because, in order to transcend it, they must possess and *understand* it. And a

nationalist spirit in Negro writing means a nationalism carrying the highest possible pitch of social consciousness. It means a nationalism that knows its origins, its limitations; that is aware of the dangers of its position; that knows its ultimate aims are unrealizable within the framework of capitalist America; a nationalism whose reason for being lies in the simple fact of self-possession and in the consciousness of the interdependence of people in modern society.

For purposes of creative expression it means that the Negro writer must realize within the area of his own personal experience those impulses which, when prefigured in terms of broad social movements, constitute the stuff of nationalism.

For Negro writers even more so than for Negro politicians, nationalism is a bewildering and vexing question, the full ramifications of which cannot be dealt with here. But among Negro workers and the Negro middle class the spirit of nationalism is rife in a hundred devious forms; and a simple literary realism which seeks to depict the lives of these people devoid of wider social connotations, devoid of the revolutionary significance of these nationalist tendencies, must of necessity do a rank injustice to the Negro people and alienate their possible allies in the struggle for freedom.

Social Consciousness and Responsibility

The Negro writer who seeks to function within his race as a purposeful agent has a serious responsibility. In order to do justice to his subject matter, in order to depict Negro life in all of its manifold and intricate relationships, a deep, informed, and complex consciousness is necessary; a consciousness which draws for its strength upon the fluid lore of a great people, and moulds this lore with the concepts that move and direct the forces of history today.

With the gradual decline of the moral authority of the Negro church, and with the increasing irresolution which is paralyzing Negro middle-class leadership, a new role is devolving upon the Negro writer. He is being called upon

to do no less than create values by which his race is to struggle, live, and die.

By his ability to fuse and make articulate the experiences of men, because his writing possesses the potential cunning to steal into the innermost recesses of the human heart, because he can create the myths and symbols that inspire a faith in life, he may expect either to be consigned to oblivion, or to be recognized for the valued agent he is.

This raises the question of the personality of the writer. It means that in the lives of Negro writers must be found those materials and experiences which will create a meaningful picture of the world today. Many young writers have grown to believe that a Marxist analysis of society presents such a picture. It creates a picture which, when placed before the eyes of the writer, should unify his personality, organize his emotions, buttress him with a tense and obdurate will to change the world.

And, in turn, this changed world will dialectically change the writer. Hence, it is through a Marxist conception of reality and society that the maximum degree of freedom in thought and feeling can be gained for the Negro writer. Further, this dramatic Marxist vision, when consciously grasped, endows the writer with a sense of dignity which no other vision can give. Ultimately, it restores to the writer his lost heritage, that is, his role as a creator of the world in which he lives, and as a creator of himself.

Yet, for the Negro writer, Marxism is but the starting point. No theory of life can take the place of life. After Marxism has laid bare the skeleton of society, there remains the task of the writer to plant flesh upon those bones out of his will to live. He may, with disgust and revulsion, say *no* and depict the horrors of capitalism encroaching upon the human being. Or he may, with hope and passion, say *yes* and depict the faint stirrings of a new and emerging life. But in whatever social voice he chooses to speak, whether positive or negative, there should always be heard or *over-heard* his faith, his necessity, his judgement.

His vision need not be simple or rendered in primer-like terms; for the life of the Negro people is not simple. The presentation of their lives

should be simple, yes; but all the complexity, the strangeness, the magic wonder of life that plays like a bright sheen over the most sordid existence, should be there. To borrow a phrase from the Russians, it should have a *complex simplicity*. Eliot, Stein, Joyce, Proust, Hemingway, and Anderson; Gorky, Barbusse, Nexo, and Jack London no less than the folklore of the Negro himself should form the heritage of the Negro writer. Every iota of gain in human thought and sensibility should be ready grist for his mill, no matter how far-fetched they may seem in their immediate implications.

The Problem of Perspective

What vision must Negro writers have before their eyes in order to feel the impelling necessity for an about face? What angle of vision can show them all the forces of modern society in process, all the lines of economic development converging toward a distant point of hope? Must they believe in some "ism"?

They may feel that only dupes believe in "isms"; they feel with some measure of justification that another commitment means only another disillusionment. But anyone destitute of a theory about the meaning, structure and direction of modern society is a lost victim in a world he cannot understand or control.

But even if Negro writers found themselves through some "ism," how would that influence their writing? Are they being called upon to "preach"? To be "salesmen"? To "prostitute" their writing? Must they "sully" themselves? Must they write "propaganda"?

No; it is a question of awareness, of consciousness; it is, above all, a question of perspective.

Perspective is that part of a poem, novel, or play which a writer never puts directly upon paper. It is that fixed point in intellectual space where a writer stands to view the struggles, hopes, and sufferings of his people. There are times when he may stand too close and the result is a blurred vision. Or he may stand too far away and the result is a neglect of important things.

Of all the problems faced by writers who as a whole have never allied themselves with world movements, perspective is the most difficult of achievement. At its best, perspective is a pre-conscious assumption, something which a writer takes for granted, something which he wins through his living.

A Spanish writer recently spoke of living in the heights of one's time. Surely, perspective means just *that*.

It means that a Negro writer must learn to view the life of a Negro living in New York's Harlem or Chicago's South Side with the consciousness that one-sixth of the earth surface belongs to the working class. It means that a Negro writer must create in his readers' minds a relationship between a Negro woman hoeing cotton in the South and the men who loll in swivel chairs in Wall Street and take the fruits of her toil.

Perspective for Negro writers will come when they have looked and brooded so hard and long upon the harsh lot of their race and compared it with the hopes and struggles of minority peoples everywhere that the cold facts have begun to tell them something.

The Problem of Theme

This does not mean that a Negro writer's sole concern must be with rendering the social scene; but if his conception of the life of his people is broad and deep enough, if the sense of the *whole* life he is seeking is vivid and strong in him, then his writing will embrace all those social, political, and economic forms under which the life of his people is manifest.

In speaking of theme one must necessarily be general and abstract; the temperament of each writer moulds and colors the world he sees. Negro life may be approached from a thousand angles, with no limit to technical and stylistic freedom.

Negro writers spring from a family, a clan, a class, and a nation; and the social units in which they are bound have a story, a record. Sense of theme will emerge in Negro writing when Negro writers try to fix this story about some

pole of meaning, remembering as they do so that in the creative process meaning proceeds *equally* as much from the contemplation of the subject matter as from the hopes and apprehensions that rage in the heart of the writer.

Reduced to its simplest and most general terms, theme for Negro writers will rise from understanding the meaning of their being transplanted from a "savage" to a "civilized" culture in all of its social, political, economic, and emotional implications. It means that Negro writers must have in their consciousness the foreshortened picture of the *whole*, nourishing culture from which they were torn in Africa, and of the long, complex (and for the most part, unconscious) struggle to regain in some form and under alien conditions of life a *whole* culture again.

It is not only this picture they must have, but also a knowledge of the social and emotional milieu that gives it tone and solidity of detail. Theme for Negro writers will emerge when they have begun to feel the meaning of the history of their race as though they in one life time had lived it themselves throughout all the long centuries.

Autonomy of Craft

For the Negro writer to depict this new reality requires a greater discipline and consciousness than was necessary for the so-called Harlem school of expression. Not only is the subject matter dealt with far more meaningful and complex, but the new role of the writer is qualitatively different. The Negro writers' new position demands a sharper definition of the status of his craft, and a sharper emphasis upon its functional autonomy.

Negro writers should seek through the medium of their craft to play as meaningful a role in the affairs of men as do other professionals. But if their writing is demanded to perform the social office of other professions, then the autonomy of craft is lost and writing detrimentally fused with other interests. The limitations of the craft constitute some of its greatest virtues. If the sensory vehicle of imaginative

writing is required to carry too great a load of didactic material, the artistic sense is submerged.

The relationship between reality and the artistic image is not always direct and simple. The imaginative conception of a historical period will not be a carbon copy of reality. Image and emotion possess a logic of their own. A vulgarized simplicity constitutes the greatest danger in tracing the reciprocal interplay between the writer and his environment.

Writing has its professional autonomy; it should complement other professions, but it should not supplant them or be swamped by them.

The Necessity for Collective Work

It goes without saying that these things cannot be gained by Negro writers if their present mode of isolated writing and living continues. This isolation exists *among* Negro writers as well as *between* Negro and white writers. The Negro writers' lack of thorough integration with the American scene, their lack of a clear realization among themselves of their possible role, have bred generation after generation of embittered and defeated literati.

Barred for decades from the theater and publishing houses, Negro writers have been *made* to feel a sense of difference. So deep has this white-hot iron of exclusion been burnt into their hearts that thousands have all but lost the desire to become identified with American civilization. The Negro writers' acceptance of this enforced isolation and their attempt to justify it is but a defense-reflex of the whole special way of life which has been rammed down their throats.

This problem, by its very nature, is one which must be approached contemporaneously from two points of view. The ideological unity of Negro writers and the alliance of that unity with all the progressive ideas of our day is the primary prerequisite for collective work. On the shoulders of white writers and Negro writers alike rest the responsibility of ending this mistrust and isolation.

By placing cultural health above narrow sectional prejudices, liberal writers of all races can help to break the stony soil of aggrandizement out of which the stunted plants of Negro nationalism grow. And, simultaneously, Negro writers can help to weed out these choking growths of reactionary nationalism and replace them with hardier and sturdier types.

These tasks are imperative in light of the fact that we live in a time when the majority of the most basic assumptions of life can no longer be taken for granted. Tradition is no longer a guide. The world has grown huge and cold. Surely this is the moment to ask questions, to theorize, to speculate, to wonder out of what materials can a human world be built.

Each step along this unknown path should be taken with thought, care, self-consciousness, and deliberation. When Negro writers think they have arrived at something which smacks of truth, humanity, they should want to test it with others, feel it with a degree of passion and strength that will enable them to communicate it to millions who are groping like themselves.

Writers faced with such tasks can have no possible time for malice or jealousy. The conditions for the growth of each writer depend too much upon the good work of other writers. Every first-rate novel, poem, or play lifts the level of consciousness higher.

KATHERINE TILLMAN

Afro-American Women and Their Work (1895)

Woman has always had a mission in the world. Since God made Eve in the fair gardens of paradise as a helpmate unto Adam, it has been woman's task to aid man in all of his stupendous undertakings. And though by her woman's curiosity, sin was born and ushered in upon the fair young earth, so all through the precious boon of motherhood, came life divine, life everlasting unto all.

Since Christ was once cradled upon a woman's breast, there is no crown too royal for woman's brow and no task so great, but that her hands can assist in its accomplishment.

But woman has not always occupied the honorable position that she now does. For centuries she lived in a state of degradation unappreciated, misunderstood and scorned as a being as inferior to man as the rays of the candle are to the beams of the noonday sun.

There are indeed women upon the pages of history like Cleopatra, the queen of paganism, who lured Mark Antony from his post of duty, like Heloise the devoted wife of the monk Abelard, who suffered the blighting touch of calumny for the sake of her husband; like Joan of Arc who suffered martyrdom but succeeded in her inspired mission, of crowning the young dauphin. Brilliant women like the friend of Pericles, the gifted Aspasia, Hannah Moore the friend of female education, and like George Eliot the famous novelist. But their names are few until Christianity made its advent into the world and taught man the true worth and ability of women. We find Miriam prophesying in gladsome song before the Israelitish hosts after they had triumphantly crossed the Red Sea, and we find Deborah a judge over God's chosen people for a number of years and we are not surprised, for Christianity is emphatically the friend of women and wherever its blessed influences are felt woman occupies her true station in life.

Woman was once regarded either as a toy created for man's gratification, or as a slave doomed to an endless servitude unto his Majesty. Immoral women fared better than those who were virtuous, and the few women who were educated became so within the gloomy walls of the convents. To have told a woman of paganism or even of medieval days of the busy honored lives of the mothers and daughters of the nineteenth century, would have been regarded as fanaticism.

All of the privileges that woman enjoys today are gifts from Christianity, and above all else she should prize this boon, this heaven-bequeathed heritage, and spread the gospel of Christ from shore to shore, from island to island, and from nation to nation!

The woman who throws her influence against the teachings of Christianity is fighting her own best interests and undermining the earth beneath her own feet.

But it is not my purpose in this article to speak of woman in general, although the subject has a peculiar fascination for me, but of Afro-American women in particular. Of their trials, their triumphs and their possibilities. My motive is to show to the public the part that our women have played in the great drama of Negro progress, and in order to do this it is only necessary to point out the leading ladies and the "hits" that they have made, and allow you the privilege of weaving about them any bit of romance that you chose.

Quite recently an Afro-American editor assumed a look of grave importance, and dipping his goose quill into the printer's ink, threw out the following challenge: "What have the women of the race done for its elevation anyway?" I shall answer that question with interesting facts which cannot be disproved.

For the period of two and a half centuries Afro-American women were slaves to the white people of this country. As laborers they were

divided into two great classes—field hands and house servants. The field hands toiled in the fields, picked cotton, hewed corn, and ploughed side by side with the men. Those who had children too young to be left alone took them near their place of work and put them on the ground where, with often a bit of bacon rind in their hands, they were expected to be quiet. Each of the female cotton pickers was required to pick a certain number of pounds each day, and in case of failure for any reason, received a severe lashing. This task was usually performed by white or black overseers, who were, if possible, a thousand times more brutal than their masters. I was once told by an ex-slave, that during slavery, while serving in the capacity of overseer, he was required to whip his sweetheart, a delicate young woman of eighteen, because she failed to pick the required amount of cotton. Her body was lacerated in a terrible manner by the stinging blows of the overseer's whip. "How could you?" I asked indignantly. "O, I jess' had to; ef I had'n' they'd a killed me," was the response.

The house hands comprised the housekeepers, cooks, chambermaids, ladies' maids, sewing women, laundresses, and nurses. In fact before the war it took six or eight women to do what is now required of one. The housekeepers were often the mistresses of their masters and exercised over them many of the privileges of a wife. Sometimes this intimacy existed for years, and children were born who received kindness or blows, according to the disposition of the master. As Charles Carleton Coffin says:

Men and women of Caucasian blood, departing from morality, found the door of society shut against them; but slavery being patriarchial it was not a crime, not even an offence against morality for a planter to choose a Hagar from his slaves. Society placed no bar in his way, the church no ban upon his actions. Hagar could be taken into the master's household, appear in silks and satins with Ishmael for the pet of the family, or both be knocked off to the highest bidder in the mart, separated and sent, one to the rice swamps of Georgia and the other to

the cane brakes of Louisiana, Hagar weeping and mourning for her child and the planter with the price of blood in his pocket, be received in any parlor in Charleston, or made Governor of the State.

The owners who might have educated these illegitimate children were in many cases suddenly snatched off by the relentless hand of death, and mother and children were left at the mercy of the dead man's relatives. In a book entitled "Half a Century," Jane Swissholm relates the story of a man who had two beautiful boys by a female slave and then whipped her to death for grieving because they were sold. The owner in those days had only to look over the slaves and select one that suited his taste. All were subject to his uncurbed will and inclinations. Dreadful, indeed, was the condition of our women in those days, for beside being unable to protect themselves against the advances of their masters, they were compelled to surrender husband, lover, and children to the pitiless auction block, knowing that in all probability they were taking then their last farewell.

Like the male slaves, the Afro-American woman had no rights that any one was bound to respect. They were often compelled to witness the whipping of their children for the most trivial offences.

Again, on certain plantations, they were kept like other stock, for breeding purposes, to breed boys and girls for the horrors of the slave pen. In view of this fact it is not astonishing that many of these suffering women resolved to die rather than to bear children, and took means to destroy their unborn babes.

But life was more endurable for them beneath the rule of kind masters, for there the whip was rarely used, the slaves were well fed and allowed to earn money for themselves by working at night. Where this was the case an affectionate feeling sprang up between owners and owned that was only broken by death. Sometimes their clothing was provided by their mistresses. A large supply of yellow cotton for underclothing and linsey cloth for dresses was purchased at regular intervals. And this was

fashioned into garments by the skillful fingers of the Negro needlewoman. These articles were given out according to the discretion of the mistress or housekeeper. By doing work at night, when they should have been taking their rest, some of the slave women were enabled to purchase their own clothing, and they got what suited them. Others hired their own time, that is they obtained permission from their owners to work for others, and paid a high percentage for the privilege.

But it was against the law for them to learn to read or write and thus we find to-day many splendid women who cannot tell one letter from another. They had no homes as we understand the term. They lived in quarters that were often a row of one-roomed cabins, a large family occupying in some instances a single room.

By some masters they were allowed to hold religious services and by others they were not. Nevertheless many a poor slave sought Jesus in those dark days and found in Him consolation for all of their woes.

An incident related by Mrs. Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seems appropriate just here. It was after Tom had been sold to Legree. The women were baking Tom's cake of corn meal, and Tom drew out his Bible.

"Whats that?" asked one of the women.

"A Bible," said Tom.

"Good Lord haint seen one since I was in Kaintuck."

"Whats dat ar book anyway?" asked another woman.

"Why the Bible!"

"Laws a me whats dat?" said the woman.

"Do tell! You never hearn tell on't. I used to hear Missus read on it in Kaintuck."

"Read a piece any ways," said the first woman curiously.

Tom read—"Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

"Them's good words enuf," said the woman; "who says them anyway?"

"The Lord," said Tom.

"I jes' wish I know whar to find Him," said the woman. "I would go; pears like I

never should get rested again. My flesh is fairly sore and I tremble all over every day and Sambo's allus jawin' at me, 'cause I doesn't pick faster and nights it's most midnight fore I get my supper and den pears like I don' turn over and shut my eyes fore I hear the horn blow to git up and at agin in the mornin'. Ef I knew whar the Lord was I'd tell Him."

These women were owned by a nation, whose government is based on God's word and which contributes thousands of dollars annually for the support of missionaries in foreign lands.

Although descendants of heathen parents, the Negro women readily adapted themselves to the requirements of civilized life, and the majority of them developed into excellent work-women. They cooked, they sewed, they spun and wove, in fact did all manner of drudgery without compensation. Many were the hardships that they endured and many were the prayers that went up to God for deliverance. Was God asleep? Or had He forgotten His dark-hued sons and daughters in America? Oh no, God is omnipotent and He is also omnipresent. Jehovah sleeps not. When the time had fully come, He answered their prayers. Woman began to interest herself in the dreadful conditions of her sister. A spark of womanly sympathy flashed up into the hearts of Lucretia Mott, Lydia Child, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, and they began with the zeal of ancient crusaders for the abolition of the slave-trade. Those who were themselves too timid to speak in public, inspired their male friends with their own heaven-born enthusiasm, and the good work spread.

It took years of earnest work and prayer and it took a gigantic loss of life to procure our freedom, yet when "Uncle Tom's Cabin" had been cried over by gray-haired men, blooming matrons, young folks and children, the battle was half won. It was completed by the great Civil War of 1861-64, and the war was over, the Afro-American was free. Free!

The land was free! 'Twas free from end to End, from cliff to lake 'twas free! Free as Our torrents are that leap our rocks or

Plow our valleys, without asking leave! Or as
Our peaks that wear the caps of snow in
the very
Presence of the regal sun!

From the bitter night of bondage the soil of Ph[i]llis Wheatley, a native African poetess of great merit, who was received with honor in England, and Frances Ellen Watkins, also a poetess had blossomed, like the fragile violets that greet us first of all the flowers in early spring. Ph[i]llis has performed her mission and gone to rest, while Frances in the person of Mrs. Harper the gifted authoress and lecturer is still living and actively engaged in the work of elevating her people.

Although uneducated and poor, Afro-American women have been large-hearted and ambitious. The first five dollars that was given to the Lincoln Monument, was given by Charlotte Cushman, an ex-slave. The spirit of kindness and self-denial that animated the bosom of our women, when during the war they divided their crusts and clothes with the Union soldiers, and caused them to hide the soldiers at the risk of their own lives seemed a part of their natures.

Generosity is a characteristic of our women. Rarely indeed does an appeal for help coming from any source fall unheeded upon their ears. Out of their poverty, they give largely, and no class of women on the globe excel them in benevolence.

Left penniless at the close of the war, many of them with large families dependent upon them, instead of wringing their hands in despair, they went cheerfully forward to build homes, to educate their children and if possible to lay by a bit for a rainy day. Like the mother of the late Dr. Simmons, many of our women toiled both early and late at the washtub in order that their children might have the intellectual training of which they themselves had been so unjustly deprived. And how proud of these mothers should these children be, and how grateful for the many sacrifices that have been made for them. Every wrinkle in the dear old face should be regarded as a thing of beauty, and it should be the aim of their after lives to make life pleasant for their parents. But to re-

turn, by their frugality and labors, their husbands were able to purchase homes, those who desired to do so and to contribute largely to the cause of the gospel and of education. Many of these noble women are dead now, but their memory is yet green and their children rise up and call them blessed. Such, in brief, was the life of our women from their coming as slaves to America to the issuing of the Proclamation of Emancipation.

What can we say of their progress to convince skeptical friends, black and white, that they are deserving of credit? We will touch briefly upon their relation with

The Religious World

What would be the condition of the churches of all races and denominations, if the women were to withdraw their moral and financial support? The result is frightful to contemplate! Our women I am happy to say seem peculiarly adapted to church work, in fact for benevolent work of any nature. Signs of human distress always evoke their sympathies and the more consecrated their lives become to Christ, the more energetic become their efforts to push forward His Kingdom on the earth. It is the women in our churches who assist the perplexed pastor in devising plans for the annihilation of state and church debts, and who assume the charge of clothing the pastor and his needy family in a little purple and fine linen occasionally; who prepare at home little feasts and invite this everyday hero, that he may fare sumptuously at least one day out of the seven, and who often seem to their pastor angels in disguise. By organizing themselves into aid societies, known as King's Daughters, Gleaners Women's Christian Temperance Union, Epworth League, Baptist Union and Christian Endeavors, they have been able to do much good for God. It is often seen in the columns of our race journals, that in various places our women have raised immense sums for the erection or renovating of churches or for some Christian enterprise. One women's organization known as the "Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church"

raised \$1,525.46 during the year ending November 1, 1893. Also we have a female Evangelist, Mrs. Amanda Smith who has traveled extensively and who has recently published a book, relating her experiences in the Old and New World. There are missionaries dead and missionaries living, who have immortalized their names by their zeal in carrying the gospel to heathen Africa. Women brave and true, like Mrs Ridgel who accompanied her husband to Africa and succeeded in opening up a girl's school and who has written such interesting letters home to us. But do not think the work has been exhausted. There is plenty of work for women to do in religious circles and work that should not be neglected. As long as there is a struggling enterprise on the globe, as long as there are girls wandering from virtue in lives of infamy or a boy feeding on husks of sin, and the coming of Christ is delayed by the triumphs of Satan, just so long must they labor. There will be no rest for women in the religious sphere, until the Book of Life has been closed and they hear the Master's approving sentence, "She hath done what she could." Let us now take a bird's eye view of Afro-American Women in

Educational Lines

Religion and Education are closely allied. Under this head we will for the sake of brevity consider education in its broadest sense—that is the mental development of all the faculties. We will first speak of that class of women who are known as business women.

It has been asserted by the enemies of the Afro-American race, that their women have no business capacity. But what are the facts of the case? In almost every avenue of business, our women are rapidly becoming engaged and where they are not, is due to prejudice rather than incompetence.

The Dinahs and Chloes of ante-bellum days, who were then justly noted for their exquisite cookery, have bequeathed to their descendants a talent for cooking, which when cultivated is hard to be excelled by the most accomplished English or French chefs. Besides those who

command good salaries as cooks in public and private establishments, there are those who are engaged in managing hotels, boarding houses, restaurants and catering establishments upon their own accounts. Mrs. C. V. Parris, of Chicago and Mrs. V. Smith, of Clinton, are women who have succeeded with first-class boarding houses, and Mrs. Lee, now of Los Angeles, California, but formerly of Sioux City, Iowa, and Mrs. Williamson, of Des Moines, are well-known caterers. In New Orleans, there are Afro-American women, who earn a fair living by selling through the streets, bread, fruits, cakes, and pies. It is impossible to enumerate the vast number who have purchased homes, yes have become owners of snug fortunes by doing laundry work, this never-failing resource and almost universal occupation of the laboring class of our women. Instead of scorning this useful occupation, they have embraced it as a friend and through its aid have realized many cherished dreams.

They made the foaming washtub
With honest labor ring,
And in its soapy contents,
Saw many a precious thing.

Among the women who have succeeded in this line is Mrs. Eliza Warren, of Oskaloosa, who owns a thriving laundry and some valuable property.

Another profitable employment for our women is that of sewing. The women who as slaves so artistically fashioned and draped the silken garments of their mistresses, now have the pleasure of seeing their daughters succeeding in life as dressmakers. Owning elegantly appointed shops, and receiving the best of prices for their work. Miss Rosa Lindsay, of Dakota, who employs several experienced white seamstresses, and who has more apprentices than she can use, and Miss Ida V. Penland, a Louisville dressmaker, are the only ones that I shall mention here. Having been personally acquainted with Miss Lindsay, I know that she has few superiors as an artist in her line of business. She is a most excellent dressmaker.

Besides dressmakers there are hundreds who sew by the day, earning from fifty cents to two

dollars per day, according to the quality of their work. There are others who earn considerable by doing artistic needle work, or fancy work, as some call it. As in every other trade, we find that the most competent receive the best pay, for there is always "room at the top." There was never a period in Negro history when our dressmakers were not patronized by the women of the race as liberally as they deserved to be, but I am thankful to say that this ungenerous spirit is being displaced by one of sweet helpfulness, and our dressmakers are better appreciated by both Afro-American and white women.

One of the wealthiest of our business women is Mrs. T. H. Lyles, a hair dresser of St. Paul, Minn., who owns or controls two hair stores in that city. Mrs. T. J. Houston, of Washington, D. C., pursues the same vocation with much success. With these appears the name of Mrs. Rebecca Elliott, inventor of the "French hair system," who is well known through her widely circulated advertisements.

In Louisiana we find Mrs. Allain owner of a prosperous dairy farm, and in one of the Canadian provinces another Afro-American woman, a Mrs. St. Johns, is engaged in the ice trade. Mrs. St. John employs several men and teams, and reaps yearly a handsome profit. Others are engaged successfully canvassing, as Miss James, of Washington, D. C., who is canvassing now for the *Ladies Home Journal* in the hope of winning a musical scholarship, and a Mrs. McCutchen, who owns and works a farm of eighty acres a few miles from Oskaloosa. Besides there are women who are clerks, barbers, dealers in second-hand clothing, and in various kinds of merchandise. In the face of these facts, who shall dare assert that our women have no business capacity? Verily it doth appear that their ability exceeds their opportunity. In my opinion, what our business women need most is our cordial support in every way and when they obtain it they will create a place for themselves in the business world that shall win the admiration of all. In addition to that which they have done already, it is encouraging to note that they are taking the lead in forming co-operative associations for the establishment of banks, stores, and industrial-training schools. God bless

our business women; and may their number increase daily. The next to which I beg leave to direct your attention is

The World of Art

Beneath the divine inspiration termed art, we will group the artists and musicians of the race. Under the first division we note Miss Mattie Hicks, instructor in drawing and painting at the State University of Kentucky, who is spoken of as an excellent artist, and Miss Mattie Roberts, of Michigan, who is instructor of the same branches at Wilberforce University. Also Miss Ella Dudley, of Kansas, who is, as far as I know, the only woman of the race who is a professional photographer. But the most noted artist among Afro-American women is Edmonia Lewis, the sculptress, who resides in Rome. Miss Lewis creates men and women of marble. Her work sells at handsome prices, and her society is courted by all lovers of art who have an opportunity to meet her. Her best productions are "Hiawatha's Wooing," "Forever Free," and "Hagar in the Wilderness." In addition to these we have many amateurs who only need training in order to become a credit to the profession. Considering the Afro-American's past environments and her present achievements in the world of art, we cannot help but feel that there is a bright future for her in this field.

When we come to musicians we are compelled to look here and there and select out of the great number of really meritorious musicians whom we know.

As a singer and as a teacher of both vocal and instrumental, Miss Nellie Brown Mitchell, a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music, ranks very high. Mrs. Mitchell was for two years at the head of the department of vocal music at Hedding Academy, New Hampshire, where all of the pupils were white. Madame Sisseretta Jones, the black Patti, whose voice in some elements is said to rival that of Adeline Patti, is undoubtedly, if all press comments are true, the greatest female singer of the race. When Madame Jones appears in public, she wears upon her breast medals that have

been bestowed upon her by foreign countries. This gifted creature of song travels under the management of Major Pond, who also contracts engagements for such notables as Lyman Abbott, the pulpit orator, George W. Cable, the Southern novelist, who wrote "Madame Delphino," Will Carleton, the prince of American poets, the African explorer, Stanley, T. Dewitt Talmage, the foremost preacher in America, and James Whitcomb Riley, the "Hossier Poet," all of them white. Following Mme. Jones closely are Flora Batson Bergen, Madame Selika, and Madame Plato, all famous singers, who have won honorable reputation in their chosen fields.

Besides these who have reached such high planes of greatness is a class of rising prima donnas, singers who are not so well known, as Neale Hawkins, of Chicago, Rachel Walker, of Ohio, and Mrs. Mary Coalson, of Des Moines.

Another branch of art in which Afro-American women have distinguished themselves is elocution. Three of our women—Hallie Q. Brown, Henrietta Vinton Davis, and Ednorah Nahar—are especially proficient in this art, and find no difficulty in entertaining the most cultured and fastidious audiences. It is thought by some who have heard the two ladies, that Miss Brown is as difficult to excel in the rendition of humorous and pathetic pieces as is Miss Davis in those that are tragic. Miss Nahar is the best female concert manager of which we know, and is a fine elocutionist beside. But we cannot linger longer upon this pleasant scene, for we must take a peep at our women in the lecture field. Madame Lois, of whom we do not hear so much as we used to, and who is an eloquent woman, Mrs. Fannie Coppin, who has spoken in London, Mrs. Rodgers Webb, preacher of purity, Mrs. Frances Harper, a temperance lecturer, Ida B. Wells, who was in England lecturing against lynch law, are the best known of the Afro-American women who now occupy the platform in America. But in the future I believe that there will be many of our women who will enter this field. Lecturers are or should be educators. Their aim should be to instruct rather than to tickle the wit, to *be* rather than to *seem*. Such a one, who goes forth with an earnest heart to disseminate truth

among the people, should be regarded as a benefactor of mankind. Would to God we had now fifty educated Christian women who would devote their lives to this work. Women who would travel from East to West and from North to South, and speak to our people upon subjects that lie near to our hearts, and that retard or improve our progress as a people. The important subjects of economy, of temperance, of social purity, and of our duty to God and to ourselves. What a grand field for women, and how necessary that we should have them as lecturers. One of the best speakers that the race ever had was Sojourner Truth, an escaped slave, who occupied the platform with such great men as Garrison and Phillips, and of whose utterances it is said that with the same culture, they would have been as undying as those of the African Saint Augustine. Sojourner lives in modern art. She is the original Libyan Sibyl, a statue carved by the celebrated Mrs. Story and exhibited at the World's Exhibition in London in 1862.

Another field, in which our women find remunerative employment, is that of medicine. A people numbering eight millions as we do, ought to have at least one thousand female physicians, which would average one for every eight thousand persons. This field is a new one for white women too, and we, like them, should pay attention to this honorable calling. Instead of educating all of the girls for teachers, let some of them study medicine or dentistry. We have a few Negro women physicians already. Dr. Susan McKinney, of New York City; Dr. Brown of Virginia, who by the way is the first woman ever admitted to practice in the state; Dr. Artishia Gilbert of Kentucky; and Drs. Consuello Clark and Carrie Golden. Ida Gray, of Cincinnati, is the only dentist that we have as yet, but there is a young Afro-American woman in Des Moines, a Miss Lizzie Weaver, who is engaged in the study of dentistry. Those who would like to adopt either of these professions, must make a way for themselves. Say with the courage of one of old "I'll find a way or make it." Do not be afraid to venture into untried paths. You will find many loyal friends among the men and women of the race and you

will find some good white friends also. As some one has said: "The best way to succeed is to succeed"—remember that

Laugh and the world laughs with you,
Weep and you weep alone.

If we are poor and have to live out at service, and if we have an ambition to become something more than we are, why then let us make the life of service a stepping stone to that grander and nobler existence for which we crave. Be assured that the function of our hopes will more than repay us for our trials. May none of us be disposed to hide our talents. A terrible charge has been made against us as a race. We have been charged with mental inferiority; now if we can prove that with cultivated hearts and brains, we can accomplish the same that is accomplished by our fairer sisters of the Caucasian race, why then, we have refuted the falsehood. Many of us give up too easily. Because we are Negroes and are poor, we feel that it is our duty to crush our aspirations and be contented to dwell in the valley of humiliation, when we might be upon the mountains, heralding some joyous message to the hungry multitudes at our feet. We owe it to God and to the Negro race, to be as perfect specimens of Christian womanhood as we are capable of being. In the profession of law only one Afro-American has dared as yet to venture and that is Ida Pratt. Others will no doubt follow in the course of time and become as celebrated as Belva Lockwood.

Another important class of educators are the women of the race who teach in our public schools and colleges. We will, as in other lines, mention those who are the most prominent. Mrs. Frances Harper and Mrs. Fannie Coppin, besides their rank as lecturers, are widely known as educators. Mrs. Coppin is a graduate of Oberlin College and is at present principal of the "Institute for Colored Youth," which is located in Philadelphia. Mrs. Sarah Garnet, who has taught in the state of New York for twenty-six years and who is a member of the Teacher's National Association and Mrs. Anna Julia Cooper, Instructor in Latin and English Literature at Washington, D.C., are among our best teachers. Miss A. H. Jones, another Oberlin

graduate, who teaches in the high school of Kansas City, and the Misses Cordelia and Florence Ray and Miss Cato, who have received from the University of New York the degree of Master of Pedagogy, also deserve honorable mention. Besides those mentioned are thousands who are engaged in the work and are successfully teaching both Afro-American and Anglo-Saxon children how to become intelligent factors in this great universe.

Another pleasant feature is the fact that a number of our women are engaged in journalism. It seems almost incredible that after so short a period of freedom, there are Afro-American women serving on the staff of prominent white journals, as Miss Lillian Lewis of Massachusetts, and writing stories for magazines like *Harper's* and *Frank Leslie's Magazines*, but true nevertheless, and in Mrs. Matthews better known as "Victoria Earle," we have a writer who writes for the *Family Story Paper* and other fiction papers. The number of women who contribute poems, essays, and stories to race magazines is already large, and it is being constantly increased. Three of our best poetesses are wives of clergymen, Mrs. M. E. Lee is the wife of an A.M.E. Bishop. She is a writer of cultured verse that is eagerly read. A number of her poems have appeared in the *Christian Recorder*. Mrs. Charlotte F. Grimké, the author of a number of beautiful poems, which are universally admired, is the wife of a Presbyterian clergyman. It is to be lamented that Mrs. Grimké does not place her poems in book form upon the market, so that all might know how gifted she is. Mrs. Frances Harper writes both poetry and prose of the best type and has published two books of poems, "Forest Leaves" and "Southern Sketches." Mrs. Josie Heard, also the wife of a clergyman of the A.M.E. connection, is a poetess of great merit. She has sold all of the first edition of her published poems and is now preparing a second edition. Miss Cordelia Ray is the author of a volume of poems entitled "Sonnets," that are highly spoken of by the press and Miss Virgie Whitsett, of Iowa, and Miss Mamie Fox, of Ohio, are rapidly winning their way to fame as writers of good and original poetry. Mrs. Lambert is a

graceful writer, and for keen, satirical articles, Miss Ida B. Wells cannot be excelled by any woman.

Then we have women who have published original stories. Mrs. Matthews has written a charming Southern story entitled, "Aunt Linda," and Mrs. Harper has given to the world "Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted," a story treating of the Race Problem. Mrs. A. E. Johnson has published two of her stories in book form, and Mrs. Cooper, author of "A Voice from the South," is said to have produced the best book ever written by a Negro on the Negro. In this field the work of our women is barely begun. With their vivid imaginations and quickness of perception, they are destined to fill an important place in the ranks of the literati of this land. But we will have to prepare for the work even as others have had to prepare for it. Literature has its attendant drudgery just as is found in other professions. "Non palma sine pulvere," no palms without dust, no crowns without crosses is as true of literature as of other things. In coming days Afro-American women who faithfully portray the lights and shadows of Negro life will receive better compensation, for then their work will be appreciated. Let us now turn to that large class of women who live in service.

It is becoming fashionable among our younger women to scorn a life of service. Some girls would rather marry a man that they did not care for especially, than earn their own living by hiring out. They are beginning to feel that somehow it is a disadvantage to live out. But it never has nor ever will it be a disgrace to earn one's living honestly. There is no aristocracy in this country. All men are created free and equal and women ditto. Some women look upon a life of service with such contempt that they fail to perform their duties in a satisfactory manner, and are constantly being discharged. Such women should remember that living in service is far happier than being yoked in an unhappy marriage, and a million times preferable to a life of shame! The laboring classes of our women have done a great work for the race. It is owing to their liberality that we have many of the privileges that we now enjoy. Let no one, then, scorn the vast army of domestics who dwell in the

land, for in God's sight there is as much honor in doing one's best in that sphere as in any other. But we cannot linger longer here. Two more scenes and the curtain will drop for the last time. The first picture is that of our society women.

The pessimists of the race, those who are continually on the outlook for the darkest side of life, tell us that we have no society worthy of the name, but such ignorant critics have failed to obtain a passport into the circle of refined Negro men and women, who are to be found in every city of the United States.

Our society women are lively, charming and usually wellbred. They observe the same laws or etiquette, that are observed by devotees of fashion the world over. They call, receive and dress according to their means and often beyond their means, just as other women do. She requires dainty morning gowns, elaborate dinner dresses, and stylish street costumes, with hat, gloves and wraps to match, just like the rest of the feminine world. The fashionable Afro-American, like her Caucasian sisters spends her time in novel reading, card playing and in whirling through the intricate mazes of the dance. Others who have consecrated their lives to God find their time taken up with various religious and intellectual organizations, such as the King's Daughters and many secret benevolent societies. Two of the best known of their clubs are the "Woman's Tourgee Club" of Chicago, and the "Harriet Beecher Stowe Circle" of Des Moines. A later organization is the "Women's Industrial League" of Washington, D.C., which is doing creditable work.

We now come to the consideration of the last thought and the one that is of the most importance.

Afro-American Women in the Home

When Howard Payne, wrote:

Mid pleasures and palaces though I may
roam,
Be it ever so humble there's no place [like]
home,

he voiced the sentiments of millions.

The home is an institution for which we are indebted to Christianity. It is of equal importance with the school and the church. Our earliest impressions of the outside world are received in the home and though we may wander many miles from the place we call home, yet it will ever occupy a sacred spot in our memories.

If, as some writer has said, the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, how important that that hand shall be trained to guide wisely the children beneath her rule!

It is in the home that our women, and indeed all women, are seen either at their best or at their worst. It is here that they are either home-makers or home-breakers. Look at these two scenes. Two young couples embarked out on the sea of life. One takes for their motto, the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The other one: "I am going to rule my house." One woman tries to be a helpmate indeed unto her husband, and the other spends her money faster than he can earn it. One meets her husband when his day's work is over with a pleasant smile, while the other keeps on hand a goodly supply of frowns and cross words. Number one is easily contented, for she knows that she has her husband's love and that brighter days are just ahead for them, but nothing satisfies number two, for she is a home-breaker, as surely as the other is a home-maker.

I am sorry that I cannot say that the majority of our homes are what they should be. It would be a miracle if they were after so many centuries of heathenish influences have surrounded our ancestors, and of course, left their marks upon us. But we are not discouraged, for we find here and there Afro-American homes, that are models of Christian culture and happiness, and we know that education and religion will create many more.

A great improvement is being noticed every where in our homes. Plaster is appearing upon

the dingy walls of the Southern cabin, books and pictures are finding their way within these homes; and life is becoming broader and more beautiful to the inmates. In the West our homes vie with the cultured abodes of Afro-Americans of the North, East, and South, and thus all are learning the value of home.

Since home-making is of such great importance, every woman who expects to have one should learn how to make it the happiest place on earth. We should remember that there is nothing more serious than a marriage, save it be a birth or death.

Some women of to-day marry with the idea of a separation if the new life does not suit them, but this is not the spirit in which the sacred vows should be taken. "Until death do us part," should be the thought, "as the maiden reverently stands with her husband before the man of God who officiates."

Not only for our own happiness should we build ideal homes, but for the sake of the little one that God gives many of us to train for Him. How can we have noble boys and pure-minded girls, if they are not reared in Christian homes amid good influences? What our race will be in the future depends greatly upon the kind of men and women that we are training now.

Let us as Afro-American women pledge ourselves to the elevation of our home. Let us war against intemperance, against infidelity, against gambling in saloons or parlors, against bad literature and immorality of all kind, for these are the demons that destroy our homes. Let us enlist under the banner of Christ and help to subdue these evils. The world needs our efforts and let us go forth in His name to conquer.

We have not wings, we cannot soar,
But we have feet to scale and climb,
By slow degrees, by more and more
The cloudy summits of our time.

VICTORIA EARLE MATTHEWS

The Value of Race Literature (1895)

If the black man carries in his bosom an indispensable element of a new and coming civilization, for the sake of that element, no money, nor strength, nor circumstance can hurt him; he will survive and play his part. . . . If you have man, black or white is an insignificance. The intellect—that is miraculous who has it, has the talisman. His skin and bones, though they were the color of night, are transparent, and the everlasting stars shine through with attractive beams.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

By Race Literature we mean ordinarily all the writings emanating from a distinct class—not necessarily race matter; but a general collection of what has been written by the men and women of that Race: History, Biographies, Scientific Treatises, Sermons, Addresses, Novels, Poems, Books of Travel, miscellaneous essays, and the contributions to magazines and newspapers.

Literature, according to Webster, is learning: acquaintance with books or letters: the collective body of literary productions, embracing the entire results of knowledge and fancy, preserved in writing, also the whole body of literature, productions or writings upon any given subject, or in reference to a particular science, a branch of knowledge, as the Literature of Biblical Customs, the Literature of Chemistry, etc.

In the light of this definition, many persons may object to the term Race Literature, questioning seriously the need, doubting if there be any, or indeed whether there can be a, Race Literature in a country like ours apart from the general American Literature. Others may question the correctness of the term American Literature, since our civilization in its essential features is a reproduction of all that is most desirable in the civilizations of the Old World. English being the language of America, they argue in favor of the general term English Literature.

While I have great respect for the projectors of this theory, yet it is a limited definition; it does not express the idea in terms sufficiently clear.

The conditions which govern the people of African descent in the United States have been and still are, such as create a very marked difference in the limitations, characteristics, aspirations, and ambitions of this class of people, in decidedly strong contrast with the more or less powerful races which dominate it.

Laws were enacted denying and restricting their mental development in such pursuits, which engendered servility and begot ox-like endurance; and though statutes were carefully, painstakingly prepared by the most advanced and learned American jurists to perpetuate ignorance, yet they were powerless to keep all the race out from the Temple of Learning. Many though in chains mastered the common rudiments and others possessing talent of higher order—like the gifted Phyllis Wheatley, who dared to express her meditations in poetic elegance which won recognition in England and America, from persons distinguished in letters and statesmanship—dared to seek the sources of knowledge and wield a pen.

While oppressive legislation, aided by grossly inhuman customs, successfully retarded all general efforts toward improvement, the race suffered physically and mentally under a great wrong, an appalling evil, in contrast with which the religious caste prejudice of India appears as a glimmering torch to a vast consuming flame.

The prejudice of color! Not condition, not character, not capacity for artistic development, not the possibility of emerging from savagery into Christianity, not these but the “Prejudice of Color.” Washington Irving’s *Life of Columbus* contains a translation from the contemporaries of Las Casas, in which this prejudice is plainly evident. Since our reception on this continent,

men have cried out against this inhuman prejudice; granting that, a man may improve his condition, accumulate wealth, become wise and upright, merciful and just as an infidel or Christian, but they despair because he can not change his color, as if it were possible for the victim to change his organic structure, and impossible for the oppressor to change his wicked heart.

But all this impious wrong has made a Race Literature a possibility, even a necessity to dissipate the odium conjured up by the term "colored" persons, not originally perhaps designed to humiliate, but unfortunately still used to express not only an inferior order, but to accentuate and call unfavorable attention to the most ineradicable difference between the races.

So well was this understood and deplored by liberal-minded men, regardless of affiliation, that the editor of "Freedom's Journal," published in New York City in 1827. The first paper published in this country by Americans of African descent, calls special attention to this prejudice by quoting from the great Clarkson, where he speaks of a master not only looking with disdain upon a slave's features, but hating his very color.

The effect of this un-Christian disposition was like the merciless scalpel about the very heart of the people, a sword of Damocles, at all times hanging above and threatening all that makes life worth living. Why they should not develop and transmit stealthy, vicious, and barbaric natures under such conditions, is a question that able metaphysicians, ethnologists, and scientists will, most probably in the future, investigate with a view of solving what to-day is considered in all quarters a profound mystery, the Negro's many-sided, happy, hopeful enduring character.

Future investigations may lead to the discovery of what to-day seems lacking, what has deformed the manhood and womanhood in the Negro. What is bright, hopeful, and encouraging is in reality the source of an original school of race literature, of racial psychology, of potent possibilities, an amalgam needed for this great American race of the future.

Dr. Dvorak claims this for the original Negro melodies of the South as every student of music is well aware. On this subject he says:

I am now satisfied that the future music of this continent must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies. This can be the foundation of a serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States.

When I first came here, I was impressed with this idea, and it has developed into a settled conviction. The beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. *They are American, they are the folk songs of America, and our composers must turn to them.* All of the great musicians have borrowed from the songs of the common people.

Beethoven's most charming *scherzo* is based upon what might now be considered a skilfully handled Negro melody. I have myself gone to the simple half-forgotten tunes of the Bohemian peasants for hints in my most serious work. Only in this way can a musician express the true sentiment of a people. He gets into touch with common humanity of the country.

In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music. They are pathetic, tender, passionate and melancholy, solemn, religious, bold, merry, gay, gracious, or what you will. It is music that suits itself to any work or any purpose. There is nothing in the whole range of composition that cannot find a thematic source here.

When the literature of our race is developed, it will of necessity be different in all essential points of greatness, true heroism and real Christianity from what we may at the present time, for convenience, call American Literature. When some master hand writes the stories as Dr. Dvorak has caught the melodies when, amid the hearts of the people, there shall live a George Eliot, moving this human world by the simple portrayal of the scenes of our ordinary existence; or when the pure, ennobling touch of a black Hannah Moore shall rightly interpret

our unappreciated contribution to Christianity and make it into universal literature, such writers will attain and hold imperishable fame.

The novelists most read at the present time in this country find a remunerative source for their doubtful literary productions based upon the wrongly interpreted and too often grossly exaggerated frailties. This is patent to all intelligent people. The Negro need not envy such reputation, nor feel lost at not revelling in its ill-gotten wealth or repute. We are the only people most distinctive from those who have civilized and governed this country, who have become typical Americans, and we rank next to the Indians in originality of soil, and yet remain a distinct people.

In this connection, Joseph Wilson, in the *Black Phalanx*, says:

"The Negro race is the only race that has ever come in contact with the European race that has proved itself able to withstand its atrocities and oppression. All others like the Indians whom they could not make subservient to their use they have destroyed."

Prof. Sampson in his "Mixed Races" says, "The American Negro is a new race, and is not the direct descent of any people that has ever flourished."

On this supposition, and relying upon finely developed, native imaginative powers, and humane tendencies, I base my expectation that our Race Literature when developed will not only compare favorably with many, but will stand out pre-eminent, not only in the limited history of colored people, but in the broader field of universal literature.

Though Race Literature be founded upon the traditional history of a people yet its fullest and largest development ought not to be circumscribed by the narrow limits of race or creed for the simple reason that literature in its loftiest development reaches out to the utmost limits of soul enlargement and outstrips all earthly limitations. Our history and individuality as a people not only provides material for masterly treatment, but would seem to make a Race Literature a necessity as an outlet for the unnaturally suppressed inner lives which our people have been compelled to lead.

The literature of any people of varied nationality who have won a place in the literature of the world, presents certain cardinal points. French literature for instance, is said to be "not the wisest, not the weightiest, not certainly the purest and loftiest, but by odds the most brilliant and the most interesting literature in the world."

Ours, when brought out, and we must admit in reverence to truth that, as yet, we have done nothing distinctive, but may when we have built upon our own individuality, win a place by the simplicity of the story, thrown into strong relief by the multiplicity of its dramatic situations; the spirit of romance, and even tragedy, shadowy and as yet ill-defined, but from which our race on this continent can never be disassociated.

When the foundations of such a literature shall have been properly laid, the benefit to be derived will be at once apparent. There will be a revelation to our people, and it will enlarge our scope, make us better known wherever real lasting culture exists, will undermine and utterly drive out the traditional Negro in dialect,—the subordinate, the servant as the type representing a race whose numbers are now far into the millions. It would suggest to the world the wrong and contempt with which the lion viewed the picture that the hunter and famous painter besides, had drawn of the King of the Forest.

As a matter of history the only high-type Negro that has been put before the American people by a famous writer, is the character Dred founded upon the deeds of Nat Turner, in Mrs. Stowe's novel.

Except the characters sketched by the writers of folk-lore, I know of none more representative of the spirit of the writers of to-day, wherein is infiltrated in the public mind that false sense of the Negro's meaning of inalienable rights, so far as actual practice is concerned, than is found in a story in *Harper's Magazine* some years ago. Here a pathetic picture is drawn of a character generally known as the typical "Darkey."

The man, old and decrepit, had labored through long years to pay for an humble cabin

and garden patch; in fact, he had paid double and treble the original price, but dashing "Marse Wilyum" quieted his own conscience by believing, so the writer claimed, that the old Darkey should be left free to pay him all he felt the cabin was worth to him. The old man looked up to him, trusted him implicitly, and when he found at last he had been deceived, the moment he acknowledged to himself that "Marse Wilyum" had cheated him, a dejected listlessness settled upon him, an expression weak and vacant came in his dull eyes and hung around his capacious but characterless mouth, an exasperatingly meek smile trembled upon his features, and casting a helpless look around the cabin that he thought his own, nay, knew it was, with dragging steps he left the place! "Why did you not stand out for your rights?" a sympathizing friend questioned some years afterwards. To this the writer makes the old man say:

"Wid white folks dat's de way, but wid niggers its dif'unt."

Here the reader is left to infer whatever his or her predilection will incline to accept, as to the meaning of the old man's words. The most general view is that the old man had no manhood, not the sense, nothing kicking at real or imaginary wrongs, which in his estimation makes the superior clan. In a word, there was nothing within the old man's range of understanding to make him feel his inalienable rights.

We know the true analysis of the old man's words was that faith, once destroyed, can never be regained, and the blow to his faith in the individual and the wound to his honest esteem so overwhelming, rendered it out of the question to engage further with a fallen idol.

With one sweep of mind he had seen the utter futility of even hoping for justice from a people who would take advantage of an aged, honest man. That is the point, and this reveals neglected subject for analytical writers to dissect in the interest of truth the real meaning of the so-called cowardice, self-negation, and lack of responsibility so freely referred to by those in positions calculated to make lasting impressions on the public, that by custom scoffs at the meaning introduced in Mrs. Stowe's burning words, when she repeated a question before

answering—"What can any individual do?" "There is one thing every individual can do. They can see to it that they feel right—an atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and justly on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race."

Think of the moral status of the Negro, that Mr. Ridpath in his history degrades before the world. Consider the political outline of the Negro, sketched with extreme care in "Bryce's Commonwealth," and the diatribes of Mr. Froude. From these, turn to the play, where impressions are made upon a heterogeneous assemblage—Mark Twain's "Pudd'n Head Wilson," which Beaumont Fletcher claims as "among the very best of those productions which gives us hope for a distinctive American drama."

In this story we have education and fair environment attended by the most deplorable results, an educated octoroon is made out to be a most despicable, cowardly villain. "The one compensation for all this," my friend, Professor Greener wittily remarks, "is that the 'white nigger' in the story though actually a pure white man, is indescribably worse in all his characteristics than the 'real nigger,' using the vernacular of the play, was ever known to be, and just here Mark Twain unconsciously avenges the Negro while trying his best to disparage him."

In "Imperative Duty," Mr. Howells, laboriously establishes for certain minds, the belief that the Negro possesses an Othello-like charm in his ignorance which education and refinement destroys, or at best makes repulsive.

In explaining why Dr. Olney loves Rhoda, whose training was imparted by good taste, refined by wealth, and polished by foreign travel, he says:

It was the elder world, the beauty of antiquity which appealed to him in the luster and sparkle of this girl, and *the remote taint* of her servile and savage origin, *gave her a fascination* which refuses to let itself be put in words, it was the grace of a limp, the occult, indefinable, lovable ness of deformity,

but transcending these by its allurements, in indefinite degree, and going for the reason of its effect deep into the mysterious places of being, where the spirit and animal meet and part in us.

* * * * *

The mood was of his emotional nature alone, it sought and could have won no justification from the moral sense which indeed it simply submerged, and blotted out for all time.

All this tergiversation and labored explanation of how a white man came to love a girl with a remote tingle of Negro blood! But he must have recourse to this tortuous jugglery of words because one of his characters in the story had taken pains to assert, "That so far as society in the society sense is concerned we have frankly simplified the matter, and no more consort with the Negroes than we do with lower animals, so that one would be quite as likely to meet a cow or a horse in an American drawing-room, as a person of color." This is the height of enlightenment! and from Dean Howells too, litterateur, diplomat, journalist, altruist!

Art, goodness, and beauty are assaulted in order to stimulate or apologize for prejudice against the educated Negro!

In Dr. Huguet, we have as a type a man pitifully trying to be self-conscious, struggling to feel within himself, what prejudice and custom demand that he feel.

In "A Question of Color" the type is a man of splendid English training, that of an English gentleman, surrounded from his birth by wealth, and accepted in the most polished society, married to a white girl, who sells herself for money, and after the ceremony like an angelic Sunday-school child, shudders and admits the truth, that she can never forget that he is a Negro, and he is bad enough to say, so says the writer, that he will say his prayers at her feet night and morning notwithstanding.

We all know, no man, negro or other, ever enacted such a part; it is wholly inconsistent with anything short of a natural-born idiot! And yet a reputable house offers this trash to the public, but thanks to a sensible public, it has

been received with jeers. And so stuff like this comes apace, influencing the reading-world, not indeed thinkers and scholars; but the indiscriminate reading-world, upon whom rests, unfortunately, the bulk of senseless prejudice.

Conan Doyle, like Howells, also pays his thoughtful attention to the educated negro—making him in this case more bloodthirsty and treacherous and savage than the Seminole. One more, and these are mentioned only to show the kind of types of Negro characters eminent writers have taken exceeding care to place before the world as representing us.

In the "Condition of Women in the United States," Mme. Blanc, in a volume of 285 pages, devotes less than 100 words to negro women; after telling ironically of a "Black Damsel" in New Orleans engaged in teaching Latin, she describes her attire, the arrangement of her hair, and concludes, "I also saw a class of little Negro girls with faces like monkeys studying Greek, and the disgust expressed by their former masters seemed quite justified."

Her knowledge of history is as imperfect so far as veracity goes, as her avowal in the same book of her freedom from prejudice against the Negro. The "little girls" must have been over thirty years old to have had any former masters even at their birth! And all this is the outcome in the nineteenth century of the highest expressions of Anglo-Saxon acumen, criticism and understanding of the powers of Negroes of America!

The point of all this, is the indubitable evidence of the need of thoughtful, well-defined, and intelligently placed efforts on our part, to serve as counter-irritants against all such writing that shall stand, having as an aim the supplying of influential and accurate information, on all subjects relating to the Negro and his environments, to inform the American mind at least, for literary purposes.

We cannot afford any more than any other people to be indifferent to the fact that the surest road to real fame is through literature. Who is so well known and appreciated by the cultured minds as Dumas of France, and Pushkin of Russia? I need not say to this thoughtful and intelligent gathering that, any people without a

literature is valued lightly the world round. Who knows or can judge of our intrinsic worth without actual evidence of our breadth of mind, our boundless humanity? Appearing well and weighted with many degrees of titles, will not raise us in our own estimation while color is the white elephant in America. Yet, America is but a patch on the universe: if she ever produces a race out of her cosmopolitan population that can look beyond mere money-getting to more permanent qualities of true greatness as a nation, it will call this age her unbalanced stage.

No one thinks of mere color when looking upon the Chinese, but the dignified character of the literature of his race, and he for monotony of expression, color, and undesirable individual habits is far inferior in these points to the ever-varying American Negro. So our people must awaken to the fact that our task is a conquest for a place for ourselves, and is a legitimate ground for action for us, if we shall resolve to conquer it.

While we of to-day view with increasing dissatisfaction the trend of the literary productions of this country, concerning us, yet are we standing squarely on the foundation laid for us by our immediate predecessors?

This is the question I would bring to your minds. Are we adding to the structure planned for us by our pioneers? Do we know our dwelling and those who under many hardships, at least, gathered the material for its upbuilding? Knowing them do we honor—do we love them—what have they done that we should love? Your own Emerson says—"To judge the production of a people you must transplant the spirit of the times in which they lived."

In the ten volumes of American Literature edited by H. L. Stoddard only Phyllis [*sic*] Wheatley and George W. Williams find a place. This does not show that we have done nothing in literature; far from it, but it does show that we have done nothing so brilliant, so effective, so startling as to attract the attention of these editors. Now it is a fact that thoughtful, scholarly white people do not look for literature in its highest sense from us any more than they look for high scholarship, profound and critical learning on any one point, nor for any eminent

judicial acumen or profound insight into causes and effects.

These are properly regarded as the results only of matured intellectual growth or abundant leisure and opportunity, when united with exceptional talents, and this is the world's view and it is in the main a correct one. Even the instances of precocious geniuses and the rare examples of extraordinary talent appearing from humble and unpromising parentage and unfortunate surroundings, are always recognized as brilliant, sporadic cases, exceptions.

Consequently our success in Race Literature will be looked upon with curiosity and only a series of projected enterprises in various directions—history, poetry, novel writing, speeches, orations, forensic effort, sermons, and so on, will have the result of gaining for us recognition.

You recall Poteghine's remark in Turgenev's novel *Smoke*. How well it applies to us.

For heaven's sake do not spread the idea in Russia that we can achieve success without preparation. No, if your brow be seven spans in width *study*, begin with the alphabet *or else remain quiet* and say nothing. Oh! it excites me to think of these things.

Dr. Blyden's essay, Dr. Crummell's sermons and addresses, and Professor Greener's orations, all are high specimens of sustained English, good enough for any one to read, and able to bear critical examination, and reflect the highest credit on the race.

Your good city of Boston deserves well for having given us our first real historian, William C. Nell—his history of *The Colored Patriots of the Revolution*—not sufficiently read nowadays or appreciated by the present generation; a scholarly, able, accurate book, second to none written by any other colored man.

William Wells Brown's *Black Man* was worthy tribute in its day, the precursor of more elaborate books, and should be carefully studied now; his *Sights and Scenes Abroad* was probably the first book of travel written by an American Negro. The same is doubtless true of his novel, *Clotelle*. *The Anglo-African* magazine published in New York City in 1859 is

adjudged by competent authority to be the highest, best, most scholarly written of all the literature published by us in fifty years.

We have but to read the graphic descriptions and eloquent passages in the first edition of the *Life and Times* of Frederick Douglass to see the high literary qualities of which the race is capable. *Light and Truth*, a valuable volume published many years ago; Dr. Perry's *Cushite!*; *Bond and Free, or Under the Yoke*, by John S. Ladue; *The Life of William Lloyd Garrison*, by Archibald Grimké; Joseph Wilson's *Black Phalanx*; and *Men of Mark*, by Rev. W. J. Simmons; *Noted Women*, by Dr. Scruggs; *The Negro Press and Its Editors*, by I. Garland Penn; *Paul Dunbar's Dialect Poems*, which have lately received high praise from the Hoosier Poet, James Whitcomb Reilly; *Johnson's School History*; *From a Virginia Cabin to the Capitol*, by Hon. J. M. Langston; *Iola Leroy*, by Mrs. F.E.W. Harper; *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, by James M. Trotter, are specimen books within easy reach of the public, that will increase in interest with time.

Professor R. T. Greener, as a metaphysician, logician, orator, and prize essayist, holds an undisputed position in the annals of our literature second to none. His defense of the Negro in the *National Quarterly Review*, 1880, in reply to Mr. Parton's strictures, has been an arsenal from which many have since supplied their armor. It was quoted extensively in this country and England.

And it is not generally known that one of the most valuable contributions to Race Literature has appeared in the form of a scientific treatise on *Incandescent Lighting* published by Van Nostrand of New York, and thus another tribute is laid to Boston's credit by Lewis H. Latimer.

In the ecclesiastical line we have besides those already mentioned, the writings of the learned Dr. Pennington, Bishops Payne and Tanner of the A.M.E. Church.

The poems, songs, and addresses by our veteran literary women F.E.W. Harper, Charlotte Forten Grimké, H. Cordelia Ray, Gertrude Mossell, "Clarence and Corinne," "The Hazelton Family," by Mrs. G. E. Johnson, and "Appointed" by W. H. Stowers and W. H. Anderson

are a few of the publications of similar subjects; all should be read and placed in our libraries, as first beginnings it is true, but they compare favorably with similar work of the most advanced people.

Our journalism has accomplished more than can now be estimated; in fact not until careful biographers make special studies drawn from the lives of the pioneer journalists, shall we or those contemporary with them ever know the actual mead of good work accomplished by them under almost insurmountable difficulties.

Beginning with the editors of the first newspapers published in this country by colored men, we New Yorkers take pride in the fact that Messrs. Cornish and Russwurm of *Freedom's Journal*, New York City, 1827, edited the first paper in this country devoted to the upbuilding of the Negro. Philip A. Bell of *The Weekly Advocate*, 1837, named by contemporaries "the Nestor of African American journalists." The gifted Dr. James McCune Smith was associated with him. *The Weekly Advocate* later became *The Colored American*. And in 1839, on Mr. Bell's retirement Dr. Charles Ray assumed the editorial chair continued until 1842, making an enviable record for zeal on all matters of race interest. These men were in very truth the pioneers of Race Journalism.

Their lives and record should be zealously guarded for the future use of our children, for they familiarized the public with the idea of the Negro owning and doing the brain work of a newspaper. The people of other sections became active in establishing journals, which did good work all along the line. Even the superficial mind must accept the modest claim that "These journals proved to a powerful lever in diverting public opinion, public sympathy, and public support towards the liberation of the slave."

Papers were edited by such men as Dr. H. H. Garnet, David Ruggles, W. A. Hodges, and T. Van Rensselaer, of *The Ram's Horn*. In 1847 our beloved and lofty-minded Frederick Douglass edited his own paper *The North Star*, in the City of Rochester, where his mortal remains now peacefully rest. "His paper was noted for its high-class matter." Samuel Ringold Ward,

the sage of Anacostia, once said to the writer, "was one of the smartest men I ever knew if not the smartest."

The prevailing sentiment at that time was sympathy for the ambitious Negro. At a most opportune time, *The Anglo-African*, the finest effort in the way of a magazine by the race up to that time, was established in January of 1859 in New York City, with Thomas Hamilton as editor and proprietor. The columns were opened to the most experienced writers of the day. Martin R. Delaney contributed many important papers on astronomy, among which was one on "Comets," another on "The Attraction of the Planets." George B. Vashon wrote "The Successive Advances of Astronomy," James McCune Smith wrote his comments "On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia" and his "German Invasion"—every number contained gems that to-day are beyond price. In these pages also appeared "Afric-American Picture Gallery," by "Ethiope"—Wm. J. Wilson; Robert Gordon's "Personality of the First Cause"; Dr. Pennington on "The Self-Redeeming Power of the Colored Races of the World"; Dr. Blyden on "The Slave Traffic"; and on the current questions of the day, such brave minds as Frederick Douglass, William C. Nell, John Mercer Langston, Theodore Holly, J. Sella Martin, Frances Ellen Watkins, Jane Rustic, Sarah M. Douglass, and Grace A. Mapps! What a galaxy! The result was a genuine race newspaper, one that had the courage to eliminate everything of personal interest, and battle for the rights of the whole people, and while its history, like many other laudable enterprises, may be little known beyond the journalistic fraternity, to such men as Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison, the paper and staff were well known and appreciated. In those days, the Negro in literature was looked upon as a prodigy; he was encouraged in many ways by white people particularly, as he was useful in serving the cause of philanthropic agitators for the liberation of the slave. The earnest, upright character and thoughtful minds of the early pioneers acted as a standing argument in favor of the cause for which the abolitionists were then bending every nerve when the slave was

liberated and the Civil War brought to a close. The spirit of Mr. Lincoln's interview with a committee of colored citizens of the District of Columbia, in August 1862, as told by William Wells Brown, in which Mr. Lincoln said, "But for your people among us, there would be no war," reacted upon the public, and from that time until the present a vicious oppression, under the name of natural prejudice, has succeeded immeasurably in retarding our progress.

As a matter of history we have nothing to compare with weekly publications of twenty five or thirty years ago. The unequal contest waged between Negro journals and their white contemporaries is lost sight of by the people, as only those connected with various publications are aware of the condition and difficulties surrounding the managements of such journals.

Our struggling journalists not only find themselves on the losing side, but as if to add to their thankless labor, they oftentimes receive the contemptuous regard of the people who should enthusiastically rally to their support. The journalist is spurred with the common-sense idea that every enterprise undertaken and carried on by members of the race is making a point in history for that entire race, and the historians of the future will not stop to consider our discontented and sentimental whys and wherefores when they critically examine our race enterprises; but they will simply record their estimate of what the men and women journalists of to-day not only represented, but actually accomplished.

It is so often claimed that colored newspapers do not amount to anything. People even who boast of superior attainments voice such sentiments with the most ill-paced indifference; the most discreditable phase of Race disloyalty imaginable—one that future historians will have no alternative but to censure.

If our newspapers and magazines do not amount to anything, it is because our people do not demand anything of better quality from their own. It is because they strain their purses supporting those white papers that are and always will be independent of any income derived from us. Our contributions to such journals are spasmodic and uncertain, like fluctuating

stocks, and are but an excess of surplus. It is hard for the bulk of our people to see this; it is even hard to prove to them that in supporting such journals, published by the dominant class, we often pay for what are not only vehicles of insult to our manhood and womanhood, but we assist in propagating or supporting false impressions of ourselves or our less fortunate brothers.

Our journalistic leader is unquestionably T. Thomas Fortune, editor of *The New York Age*, and a regular contributor of signed articles to the *New York Sun*, one of the oldest and ablest daily newspapers in the United States, noted on two continents for its rare excellence.

For many years Mr. Fortune has given his best efforts to the cause of race advancement, and the splendid opportunities now opening to him on the great journals of the day, attest the esteem in which he is held by men who create public opinion in this country.

If John E. Bruce, "Bruce-Grit," "John Mitchell, Jr.," W.H.A. Moore, Augustus M. Hodge "B Square," were members of any other race, they would be famous the country over. Joe Howard or "Bill Nye" have in reality done no more for their respective clientage than these bright minds and corresponding wits have done for theirs.

T. T. Fortune of *The New York Age*, Ida Wells-Barnet of the *Free Speech*, and John Mitchell of *The Richmond Planet*, have made a nobler fight than the brilliant Parnel in his championship of Ireland's cause, for the reason that the people for whom he battled, better knew and utilized more the strength obtained only by systematic organization, not so is the case with the constituents of the distinguished journalists I have mentioned.

Depressing as this fact is, it should not deter those who know that Race Literature should be cultivated for the sake of the formation of habits. First efforts are always crude, each succeeding one becomes better or should be so. Each generation by the law of heredity receives the impulse or impression for good or ill from its predecessors, and since this is the law, we must begin to form habits of observation and commence to build a plan for posterity by

synthesis, analysis, ourselves aiming and striving after the highest, whether we attain it or not. Such are the attempts of our journalists of to-day, and they shall reap if they faint not.

Race Literature does not mean things uttered in praise, thoughtless praise of ourselves wherein each goose thinks her gosling a swan. We have had too much of this, too much that is crude, rude, pompous, and literary nothings, which ought to have been strangled before they were written much less printed; and this does not only apply to us; for it is safe to say that, only an infinitesimal percentage of the so-called literature filling the book shelves to-day, will survive a half century.

In the words of a distinguished critic, "It is simply amazing how little of all that is written and printed in these days that makes for literature; how small a part is permanent, how much purely ephemeral, famous to-day on account of judicious advertising, forgotten to-morrow. We should clear away the under-brush of self-deception which makes the novice think because sentences are strung together and ordinary ideas evolved, dilated upon, and printed, that such trash is literature." If this is claimed for the more favored class, it should have a tendency with us to encourage our work, even though the results do not appear at once.

It should serve the student by guarding him against the fulsome praise of "great men," "great writers," "great lawyers," "great ministers," who in reality have never done one really great or meritorious thing.

Rather should the student contemplate the success of such as Prof. Du Bois who won the traveling fellowship at Harvard on metaphysical studies, and has just received his Ph. D., at the last commencement, on account of his work. For such facts demonstrate that it is the character of the work we do, rather than the quantity of it, which counts for real Race Literature.

Race Literature does mean though the preserving of all the records of a Race, and thus cherishing the materials saving from destruction and obliteration what is good, helpful, and stimulating. But for our Race Literature, how will future generations know of the pioneers in

Literature, our statesmen, soldiers, divines, musicians, artists, lawyers, critics, and scholars? True culture in Race Literature will enable us to discriminate and not to write hasty thoughts and unjust and ungenerous criticism often of our superiors in knowledge and judgement.

And now comes the question, What part shall we women play in the Race Literature of the future? I shall best answer that question by calling your attention to the glorious part which they have already performed in the columns of *The Woman's Era*, edited by Josephine St. P. Ruffin.

Here within the compass of one small journal we have struck out a new line of departure—a journal, a record of Race interests gathered from all parts of the United States, carefully selected, moistened, winnowed, and garnered by the ablest intellects of educated colored women, shrinking at no lofty theme, shirking no serious duty, aiming at every possible excellence, and determined to do their part in the future uplifting of the race.

If twenty women, by their concentrated efforts in one literary movement, can meet with such success as has engendered, planned out, and so successfully consummated this convention, what much more glorious results, what wider spread success, what grander diffusion of mental light will not come forth at the bidding of the enlarged hosts of women writers, already called into being by the stimulus of your efforts?

And here let me speak one word for my journalistic sisters who have already entered the broad arena of journalism. Before *The Woman's Era* had come into existence, no one except themselves can appreciate the bitter experience and sore disappointments under which they have at all times been compelled to pursue their chosen vocations.

If their brothers of the press have had their difficulties to contend with, I am here as a sister journalist to state, from the fullness of knowledge, that their task has been an easy one compared with that of the colored woman in journalism.

Woman's part in Race Literature, as in Race building, is the most important part and has

been so in all ages. It is for her to receive impressions and transmit them. All through the most remote epochs she has done her share in literature. When not an active singer like Sappho, she has been the means of producing poets, statesmen, and historians, understandingly as Napoleon's mother worked on Homeric tapestry while bearing the future conqueror of the world.

When living up to her highest development, woman has done much to make lasting history, by her stimulating influence and there can be no greater responsibility than that, and this is the highest privilege granted to her by the Creator of the Universe.

Such are some brief outlines of the vast problem of Race Literature. Never was the outlook for Race Literature brighter. Questions of vast importance to succeeding generations on all lines are now looming up to be dissected and elucidated.

Among the students of the occult, certain powers are said to be fully developed innately in certain types of the Negro, powers that when understood and properly directed will rival if not transcend those of Du Maurier's Svengali.

The medical world recognizes this especially when investigating the science of neurology,—by the merest chance it was discovered that certain types of our nurses—male and female—possessed invaluable qualities for quieting and controlling patients afflicted with the self-destructive mania. This should lead our physicians to explore and investigate so promising a field.

American artists find it easy to caricature the Negro, but find themselves baffled when striving to depict the highest characteristics of a Sojourner Truth. If he lacks the required temperament, there is thus offered a field for the Race-loving Negro artist to compete with his elder brother in art, and succeed where the other has failed.

American and even European historians have often proved themselves much enchain'd by narrow, local prejudice, hence there is a field for the unbiased historian of this closing century.

The advance made during the last fifteen or twenty years in mechanical science is the most

encouraging nature possible for our own ever-increasing class of scientific students.

The scholars of the race, linguists and masters of the dead languages have a wide field before them, which when fully explored, will be of incalculable interest to the whole people—I mean particularly the translators of the writings of the ancient world, on all that pertains to the exact estimate in which our African ancestors were held by contemporaries. This will be of interest to all classes, and especially to our own.

Until our scholars shall apply themselves to these greatly neglected fields, we must accept the perverted and indifferent translations of those prejudiced against us.

Dr. Le Plongeon, an eminent explorer and archaeologist, in his Central American studies, has made startling discoveries, which, if he succeeds in proving, will mean that the cradle of man's primitive condition is situated in Yucatan, and the primitive race was the ancestor of the Negro.

The Review of Reviews, of July, has this to say: "That such a tradition should have been handed down to the modern Negro is not so improbable in view of the fact that the inhabitants of Africa appear certainly to have had communication with the people of the Western

world up to the destruction of the Island of Atlanta, concerning which even Dr. Le Plongeon has much to tell us."

Think of it! What a scope for our scholars not only in archaeology, but in everything that goes to make up literature!

Another avenue of research that commands dignified attention is the possibility that Negroes were among those who embarked with Columbus. Prominent educators are giving serious attention to this. Prof. Wright, of Georgia, lately sailed to England with the express purpose of investigating the subject, during his vacation, in some of the famous old libraries of Europe.

The lesson to be drawn from this cursory glance at what I may call the past, present, and future of our Race Literature, apart from its value as first beginnings, not only to us as a people but literature in general, is that unless earnest and systematic effort be made to procure and preserve for transmission to our successors, the records, books, and various publications already produced by us, not only will the sturdy pioneers who paved the way and laid the foundation for our Race Literature be robbed of their just due, but an irretrievable wrong will be inflicted upon the generations that shall come after us.

CHARLES W. CHESNUTT

The Writing of a Novel (after 1899)

Given the traditional pen, ink, and paper which represent the financial outlay required to enter the field of letters; given furthermore some facility of expression in English or one's mother tongue; given experience or imagination; or somewhat of both; given the creative impulse, the would-be author faces his task. And in order that we may not, with him, waste a great deal of time in deciding what form his effort shall take, let us assume that he has concluded to write a novel. If he has in any way qualified himself to attempt such a task, he will realize, ere he puts

his pen to paper, that there are certain fundamental elements which enter into the construction of any work of the imagination which can be properly called a novel.

The first of these, I think, which will suggest itself, is the purpose which the writer has in view. A man may write a novel to amuse, to instruct, to inspire, to promote a cause. I refer of course to the objective purpose: primarily most men who write, write much as the spider spins his web, or the bee gathers honey, or the snake secretes venom—for the creative impulse, alas,

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is not always guided by high and noble instinct. It will be observed, however, that well-high every great work of fiction was inspired by some worthy motive, and that those to which no purely altruistic end can be imputed, have served some purpose beneficial to mankind. The Hebrew Scriptures Greek Orators and Poets. Caesar. The Roman Classics. Voltaire. Shakespeare. Scott. Dickens. Dumas. Balzac. Mrs. Stowe. Novels of evil purpose are not wanting, but usually short-lived. "The good men do lives after them"; the evil decays and perishes.

Having decided what end he has in view, the author must next select a theme for his story. This will perhaps ordinarily suggest itself in connection with his purpose. One seldom has a strong purpose without having first thought deeply upon some phase of human life, and the purpose-novel, to be effective, must deal with subjects upon which the author is informed, and has convictions. In an age like ours there is no lack of subjects. The Marriage Relation. Religion. (*Robt Elsmere.*) Patriotism. (Floods.) Slavery. Race Questions. *Uncle* & more. Dickens. Balzac. (*Cousin Bette, Cousin Pons. La Lys dans la Vallée.*) Maeterlinck. Dissection. Ibsen. (Social Misfits.) Turgenieff. Tolstoy. Tyranny.

Of novels to amuse or entertain, there are many themes. Love and Adventure. Happy Love. Unhappy Love. Hatred. Revenge. Fidelity. And the crop of French novels of adultery.

Next your novel must have a plot. The plotless novel is in reality no more than a character sketch. Unless written with exceptional charm of expression or upon some theme of immediate and compelling importance a novel must have such a dramatic movement, such an unfolding of events, such a play of characters, and such uncertainty of outcome as to hold the reader's attention through four hundred solid pages of reading matter. Mark Twain I believe has said that there are only forty-seven plots in all literature, and that the whole body of books is the mere rearrangement of these elements. Lest the aspiring novelist should think that by finding these forty-seven plots he would find it easy to write a novel, it may be suggested that there are as many different combinations, or nearly so, as are possible with a pack of fifty-two

playing cards, and most of us know how rarely in the course of a year or even of a lifetime, one gets the cards to take thirteen tricks in a game of whist. Amazing fertility of invention of great romancers. Scott. Victor Hugo. Alexander Dumas. Ingenuity of lesser lights. Wilkie Collins Conan Doyle. Geo. Meredith. Some novels memorable for their plots. In detective stories, for instance, the plot is the *raison d'être* of the book. The same rule applies in lesser measure to the novel of adventure.

Robinson Crusoe. Take us out of ourselves, beyond the dull, trammelled life of convention, out into the freedom of Arcadia. Salt sea breeze. Desert Isle. Republicans like to read about princes. Recent Experience.

Having conceived more or less clearly his plot, the novelist must now create the characters with which to carry on the action of his story, and this is perhaps the most important element in a work of creative imagination. For as man is the crown and flower of creation, so a good character is the highest product of the creative imagination. As the Greek sculptors of the age of Pericles could produce a statue representing a perfection more ideal than could be found in any one human being, as the great masters of the art of painting can by combining the excellences of many models, infuse them with the fire of genius and make them live upon the canvas, the joy and the despair of those less gifted, so the master minds of fiction have created characters more real, more convincing than those of even the men and women whom we see around us. Nowhere is the kinship of humanity to divinity more apparent than in its power to create out of thin air, creatures who live and breathe and love and hate and do and die—and yet live on forever. There are characters in fiction which are more immortal than the names of those who wrote them. Many a legend has been handed down for centuries, and has become a part of the literature of mankind, of which the name of the author is lost in oblivion. As a great portrait painter may so idealize the living face as to bring out all the good and leave out all the bad, so the great master of fiction may take a historical character and make of him or her a person much more vital

than the real man or woman could ever, in our human experience, have been.

Great characters of fiction.
Henry Esmond
Becky Sharp
Rebecca in <i>Ivanhoe</i>
Shylock
Falstaff
D'artagnan and Companions
Sherlock Holmes
David Copperfield
Micawber
Uriah Heep
Jean Valjean
&c.

I had forgotten to say, what may perhaps be just as well said here, that a novel should have a background. This is perhaps a subject which will take care of itself. A novel of warlike adventure must perforce be located at some place and in some period where a war was in progress. A novel which dealt with the proscription of the Jewish race in modern times could not be better located than in Russia. If one take for his theme slavery or its tragic consequences, our own South would be his natural field. Most desert island stories are located in the tropics, but one of the most charming of recent appearance had for its scene of action an uninhabited island in the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. He who would write a convincing story of realistic life, which depends for its interest upon the human heart and its emotions, upon the love of woman, upon the lust of power will write best if

he confine himself to the scenes with which he is familiar. *The Helmet of Navarre*. *Robert Tournay*. No atmosphere. The Inevitable Russian Princess or Mediatized German Grand Duke. Picture to yourself a woman young, beautiful, of noble form and faultless contour. Give her if you wish a fine mind and a great soul, and then turn her into a parlor filled with well-dressed people, in a gown which does not fit, and you have the novel without style, in company with the great books which make up the world's literature. As a fine mind and a great soul may command recognition and respect in spite of a gown which does not fit, so doubtless a great book may win a place in literature in spite of crudities of form. And yet in the long run, when books like the deeds of men are sifted through the sieve of time, those live longest which have most claims upon human interest. A character, I have said, may outlive its creator. So a book may for the beauty of its form long outlive the purpose which gave it birth. Indeed it is so with most great books. And by style I do not mean fine writing, at least not necessarily fine writing—good writing of course, but that is best which best subserves its end. Style may be simple and direct. It may be florid, ornate. It may content itself with direct statement; it may deal with figures of speech and flowers of Rhetoric. All have their place. And were I writing a technical guide to authorship, I should say to the literary aspirant, adapt your speech to your thought and your thought to the situation. I read the other day in either an old novel, written when novel writing was in its evolutionary . . .

W.E.B. DU BOIS

The Negro in Literature and Art (1913)

The Negro is primarily an artist. The usual way of putting this is to speak disdainfully of his sensuous nature. This means that the only race which has held at bay the life destroying forces of the tropics, has gained therefrom in some slight compensation a sense of beauty,

particularly for sound and color, which characterizes the race. The Negro blood which flowed in the veins of many of the mightiest of the pharaohs accounts for much of Egyptian art, and indeed, Egyptian civilization owes much in its origins to the development of the large

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particularly for sound and color, which characterizes the race. The Negro blood which flowed in the veins of many of the mightiest of the pharaohs accounts for much of Egyptian art, and indeed, Egyptian civilization owes much in its origins to the development of the large

strain of Negro blood which manifested itself in every grade of Egyptian society.

Semitic civilization also had its Negroid influences, and these continually turn toward art, as in the case of Nosseyeb, one of the five great poets of Damascus under the Ommiades. It was therefore not to be wondered at that in modern days one of the greatest of modern literatures, the Russian, should have been founded by Pushkin, the grandson of a full-blooded Negro, and that among the painters of Spain was the mulatto slave, Gomez. Back of all this development by way of contact, comes the artistic sense of the indigenous Negro as shown in the stone figures of Sherbro, the bronzes of Benin, the marvelous handwork in iron and other metals which has characterized the Negro race so long that archeologists today, with less and less hesitation, are ascribing the discovery of the welding of iron to the Negro race.

To America, the Negro could bring only his music, but that was quite enough. The only real American music is that of the Negro American, except the meagre contribution of the Indian. Negro music divides itself into many parts: the older African wails and chants, the distinctively Afro-American folk-song set to religious words and Calvinistic symbolism, and the newer music which the slaves adapted from surrounding themes. To this may be added the American music built on Negro themes such as "Suwanee River," "John Brown's Body," "Old Black Joe," etc. In our day Negro artists like Johnson and Will Marian Cook have taken up this music and begun a newer and most important development, using the syncopated measure popularly known as "rag time," but destined in the minds of musical students to a great career in the future.

The expression in words of the tragic experiences of the Negro race is to be found in various places. First, of course, there are those, like Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote from without the race. Then there are black men like Es-Sadi who wrote the Epic of the Sudan, in Arabic, that great history of the fall of the greatest of Negro empires, the Songhay. In America the literary expression of Negroes has had a regular development. As early as the eighteenth century,

and even before the Revolutionary War, the first voices of Negro authors were heard in the United States.

Phyllis [sic] Wheatley, the black poetess, was easily the pioneer, her first poems appearing in 1773, and other editions in 1774 and 1793. Her earliest poem was in memory of George Whitefield. She was followed by the Negro, Olaudah Equiano—known by his English name of Gustavus Vassa—whose autobiography of 350 pages, published in 1787, was the beginning of that long series of personal appeals of which Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* is the latest. Benjamin Banneker's almanacs represented the first scientific work of American Negroes, and began to be issued in 1792.

Coming now to the first decades of the nineteenth century we find some essays on freedom by the African Society of Boston, and an apology for the new Negro church formed in Philadelphia. Paul Cuffe, disgusted with America, wrote an early account of Sierra Leone, while the celebrated Lemuel Haynes, ignoring the race question, dipped deeply into the New England theological controversy about 1815. In 1829 came the first full-voiced, almost hysterical, protest against slavery and the color line in David Walker's *Appeal* which aroused Southern legislatures to action. This was followed by the earliest Negro conventions which issued interesting minutes, and a strong appeal against disfranchisement in Pennsylvania.

In 1840 some strong writers began to appear. Henry Highland Garnet and J.W.C. Pennington preached powerful sermons and gave some attention to Negro history in their pamphlets; R. B. Lewis made a more elaborate attempt at Negro history. Whittfield's poems appeared in 1846, and William Wells Brown began a career of writing which lasted from 1847 until after the war. In 1845 Douglass' autobiography made its first appearance, destined to run through endless editions up until the last in 1893. Moreover it was in 1841 that the first Negro magazine appeared in America, edited by George Hogarth and published by the A.M.E. Church.

In the fifties William Wells Brown published his *Three Years in Europe*; James Whitfield published further poems, and a new poet arose in the

person of Frances E. W. Harper, a woman of no little ability who died lately; Martin R. Delaney [*sic*] and William Nell wrote further of Negro history, Nell especially making valuable contributions to the history of the Negro soldiers. Three interesting biographies were added in this decade to the growing number: Josiah Henson, Samuel G. Ward, and Samuel Northrop; while Catto, leaving general history, came down to the better known history of the Negro church.

In the sixties slave narratives multiplied, like that of Linda Brent, while two studies of Africa based on actual visits were made by Robert Campbell and Dr. Alexander Crummell; William Douglass and Bishop Daniel Payne continued the history of the Negro church, while William Wells Brown carried forward his work in general Negro history. In this decade, too, Bishop Tanner began his work in Negro theology.

Most of the Negro talent in the seventies was taken up in politics; the older men like Bishop Wayman wrote of their experiences; William Wells Brown wrote the *Rising Sun*, and Sojourner Truth added her story to the slave narratives. A new poet arose in the person of A. A. Whitman, while James M. Trotter was the first to take literary note of the musical ability of his race. Indeed this section might have been begun by some reference to the music and folklore of the Negro race; the music contained much primitive poetry and the folklore was one of the great contributions to American civilization.

In the eighties there are signs of unrest and different conflicting streams of thought. On the one hand, the rapid growth of the Negro church is shown by the writers on church subjects like Moore and Wayman. The historical spirit was especially strong. Still wrote of the *Underground Railroad*; Simmons issued his interesting biographical dictionary, and the greatest historian of the race appeared when George W. Williams issued his two-volume history of the *Negro Race in America*. The political turmoil was reflected in Langston's *Freedom and Citizenship*, Fortune's *Black and White*, and Straker's *New South*, and found its bitterest arraignment in Turner's pamphlets; but with all this went other new thought; a black man

published his *First Greek Lessons*, Bishop Payne issued his *Treatise on Domestic Education*, and Stewart studied Liberia.

In the nineties came histories, essays, novels and poems, together with biographies and social studies. The history was represented by Payne's *History of the A.M.E. Church*. Hood's *History of the A.M.E. Zion Church*, Anderson's sketch of *Negro Presbyterianism* and Hagood's *Colored Man in the M.E. Church*; general history of the older type by R. L. Perry's *Cushite* and the newer type in Johnson's history, while one of the secret societies found their historian in books; Crogman's essays appeared and Archibald Grimké's biographies. The race question was discussed in Frank Grimké's published sermons, while social studies were made by Penn, Wright, Mossell, Crummell, Majors, and others. Most notable, however, was the rise of the Negro novelist and poet with national recognition; Frances Harper was still writing and Griggs began his racial novels, but both of these spoke primarily to the Negro race; on the other hand, Chesnutt's six novels and Dunbar's inimitable works spoke to the whole nation.

Since 1900 the stream of Negro writing has continued. Dunbar has found a worthy successor in the less-known but more carefully cultured Braithwaite; Booker T. Washington has given us his biography and *Story of the Negro*; Kelly Miller's trenchant essays have appeared in book form; Sinclair's *Aftermath of Slavery* has attracted attention, as have the studies made by Atlanta University. The forward movement in Negro music is represented by J. W. and F. J. Work in one direction and Rosamond Johnson, Harry Burleigh and Will Marion Cook in another.

On the whole, the literary output of the American Negro has been both large and creditable, although, of course, comparatively little known; few great names have appeared and only here and there work that could be called first-class, but this is not a peculiarity of Negro literature.

The time has not yet come for the great development of American Negro literature. The economic stress is too great and the racial persecution too bitter to allow the leisure and the

poise for which literature calls. On the other hand, never in the world has a richer mass of material been accumulated by a people than that which the Negroes possess today and are becoming conscious of. Slowly but surely they are developing artists of technic who will be able to use this material. The nation does not notice this for everything touching the Negro is banned by magazines and publishers unless it takes the form of caricature or bitter attack, or is so thoroughly innocuous as to have no literary flavor.

Outside of literature the American Negro has distinguished himself in other lines of art. One need only mention Henry O. Tanner, whose pictures hang in the great galleries of the world, including the Luxembourg. There are a score of other less known colored painters of ability including Bannister, Harper, Scott, and Brown. To these may be added the actors headed by Ira Aldridge, who played in Covent Garden, was decorated by the king of Prussia and the emperor of Russia, and made a member of learned societies.

There have been many colored composers of music. Popular songs like "Grandfather's Clock," "Listen to the Mocking Bird,"—"Carry Me Back to Old Virginia," etc., were composed by colored men. There were a half dozen composers of ability among New Orleans freedmen and Harry Burleigh, Cook, and Johnson are well known today. There have been sculptors like Edmonia Lewis, and singers like Flora Batson, whose color alone kept her from the grand opera stage.

To appraise rightly this body of art one must remember that it represents the work of those artists only whom accident set free; if the artist had a white face, his Negro blood did not militate against him in the fight for recognition; if his Negro blood was visible, white relatives may have helped him; in a few cases ability was united to indomitable will. But the shrinking, modest, black artist without special encouragement had little or no chance in a world determined to make him a menial. So this sum of accomplishment is but an imperfect indication of what the Negro race is capable of in America and in the world.

ALICE DUNBAR-NELSON

Negro Literature for Negro Pupils (1922)

The ancient Greeks, wishing to impress upon their children the greatness of Hellas, made the schoolboys memorize Homer, particularly those passages dealing with wars and conquests. The Romans saturated their youth with Roman literature, history, and law. The Hebrew children of all ages are versed, grounded, and crammed with the Mosaic and Rabbinical law. The Chinese child learns volumes of Confucius. The French child recites La Fontaine, even before he can read. Spain drives home the epic of the Cid to the youth of her land—and so on, through all history, ancient and modern; each land, each nation impresses most painstakingly upon the rising generation the fact that it possesses a history and a literature, and that it must live up to the traditions of its history, and make that literature a part of its life.

The reason for this is obvious. If a people are to be proud and self-respecting, they must believe in themselves. Destroy a man's belief in his own powers, and you destroy his usefulness—render him a worthless object, helpless and hopeless. Tell a people over and over again that they have done nothing, can do nothing, set a limitation for their achievement; impress upon them that all they have or can hope to have is the product of the minds of other peoples; force them to believe that they are pensioners on the mental bounty of another race,—and they will lose what little faith they may have had in themselves, and become stultified non-producers. Any parent or teacher knows how disastrous is the result of telling a child how splendidly some other child has done, and asking why he does not go and do likewise. The one so adjured

poise for which literature calls. On the other hand, never in the world has a richer mass of material been accumulated by a people than that which the Negroes possess today and are becoming conscious of. Slowly but surely they are developing artists of technic who will be able to use this material. The nation does not notice this for everything touching the Negro is banned by magazines and publishers unless it takes the form of caricature or bitter attack, or is so thoroughly innocuous as to have no literary flavor.

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Negro Literature for Negro Pupils (1922)

The ancient Greeks, wishing to impress upon their children the greatness of Hellas, made the schoolboys memorize Homer, particularly those passages dealing with wars and conquests. The Romans saturated their youth with Roman literature, history, and law. The Hebrew children of all ages are versed, grounded, and crammed with the Mosaic and Rabbinical law. The Chinese child learns volumes of Confucius. The French child recites La Fontaine, even before he can read. Spain drives home the epic of the Cid to the youth of her land—and so on, through all history, ancient and modern; each land, each nation impresses most painstakingly upon the rising generation the fact that it possesses a history and a literature, and that it must live up to the traditions of its history, and make that literature a part of its life.

The reason for this is obvious. If a people are to be proud and self-respecting, they must believe in themselves. Destroy a man's belief in his own powers, and you destroy his usefulness—render him a worthless object, helpless and hopeless. Tell a people over and over again that they have done nothing, can do nothing, set a limitation for their achievement; impress upon them that all they have or can hope to have is the product of the minds of other peoples; force them to believe that they are pensioners on the mental bounty of another race,—and they will lose what little faith they may have had in themselves, and become stultified non-producers. Any parent or teacher knows how disastrous is the result of telling a child how splendidly some other child has done, and asking why he does not go and do likewise. The one so adjured

usually does the exact opposite, in a bitterness of resentment and gloom, it being one of the vagaries of human nature to act contrariwise.

All this is by way of reminding ourselves that for two generations we have given brown and black children a blonde ideal of beauty to worship, a milk-white literature to assimilate, and a pearly Paradise to anticipate, in which their dark faces would be hopelessly out of place. That there has not been a complete and absolute stultification of the efforts of the race toward self-expression is due only to the fact that we are a people of peculiar resiliency and combativeness. The effect of this kind of teaching is shown in the facts that the beautiful brown dolls, which resemble their tiny play-mothers, still have some difficulty in making their way into the homes of our people; that some older religionists still fondly hope that at death, and before St. Peter admits them into Paradise, they will be washed physically white; that Negro business enterprises are still regarded with a doubtful eye; and that Negro literature is frequently mentioned in whispers as a dubious quantity.

There is a manifest remedy for this condition, a remedy which the teachers of the race are applying gradually, wherever the need has been brought to their attention. We must begin everywhere to instill race pride into our pupils; not by dull statistics, nor yet by tedious iterations that we are a great people, and "if you do not believe it, look at this table of figures, or at the life of so-and-so." Idle boasting of past achievements always leaves a suspicion in the mind of the listener that the braggart is not sure of his ground and is bolstering up his opinion of himself. But we will give the children the poems and stories and folklore and songs of their own people. We do not teach literature; we are taught by literature. The subtlest, most delicate, and lasting impressions of childhood are those gained by the chance poem, the eagerly absorbed fable, the lesson in the reader, the story told in the Sunday-school lesson. The fairy prince and the delectable princess have their charm, as opening up a vista into an enchanted land, but the poem that touches closely the heart of a child, and belongs to it because of

its very nearness to his own life, is the bit of literature that lifts him above the dull brown earth and makes him akin to all that is truly great in the universe.

Three pictures project themselves upon the screen of memory, deeply suggestive of the futility of some of our efforts to reach child-life. One is that of a plaintive child, to whom the world of books was the real world, hugging to her thin little breast a big book of poetry, and passionately praying, "Oh, please, dear Lord, let me grow up and write things, because none of us have ever written anything, and we ought to, dear Lord, because its *awful* that we don't write stories or things." Now this was a Southern child in a Southern city in a school taught by colored teachers, and her eager little soul was convulsed with shame that her own people had never accomplished anything in the realm of the books she loved.

The second picture shows a young girl teaching in a Southern city before it was supplied with modern sewerage, when to dig even eighteen inches in the ground brought one to water. The Second-Reader lesson cheerfully told of the joys of storing red apples in the cellar to eat when the snow was on the ground. To explain snow to these children in a semi-tropical clime was a feat requiring Herculean efforts, and the modicum of impression made was tempered by open skepticism on the faces of the boys. But when the cellar problem was attacked all faith in the teacher's omniscience was blown to the four winds. What, a room underground? Why, everyone knew that you couldn't even dig a grave without its filling with water, much less have a whole room underground! Prudence and decorum went to the winds, and the little teacher mopped her agitated forehead and prayed for Second Readers with Southern stories in them.

Third: a splendidly equipped school in a seaside town. The windows of all the rooms on one side of the building overlooked the Atlantic Ocean, and every pane of glass framed a perfect vignette of cloud and wave and white-winged fishing smack, driving before the wind, or lying at anchor with graceful spars silhouetted against a myriad-hued sky. Yet every child in the art classes was busily painting apple orchards in

full bloom, it being spring, and time for the apple orchards of New England and inland places to flower into whiteness and pinkness. There are no apple trees anywhere near this sandy strip of white coast that is pounded by the great waves, and spring for that section means the shy wild flowers that bloom in heaped sand dunes, or brilliant marshy mallows flushing amidst swaying reeds. It means little, saucy-frocked fishing smacks running through white-capped ultramarine waves. Yet in all that school not a child had been told to look out of the window and see the beauties of his own environment. They were copying the reputed beauties of a land miles inland.

These three pictures stand out in my mind because it seems to me that they symbolize the kind of teaching that we do so much of in some of our schools—the colored child, hungry for information, and yet ignorant of the history and achievements of its own race; pupils forced to insult their budding intelligence with an unnecessary situation; youthful artists turning their backs on the beauties about them and copying the counterfeit landscapes which they have never seen. It is high time that we throw off the shackles which convention binds around our educational methods and “let down our buckets where we are.”

Every teacher in a colored school is a missionary. More than the mere instilling of so much knowledge in the heads of the pupils, must he or she teach many other things, character through pride of race being one of the greatest. For the youth who is proud of his race and will endeavor to live up to its traditions, and will hesitate to do mean things lest they sully the escutcheon. As we have said before, the sentiment of pride and honor fostered in the Negro youth will fire his ambition, his desire to accomplish, even as others of his race have done before him. It is only the exceptional case, the overwhelming genius who is thrilled with the desire to conquer because no other has done so. The ordinary one—and there are so many more of him than there are of any other kind—needs encouragement from the deeds of others.

But statistics mean nothing to children; they are colorless things, savoring too much of tables

in arithmetic to be deeply intriguing. The child mind must have concrete examples, for it is essentially poetic and deals in images. It is not enough to say that black men fought in the Revolutionary War to the extent of so many in so many regiments. But there are a number of well-told, crisply narrated stories of Crispus Attucks, and even some narrative poems celebrate the first blood shed in the Revolutionary War. It is not enough to say that black slaves, from Massachusetts to Maryland, stood by the Nation when red-coated Tories overran the land. Dunbar’s spirited ballad of “Black Samson of Brandywine” will fix the idea in the youthful mind, even as “Paul Revere’s Ride” has fixed the date of the battle of Concord and Lexington in the minds of generations of young Americans, white and black, from Maine to California.

It is well for Negro children to know that the delightful fables of Aesop are the satires of a black slave, and that the author of the incomparable “Three Musketeers,” which rejoices in the swashbuckling instincts of the adolescent, was of Negro descent. There are exquisite little nature lyrics, particularly snow scenes, by Pushkin (obtainable in translation) as perfect in their picturization, in a way, as those of Bryant, or that of Lowell’s “First Snowfall”; and it would make the young chests swell with pride to know that these are the work of one of the greatest of Russian poets—an acknowledged Negro.

Apart from these exotic instances, the children might well be taught the folktales of the race, as rich in content and moral lesson as can be found in any folk tales, from Aesop and Reynard the Fox to Uncle Remus. There is a mine of suggestion in Alphonso Stafford’s “African Folk Stories.” That classic, “The Seedling,” by Dunbar, has delighted the little folks of a generation, with its botanical lesson encouched in delicate verse, and the inevitable moral admonition, which all children secretly love, at the end.

By the side of Maggie Tulliver we may place Zora, of *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (Du Bois); against Spartacus and his address to the gladiators, is Dessalines and his defiant reminiscences; thrilling rescue stories might be matched by the rescue of the lad in Durham’s “Diane”; or by the round-up scene from “The

Love of Landry" (Dunbar), to give the proper Western flavor to the boy or girl in love with the Bill Hart type. In company with "The Charge of the Light Brigade" is the "Second Louisiana," and the "Finish of Patsy Barnes" (Dunbar), for those who love the small boy who overcomes obstacles for the sake of the mother ill at home. Thanksgiving is commemorated by Braithwaite as delightfully as ever Stevenson "gave thanks for many things," not to mention "Christmas" (Dunbar) or similar poems by those others who have followed in his tread.

And the winged words of Booker Washington and Frederick Douglass! The biographies of those who have accomplished great things in the face of heavy odds! Romances of lives as thrilling as the romances which have grown up around Lincoln and Daniel Boone! The girl, Phillis, and the lad, Paul! How much finer for the Negro boy and girl to know of these lives, and of the work they did; to read the burning, living words that are the work of their own blood and kin; to feel that the lowly ones of the cabins in the country, or the tenements and alleys in the city, may yet give to the world some gift, albeit small, that will inspire and ennoble countless dark-faced children struggling up towards the light.

Assuredly we will teach our boys and girls, not only their own history and literature, but works by their own authors. We will, ourselves, first achieve a sense of pride in our own productions, with a fine sense of literary values which will not allow us to confuse trivialities and trash with literature. We will learn to judge a thing as good, because of its intrinsic value and not because it is a Negro's! We will be as quick to throw away valueless stuff written by a black man or woman, as if it were written by a white man or woman. In other words, we will recognize but one absolute standard, and we will preserve for our children all that approximates that standard, and teach them to reverence the good that is in their own because it is good.

And by so doing, we shall impress most deeply upon the young people of our race, by our own literature, that most valuable of all lessons:—

Be proud, my race, in mind and soul;
Thy name is writ on glory's scroll
In characters of fire;
High, midst the clouds of Fame's bright sky,
Thy banner's blazoned folds now fly,
And Truth shall lift them higher.

ROBERT E. PARK

Negro Race Consciousness as Reflected in Race Literature (1923)

Robert T. Kerlin, head of the English Department of the Virginia Military University, in a recent paper on Contemporary Poetry of the Negro, makes the following interesting observation: "A people that is producing poetry is not perishing, but is astir with life, with vital impulses, with life-giving visions. A people's poetry, therefore, affords the most serious subject of study to those who would understand the people—that people's soul, that people's status, that people's potentialities."

Mr. Kerlin is a literary man. He has been studying the recent literature of the Negro and,

as it seems to me, to some purpose. He writes of it, not exactly with enthusiasm, but with profound appreciation. Something in the quality of this literature, the themes that inspire it, the wistful and pathetic yearning which it reflects, the occasional ominous flashes of prophecy—"the sternness of rebuke and the yearning for things that should be"—these I suspect are the qualities in this poetry that would and should attract and interest the student of literature.

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in the language of literary criticism. But I am disposed to accept quite literally, not as a figure of speech, but as a matter of fact, Mr. Kerlin's statement that a "people that is producing poetry is not perishing, but astir with life, with vital impulses and life-giving visions." It certainly is true, also, more true if possible of the Negro than of any other people, that the Negro poetry is a transcript of Negro life.

The Negro has always produced poetry of some sort. It has not always been good poetry, but it has always been a faithful reflection of his inner life. Expression is, perhaps, his *metier*, his vocation.

First, most characteristic, and best remembered are the songs of slavery, particularly the "spirituals." Sorrow songs, Mr. Du Bois called them, "weird old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men."

The Negro folk songs are the Negroes' literature of slavery. They reflect life as he saw it and felt it at that time. Sixty years ago travelers on the lower Mississippi were invariably attracted by the rude chantneys of the Negro deckhands on the tow boat. Some fragments of these, as well as the work songs, say, of the mowers, of the rowers, and the cornhuskers have been preserved. The love songs of the Louisiana Creoles, with their plaintive melodies and their quaint, exotic sentiments are part of this same tradition. There are besides rhymes and jingles, sung when the slaves danced at evening around the cabin fire and the songs of longing, sad, dreaming airs, describing the more sorrowful pictures of slave life, and sung in the dusk when the slaves were returning home from their day's work. It is perhaps the ghosts of these songs that haunt us in familiar ballads like "Swanee River" and "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Groun." This is one of which a fragment has been preserved.

Mother, is Massa goin' to sell, sell us
tomorrow?

Yes, my child! Yes, my child! Yes, my child!
Going to sell us down in Georgia?

Yes, yes, yes!

Going to sell us way down in Georgia?

Yes, yes, yes!

Oh! Watch and pray!

Fare you well Mother,
I must leave you,
Fare you well,
Fare you well Mother,
I must leave you.
Fare you well.
Oh! Watch and pray!

These songs are no longer sung. They have been supplanted by others more personal and less naïve. Only the religious songs of the Negro, the spirituals, have outlived the occasions that called them forth.

Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who was the first, so far as I know, to make a serious study of the Negro spirituals, compared them to the Scottish ballads. The comparison is interesting, less for the similarities than the differences that it brings out. The tragic little episodes commemorated in the Scottish ballads have very little in common, at least so far as their themes are concerned, with the rude hymns of the Negro slaves.

Negro folk-songs also are more primitive and less articulate. The best of them, those that touch us most deeply, are not composed; they are merely uttered. The verses are often mere disconnected phrases, interrupted with a shout and a groan, but rendered dramatic and expressive by the melody and the chorus which accompanied them.

An' I couldn't hear nobody pray,
O Lord!

Couldn't hear nobody pray.

O—way down yonder

By myself,

I couldn't hear nobody pray.

In the valley,

Couldn't hear nobody pray,

On my knees,

Couldn't hear nobody pray,

With my burden,

Couldn't hear nobody pray

An' my Savior

Couldn't hear nobody pray.

O Lord!

I couldn't hear nobody pray,

O Lord!

Couldn't hear nobody pray
 O-way down yonder
 By myself,
 I couldn't hear nobody pray.

Chilly waters,
 Couldn't hear nobody pray
 In the Jordan,
 Couldn't hear nobody pray,
 Crossing over,
 Couldn't hear nobody pray
 Into Canaan,
 Couldn't hear nobody pray.

The Negro had been taught, and he had it from the Bible, too, that the curse of Canaan had made him black and condemned him forever to be a hewer of wood, a drawer of water, and servant to his brother, the white man. One can imagine that there were some dark moments, when the sense of his helplessness, under the burden of this ancient ancestral curse, must have quite overwhelmed the black man. But what words could more eloquently express the feeling of a slave at such a moment than these simple lines from an old slave song:

O Lord! O my Lord!
 O my good Lord!
 Keep me from sinking down!

Whatever may have been the origin of his other songs we know that the spirituals arose spontaneously out of the communal excitements of a religious meeting—a revival or a “shout.” The best of these were remembered, repeated and handed down by oral tradition. The songs that were most often repeated were those that most completely and adequately voiced the deep unconscious wishes of those who sang them. Thus by a process of natural selection the songs that circulated widest and lived longest were those which reflected the profounder and more permanent moods and sentiments of the race. It was through the medium of these religious songs which were sung all over the South, wherever slave plantations existed, that the Negro achieved in slavery, if not, as one writer has finely put it, race consciousness, at least a consciousness of his race.

These rude hymns of the slave, crude and elemental as they were, nevertheless, like every other literature in which men's hopes and fears and faiths have found expression, embodied a scheme of life.

The sinner on the mourner's bench, “down in the valley,” despairing of this world, with its troubles, its disappointments, and its insecurity, found consolation in the bright vision of another world, almost visible over there beyond Jordan; a world where all troubles vanished, where every day was Sunday, and where the souls redeemed walked in majesty with long white robes and golden slippers, talked familiarly with the angels, with Peter and Paul—and there was no more work.

Recent psychology has been much concerned with the interpretation of dreams. Dreams are a sort of compensation for the inadequacies and the imperfections of a real world. When the world denies us the fulfillment of our wishes we seek refuge in dreams. But poetry, like dreams, is a product of the phantasy. The Negro's poetry is a racial dream. The slave's ecstatic visions of “bright mansions above” are manifestly a compensation for a real existence in which so many of his human wishes were unfulfilled.

This other-worldliness, with its practical implications, patience, humility, resignation in this life, mitigated by the expectations of a glorious riot in the next—this is the Negroes' philosophy of life as expressed in the songs of slavery.

With the dawn of freedom we observe the onset of a profound change in the Negro ethos. The old scheme of life did not lose its hold at once upon the masses of the Negro people. The older generation have remained for the most part “respectful and humble,” as Southern people phrase it. The Negroes on the plantations still sang the old hymns, but they sang them with less conviction. The younger generation, particularly the ambitious, newly educated of the race, refused to sing them at all. They wanted to put behind them everything that reminded them of slavery and of the past.

The Negro still sings; and still, when the occasion arises, new melodies blossom on the southern plantations, but the folk songs that

the Negro produces today do not have the quality of those he sang in slavery.

Howard Odum, who has studied Negro folk-songs extensively and at first hand, says that the religious songs of today are different in several specific ways from the songs of slavery days. The songs of recent origin have more rhymed words and less meaning. There is more emphasis on the form; meanings are often sacrificed to make rhyme, or make the song fit into a tune, to emphasize a well-sounding word. There is, in short, less conviction and more conscious striving for effects.¹

The recent folk-songs are not only less spontaneous, but they show in other ways the blighting effects of deliberate artifice. They are very likely to be cluttered up with moral casuistry and theological reflection. The refrain of one of these songs, as I recall it, is something like this:

Ain't it a shame to gamble on Sunday?
There's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,
Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Ain't it a shame to gamble on Sunday?

Still another song turns about the interesting question: "What is the Soul?"

Oh, pray will someone tell me,
What is the Soul of man?

Folk-songs are the literature of an illiterate people. The first effect of the introduction of reading and writing among an illiterate folk is to destroy the sources of their songs. Writing enforces reflection. Reflection makes the writer self-conscious and destroys that natural spontaneity which is the essence of folk-poetry.

Negroes did not cease to produce poetry after they learned to read and write. But for a long time this poetry was turgid stuff. Much of the poetry of the newly educated Negro, written before he had full possession of the new poetic idiom, was pedantic and dull. Some of it was atrocious. Here is a gem from a volume called *Priceless Jewels*.²

There's Hope in Breast of Ham
Regardless of all the Prejudice,
Regardless jim-crow cars!

Though law and justice fail to stand
Behind the pleading bars.
Though all the World may wrongfully
Hold back him in command;
Amid trials and temptations
There's hope in breast of Ham.

The're heavy clouds of grief sometimes,
Rise o'er this distant way.
His shaking head with discourage
At time waits justice sway.
But facing hopes of victory
With Jesus, the World's Lamb,
In hardest strife with all his foe;
There's hope in breast of Ham.

Old Ethiopia did Pay well,
The price of Slavery's chain.
She bore the toil in mournful songs,
And then endured the Pain.
How God was pleased! Then said to her,
"Ye shall stretch forth your hand!"
Though Powers may rise against her
There's hope in breast of Ham.

This represents, so to speak, the dark ages of Negro poetry; the period of transition from the natural simplicity of the folk-songs to the conscious art of written verse. Poetry of the type of *Priceless Jewels* is representative of the period of conscious imitation, when the Negro, not yet race conscious, in the sense in which that expression is used by recent writers, was nevertheless acutely, often morbidly, conscious of himself. This is indicated by the naïve and pathetic striving for recognition and for distinction. The Negro was trying at this period to prove to himself and the world that he was a man like other men; that he could think the white man's thoughts and practice the white man's arts.

It was not until the appearance, in the early nineties, of Paul Laurence Dunbar that the Negro in America produced a poet who was able to command the respectful attention of the world. W. D. Howells said that it seemed to him that the American Negro "had come to its most modern consciousness" in Dunbar, "whose unique achievement was to have studied the American Negro objectively and to have represented him as he found him to be, with humor,

with sympathy and yet with what the reader must instinctively feel to be entire truthfulness.”³

To say that Dunbar described the Negro objectively, without apology and without prejudice, is to define precisely the nature of his achievement. But Dunbar’s description of the Negro, if objective, is at the same time superficial. The period, from 1892, when Dunbar began to publish, until 1906, when he died, was for the Negro one of storm and stress, of conflict and contention. The Negro ethos was confused, distracted, and divided within itself. The old order, with its other-worldliness, and its Christian counsels of patience, humility, and resignation, was passing away. The new order, as Negro radicals conceived it, at any rate, was distinctly of this world. The men who represented what Mr. Kerlin calls “the renaissance of the Negro soul,” were militant, insistent, repudiating compromise, rejecting any paradise of hopes deferred. They dreamed of a world in which the Negro should have freedom, equality, and justice, not in some dim distant future, but presently, here and now.

Of all this turmoil there are almost no intimations in Dunbar’s poetry. In two poems only—the “Ode to Ethiopia” and “We Wear the Mask”—does Dunbar refer to things with which the Negro people of his day were most deeply concerned.

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile
And mouth with myriad subtleties.⁴

Emancipation had made the Negro free, but it had not made him, in the full sense of the word, a citizen. His status was still undefined, different in the Northern and in the Southern states, but different, in some respects, in every different community. Every day the Negro was compelled to face anew the problem how to be at once a Negro and a citizen. This has been and is still the enigma of the Negro’s existence.

To America

How would you have us—as we are,
Or sinking ‘neath the load we bear?

Our eyes fixed forward on a star?
Or gazing empty at despair?
Rising or falling? Men or things?
With dragging pace, or footsteps fleet?
Strong, willing sinews in your wings?
Or tightening chains about your feet?⁵

The history of the American Negro, according to Mr. Du Bois, is the history of this struggle “to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American.”

This sense of endless striving to reconcile irreconcilable ideals has found a classic expression in Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unrecconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

It is this double consciousness of the Negro, always looking at himself through the eyes of others, that has made it difficult for Negro poetry to achieve a sincere expression of Negro life. Dunbar’s reference to the “mask” with which the Negro covers his deeper feelings; Du Bois’ description of the “veil” through which the Negro, as by a sort of second sight, reads all the secrets of the white man’s life, even as it hides his own soul from the understanding of the white man, are merely different accounts of an experience that comes sometime in life to every Negro.

“The Negro,” says Du Bois, “is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see through the revelation of the other world.”⁶

My People

My people laugh and sing
And dance to death—
None imagining
The heartbreak under breath.⁷

This introspective mood, this recognition of the conflict in his own soul is itself the manifestation of a new race consciousness. It is an indication that the Negro had already begun to reflect upon his own experience and consciously to redefine the aims of his racial life. Two poems written about the time of the fiftieth anniversary of emancipation indicate this changed attitude of the Negro towards himself and his past, James Weldon Johnson's "Black and Unknown Bards" and Kelly Miller's "I See and Am Satisfied".

O Black and Unknown Bards

O black slave singers, gone, forgot,—
unfamed,
You—you alone, of all the long, long line
Of those who've sung untaught, unknown,
unnamed,
Have stretched out upward, seeking the
divine.

* * * * *

You sang far better than you knew, the songs
That for your listeners' hungry hearts
sufficed
Still live—but more than this to you
belongs:
You sang a race from wood and stone to
Christ.⁸

What impresses me about these two poems is the serenity with which they accept the past and the confidence they seem to feel in the future. It is as if the Negro, at the end of his first fifty years of freedom, had paused to look back upon his past and forward upon his future. These two poems, perhaps, better than others mark the change that has been taking place in the attitudes of the Negro toward the world and himself. From this time forward, judging not merely by their literature, but by the attitudes of individual men, Negroes have been less interested in demonstrating their right as individuals to participate in the common cultural life about them; they have been more concerned, on the other hand, in defining their own conception of their mission and destiny as a race.

Most Negroes, at one time, probably looked forward to a day when all racial marks that now divide the races would disappear or at least

be forgotten. Amalgamation, many Negroes as well as whites thought, must eventually solve the Negro problem. A very recent poem dwells on the pathos of that isolation which racial barriers impose.

The Barrier

I must not gaze at them although
Your eyes are dawning day;
I must not watch you as you go
Your sun-illumined way;

I hear but I must never heed
The fascinating note,
Which, fluting like a river reed,
Comes trembling from your throat;

I must not see upon your face
Love's softly glowing spark;
For there's the barrier of race,
You're fair and I am dark.⁹

In America, where the census definition of a Negro is a person who passes for a Negro in the community where he lives, it has been, as might be expected, the mulattos and the mixed bloods, themselves the products of the mingling of the races, who have looked forward most hopefully to the ultimate fusion of the races.¹⁰ No doubt Negroes are still influenced by this, as by every other motive or trend that has dominated the race at any period of its history. The disposition of the Negro in America today, however, no matter how slightly tinged with African blood, is to accept the racial designation that America has thrust upon him and identify himself with the people whose traditions, status, and ambitions he shares.

The Mulatto To His Critics.

Ashamed of my race?
And of what race am I?
I am many in one.
Through my veins there flows the blood
Of Red Man, Black Man, Briton, Celt
and Scot,
In warring clash and tumultuous riot.
I welcome all,
But love the blood of the kindly race
That swarthes my skin, crinkles my hair,
And puts sweet music into my soul.

It is the necessity for collective action, the necessity that Negroes should cooperate to win for themselves the place and the respect in the white man's world that the constitution could not give them, that has created among the Negroes of the United States a solidarity that does not exist elsewhere. Race consciousness is the natural and inevitable reaction to race prejudice.

The new literacy movement, what Mr. Kerlin calls "the renaissance of the Negro soul," is in some sense also a response of the Negro to prejudice and opposition. It is more than that, however. It is the natural expression of the Negro temperament under all the conditions of modern life. The Negro has learned to write; and as he feels life keenly, he expresses it emotionally.

The Negro has not ceased to sing nor to value the old slave hymns but the latter have no message for the present day. The songs of slavery were songs of surrender and resignation.

"This world almost done;"
 "One more river;"
 "I want to go home;"
 "Give me Jesus and take all this world."

These were themes of the spirituals.

The new poetry, the poetry of the Negro renaissance, is distinctly of this world. It is characteristically the poetry of rebellion and self-assertion.

If we must die.

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
 Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
 While round us bark the mad and hungry
 dogs,
 Making their mock at our accursed lot.
 If we must die, oh, let us nobly die
 So that our precious blood may not be shed
 In vain: then even the monsters we defy
 Shall be constrained to honor us though
 dead!

Oh, kinsmen! We must meet the common
 foe;
 Though far outnumbered, let us still be
 brave,
 And for their thousand blows deal one
 deathblow!

What though before us lies the open grave?
 Like men we'll face the murderous,
 cowardly pack,
 Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting
 back!¹¹

The new poetry is not irreligious. No poetry that seeks to express, define and justify the deepest emotions of men can be called irreligious. It is, however, radical.¹²

Credo.

I am an Iconoclast.
 I break the limbs of idols
 And smash the traditions of men.
 I am an Anarchist,
 I believe in war and destruction—
 Not in the killing of men,
 But the killing of creed and custom.
 I am an Agnostic.
 I accept nothing without questioning.
 It is my inherent right and duty
 To ask the reason why.
 To accept without a reason
 Is to debase one's humanity
 And destroy the fundamental process
 In the ascertainment of Truth.

I believe in Justice and freedom.
 To me Liberty is priestly and kingly;
 Freedom is my Bride,
 Liberty my Angel of Light,
 Justice my God.

I oppose all laws of state or country,
 All creeds of church and social orders,
 All conventionalities of society and system
 Which cross the path of the light of
 Freedom
 Or obstruct the reign of Right.¹³

There is a vein of cynicism in some of this more radical poetry that seems quite foreign to the traditional attitudes of Negroes. In the following poem the victim of a "Christian mob," as the author calls it, is represented as reciting the horrors of his own lynching:

And it was on a Sabbath day
 While men and women went to pray,
 I passed the crowd in humble mode
 In going to my meek abode;

From out the crowd arose a cry,
 And epithets began to fly;
 And thus like hounds they took my track—
 My only crime—my face was black.
 And so this Christian mob did turn
 From prayer to rob, to rack and burn.
 A victim helpless I fell
 To tortures truly kin to hell;
 They bound me fast and strung me high,
 Then cut me down lest I should die
 Before their savage zeal was spent
 In torturing to their hearts' content.
 They tore my flesh and broke my bones,
 And laughed in triumph at my groans;
 They chopped my fingers, clipped my ears,
 And passed them round for souvenirs.
 And then round my quivering frame;
 They piled the wood, the oil and flame;
 And thus their Sabbath sacrifice
 Was wafted upward to the skies.
 A little boy stepped out the crowd,
 His face was pale, his voice was loud;
 "My ma could not get to the fun,
 And so I came, her youngest son,
 To get the news of what went on."
 He stirred the ashes, found a bone—
 (A bit of flesh was hanging on)
 He bore it off, a cherished prize,
 A remnant of the sacrifice.

O, heathen minds on heathen strand,
 What think you of Christian land,
 Where men and boys and women turn
 From prayer to lynch, to rob, and burn,
 And oft their drowsy minds refresh
 Through sport in burning human flesh?
 Yet none dare tell who led the band;
 And this was in a Christian land.¹⁴

This probably is not good poetry, but it gives a vivid picture. It probably represents very accurately the images in which the Negro thinks, sometimes, of the race problem.

What now, finally, have been the sources and what is the practical outcome of this new movement and this new orientation of Negro life?

1. The Negro is now, to an extent that was never before true, awake. The Negro race, for good or for ill, is coming out of its isolation,

and entering a world where it is exposed to all the contagious influences of modern life. The unrest which is fermenting in every part of the world, has gotten finally under the skin of the Negro. The Negro is not only becoming radical, but he is becoming Bolshevik, at least in spots.

2. The Negro, particularly during and since the war, is learning to live in cities. The traditions and habits acquired in slavery, which have been embalmed and preserved to a very considerable extent, under the conditions of southern rural life, vanish as soon as the Negro enters into the vivid, restless, individualistic life of cities.

3. The Negro in the cities is learning to read. The art of reading and the use of books which was regarded as a luxury in the rural community becomes a necessity to the city. The Negro publishes at present more than two hundred papers in the United States, some of them with large circulations and wide influence.

4. The Negroes in Africa are learning to read and are beginning to publish, sometimes in European languages, sometimes in native dialects, their native newspapers. They more enterprising Negro editors in America read their African exchanges and comment from time to time upon events of common interest.

The whole world is becoming literate and under the influence of these newly acquired habits, a new intimacy is growing up between colored races in the most distant portions of the world.

It is an interesting comment on the present state of the world that native life in Central African has begun to respond to the price of raw rubber on the London market. It was strange, likewise, to read in the newspapers of a few months ago of the election of Marcus Garvey, leader of a great, popular back-to-Africa and Africa-for-the-Africans movement, to the presidency of an African Republic not yet born.

A recent copy of *the Crisis*, the organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, of which Mr. Du Bois is editor, publishes the manifesto of the second Pan-Africa

Congress held last August in London and Brussels and Paris.

The American Negro no longer conceives his destiny as bounded by the limits of the United States. He is seeking alliances and creating loyalties that transcend the boundaries of our American commonwealth. The Negro in his racial relationship at least, is internationalist. He is becoming a citizen of the world.

So much for the general social conditions under which the new Negro poetry, and the new vision which inspires it, have come into existence. These, however, are the same conditions under which new literary movements have sprung up, within a period of a hundred years, among all the disinherited races of Europe.

The great nations have arisen in Europe by the imposition of their institutions and their languages upon lesser peoples, whom they conquered but never fully assimilated. The dominant peoples established their cultures in the cities, but in the rural regions the native languages and the primitive cultures persisted.

The struggles of these racial and cultural minorities to maintain their historical traditions and lift their folk speech to the dignity of literary language has, one might almost say, made the history of Europe during the last seventy-five years.

Every nationalist movement in Europe from that of the Catalonians in Spain to that of the Norse in Norway has been at the same time a linguistic and a literary movement.

Irrespective of time, place, and historical circumstances, all the general features of these movements have been the same. Nationalist movements, whether they occur in Ireland or Slovakia, whether they are called Zionism among the Jews, Irredentism among the Italians, or socialism among the Finns, all have the same natural history.

1. They are the struggles of a predominantly rural population to maintain their cultural existences in competition with populations and cultures predominantly urban. They are, in a sense, the struggles of the rural populations to get to the city and appropriate the cultures of the cities for their own uses.

2. They have invariably been the struggles of the disinherited, neglected, if not oppressed, peoples to emancipate themselves culturally and economically, and so gain for themselves a status in the world which had been denied them by the dominant races.

3. They have invariably resulted in a general expansion of the people, geographical as well as cultural, accompanied by a marked elevation and intensification of the lives of the individuals and of the peoples as a whole. It is a perfectly accurate statement to say that these movements have invariably had the general character of a renaissance, a nationalist, or racial rebirth.

A people that is producing poetry, as has already been said, is not a people that is perishing. On the contrary, it is a people that is astir with vital impulses, a people inspired by life-giving visions.

All nationalist struggles in Europe and elsewhere, seem to have had a history not unlike that which has been described as the Negro renaissance. This fact makes the Negro movement, as I have been describing it, somewhat less unique, but, at any rate, a little more intelligible.

If now we ask what have been the fundamental human motives or trends—as the new psychology would say—in all these different racial and nationalist movements, I can answer best perhaps, by quoting from George Santayana's *Winds of Doctrine*.

"Man," he says, "is certainly an animal that, when he lives at all, lives for ideals. Something must be found to occupy his imagination, to raise pleasure and pain into love and hatred and change the prosaic alternative between comfort and discomfort into the tragic one between happiness and sorrow."

Santayana goes on to add that, nowadays, when religion is "for the most part so vague and accommodating," nationality, "the one eloquent, public," nationality, "the one eloquent, public, intrepid illusion" which modern life has left us, has taken the place of religion in the lives of modern men. Not only nationalism, but socialism, Bolshevism, Christian science, and many another "ism" which we have taken as a

"mystical essence" or "an ultimate good," has taken the place of religion in the minds of modern peoples.

Wherever the old ideals of life, for any reason, have ceased to interest us, have lost for us their sense of reality, or for any reason no longer seem an adequate description of anything real, anything in which we can wholeheartedly believe, we have sought, if not a new religion, at any rate, some new definition of life's ultimate values, something men must have that will "change the prosaic alternative between comfort and discomfort into the tragic one between happiness and sorrow."

What has happened to other peoples in this modern world, has happened, is happening, to the Negro. Freedom has not given him the opportunity for participation in the common life of America and of the world that he hoped for. Negroes are restless and seeking. We are all restless, as a matter of fact.

In some respects, however, it seems to me the Negro, like all the other disinherited peoples, is more fortunate than the dominant races. He is restless, but he knows what he wants. The issues in his case, at least, are clearly defined. More than that, in this racial struggle, he is daily gaining not merely new faith in himself, but new faith in the world. Since he wants nothing except what he is willing to give to every other man on the same terms he feels that the great forces that shape the destinies of peoples are on his side. It is always a source of great power to any people when they feel that their interests, so far from being antagonistic are actually identified with the interests of the antagonists. We of the dominant, comfortable classes, on the other hand, are steadily driven to something like an obstinate and irrational resistance to the Negro's claims, or we are put in the position of sympathetic spectators, sharing vicariously in his struggles but never really able to make his cause wholeheartedly our own.

Much of the poetry that Negroes write today is like much of our own—interesting but unconvincing. It has form but not conviction. Negro writers, however, have the inspiration of a great theme, and occasionally, when their songs arise spontaneously out of

a deep racial experience, they speak with an authority of deep conviction, and with a tone of prophecy.

The Band of Gideon.

The bands of Gideon roam the sky,
The howling wind is their war-cry,
The thunder's roll is their trumpet's peal,
And the lightning's flash their vengeful
steel.

Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,

"The Sword of the Lord and Gideon."

And men below rear temples high
And mock their God with reasons why,
And live in arrogance, sin, and shame,
And rape their souls for the world's good
name.

Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,

"The Sword of the Lord and Gideon."

The bands of Gideon roam the sky
And view the earth with baleful eye;
In holy wrath they scourge the land
With earthquake, storm, and burning
brand.

Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,

"The Sword of the Lord and Gideon."

The lightning's flash and the thunder's roll,
And "Lord have mercy on my soul,"
Cry men as they fall on the stricken sod,
In agony searching for their God.

Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,

"The Sword of the Lord and Gideon."

And men repent and then forget
That Heavenly wrath they ever met.
The band of Gideon yet will come

And strike their tongues of blasphemy
dumb.
Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,
"The sword of the Lord and Gideon."¹⁵

NOTES

1. Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negroes, *The American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education*, July, 1909, p. 274.

2. *Priceless Jewels* was printed in 1911, but it is fairly representative of much that was written and printed earlier and much more that was never printed at all.

3. Quoted in the Introduction to the *Life and works of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. p. 1.

4. *Life and Works*, p. 184.

5. James W. Johnson.

6. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 3. 9th Ed., 1911.

7. Charles Bertram Johnson.

8. James W. Johnson, *Century Magazine*. November, 1908.

9. Claude McKay.

10. It is an interesting fact that in other countries than our own the mixed blood, the coloured men, is a separate caste. It is true, however, that caste lines are more stiffly drawn in English than in the French and Spanish colonies.

11. Claude McKay.

12. There is a very good collection of it in the Report of the Department of Justice, 66 Congress, First Session, Document 153, Investigations. Activities of the Department of Justice, Washington, 1919.

13. Walter Everette Hawkins.

14. This poem is quoted in the report of the Department of Justice, November 17, 1919, as a specimen of Negro radical literature. The author's name is not given.

15. Joseph S. Cotter, Jr.

IRENE M. GAINES**Colored Authors and Their Contributions
to the World's Literature (1923)**

The evening was very dreary. The rain beat a dismal tatoo on the window pane. Just how long I had been studying my literature lesson I cannot tell, but my eyelids grew very heavy and I could not resist the wooing of Morpheus.

Suddenly I seemed to be standing before a dream palace. A waning sun cast its rays of elfin gold on the wide marble stairs. Lifting my eyes to the inscription over the entrance I saw the words: The World's Literature Building.

Traversing the brilliantly lighted hallway, I stood on the threshold of a spacious, high vaulted room opening into similar ones beyond. I was greeted by a group of friendly persons who volunteered to escort me through this wonderful building. The first room that we visited was Historians' Hall.

In this interesting apartment there were magnificent paintings of the world's great historians. I was surprised by seeing so many black faces.

Who are those distinguished looking black men wearing turbans? I asked. The first was Mohaman Koti, an eminent Negro writer born in the year A. D. 1460, in a little Sudanese village. His life and works date from the third quarter of the fifteenth century to the year 1560. His most celebrated work, *Fatassi*, is a history of the kingdoms of Ganata, Songhai, and the city of Timbuctoo, the queen of the Sudan.

The second painting was that of Ahmen Baba, called, "the unique Pearl of his time." This great man was born in Arawan, Africa, a city of the Sudan, in the year 1556. He is the author of twenty known books, dealing with philosophy, law, ethics, traditions, theology, rhetoric and astronomy. His text books were used in such noted universities as those of Fez, Tunis, Sankore, and Cairo. M. Du Bois, a celebrated French scholar and African traveler, was so impressed with the writings and scholarship of the

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Sudanese Negroes, that he spoke of them in these words of praise:

The learning and scholarship of the Sudanese Blacks were genuine and so thorough that during their sojourn in foreign universities they astounded the most learned men of Islam by their erudition. That these Negroes were on the level with the Arabian savants, their teachers, is proved by the fact that they were installed as professors in Morocco and Cairo.

By the sixteenth century these black scholars became so learned that they were regarded as dangerous and it was this that brought upon them the Moorish exile in Morocco. While there our distinguished author, Ahmen Baba, taught rhetoric, law and theology. His decisions in the courts were regarded as final. After some years he was allowed to return to his beloved country where he died in 1627. Among his works we find an astronomical treatise written in verse. *Miraz*, a work written by Baba while in exile, is a wonderful description of the erudition of the Negraic peoples residing in the very heart of Africa. By this work the attention of Morocco and the whole of northern Africa was called to the culture and scholarship of the Sudan Negro. On account of El Ibitihadj, his large biographical dictionary of the Mussulman doctors of the Malekite sect (completed in 1596), it has been possible to reconstruct the intellectual past of Timbuctoo, showing the culture and civilization of the Negro race in the Sudan, Africa. For this reason the name of Ahmen Baba should be held in pious memory by every lover of the race. His great, great, grandchildren are now living in Timbuctoo, near the mosque of Sankore.

Passing on I came to the painting of Abderaham es Sadi, another African scholar, whose best works were written in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. He wrote *Tarik e Soudan*, a history of the Sudan, and is the greatest work on the Sudan in existence. It forms, with the exception of the holy writings, the favorite volume of the Negro savants throughout central Africa, and is known to the furthest extremity of western Africa from the shores of the

Niger to the borders of Lake Chad. The whole work is a collection of active morals and is the most charming of its kind; for fables, marvels and miracles are agreeably intermingled with real events.

One enjoys, says a French critic, from its pages the delicate repasts offered by Homer, Herodorus and Froissard, and it is for this reason that the *Tarik* is called the chief work of Sudanese literature.

Adjoining Historians' Hall was another spacious room in which there were thousands of books. Glancing through the catalogue I came across many other Negro historians. There was John Sarbar, author of *Fanti Customary Laws*, written near the close of the nineteenth century, and said to be the most authoritative work on native laws and customs. The author, an educated native of the Gold Coast, West Africa, tells understandingly and truly every phase of the customary laws of his people. This valuable work has done as much, if not more, than any other to place the African and his institutions before the world in something like their true light and condition.

Casely Hayford is another one of the great native African writers living in west Africa, who is making some valuable contributions to the literature of Africa and the world. His *Institutions of the Gold Coast*, *Native Constitutions*, and *Ethiopia Unbound* have made the Negroes of Africa and the world his debtors.

Perhaps there is no continent and no people held in such little esteem through ignorance of their true life, culture and character as Africa and its races, and against whom there is so much unfounded prejudice. That the African race has for centuries been producing its own authors to interpret Africa and her people to the nations of the earth, ought to be an inspiration to Negroes and mankind everywhere. By his wide acquaintance with native life and conditions, his great command of literary form and style, Hayford may well be mentioned with Sarbar whose literary prominence recalls the fadeless fame of Koti, Baba, and Sadi who gave the heart of Africa to the highest form of literature more than three centuries ago.

There was the great Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden; this great writer died an old man in 1912, in the little British colony of Sierra Leone. His writings began with the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Among his most prominent works we find: *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*; *The Koran in Africa*; *West Africa before Europe*; *Liberia's Offerings*; and *Monrovia to Palestine*. Such scholarly productions were his that they have been translated from English into French, German, Italian, and Arabic. Besides these publications Dr. Blyden has written numerous essays and pamphlets on different subjects touching the welfare of African peoples and the government of them by European colonial powers. For years he has been recognized as the foremost authority on west Africa; and has done more than any other thinker and writer to modify and soften the attitude of white Europe in its government and control of black Africa. Familiar with French, German, Arabic, and a number of native tongues, and with a literary style that is fascinating, forceful and unique, this noted writer will ever be remembered as among the first and foremost scholars on Africa; besides he was for years secretary of State of Liberia, envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the court of St. James, special envoy to the Republic of France, and director of Mohamudan education in Sierra Leone.

And W. S. Scarborough, former President of Wilberforce University, a most scholarly gentleman, has contributed several text books. His Greek grammars have been used in Harvard, Yale, and other colleges in the United States and are recognized as being among the best text books written on this subject.

There was William A. Sinclair's *Aftermath of Slavery*, a record of the progress of the colored citizens in the United States since the Civil War. This book, written in 1905, has wide reading by the American public and has done much to correct the views of people in this country and abroad, concerning the character and progress of the American Negro. The press and literary critics have justly paid tribute to its merits. For some time Mr. Sinclair was secretary and treasurer of Howard University, and

has taken a prominent part in the advance movements in behalf of the race. He now resides in Philadelphia.

George W. Williams, of Ohio. Here I find two large and splendid volumes written in 1888 on *The History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion*. The author of these publications had begun another upon the *History of the Negro of the World*, when in the midst of his literary task he suddenly died. He was a member of the Ohio legislature for some years; and his history of the Negro is perhaps the best history ever written of the colored people in the United States. His style is warm, vivid, and glowing and replete with copies of documents from original sources, exhaustive of every phase of his subject. Without a dissenting voice he is the premier historian of the American Negro. It would be difficult to find words that would praise too highly the literary and substantial character of his works.

And now turning to the name of Kelly Miller, I was very much interested in the high quality and character of his works. As dean of the college department of Howard University for some years he has held a unique position in the education of colored people. He is preeminently a controversial thinker. In the many great questions before the country in which white prejudiced writers sought to defame the character and ability of the Negro race, they have found in the pen of this race thinker, a power that has been unable to be subdued. One after another he dashed off in brilliant form and style, *Roosevelt and the Negro*; *Appeal to Reason*; *Forty Years of Negro Education*; *The Ultimate Race Problem*; *The Political Capacity of the Negro*; *Social Equality*; and other pamphlets similar in character and surpassed himself in a splendid collection of high-class essays dealing with the multiform phases of the race problem; and we had in 1905 his great work, *Race Adjustment*, to be followed by his *From Servitude to Service*. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* says of him:

Prof. Miller shows himself a master of an incisive style and a keen logician. (Of him the *New York Post* remarks: Admirable for calmness and temper, thoroughness, and skill.)

Dr. Booker T. Washington, regarded by Andrew Carnegie as one of the foremost men of this age, was president and founder of the great industrial Institute of Tuskegee, the greatest institution of its kind in the world. He sprang into prominence in 1890 by what is known as his Atlanta speech, in which he pleads for peace between the races and urged them to unite for the common good in all matters industrial, remaining separate socially. He was the trusted advisor on Southern matters of two presidents, wined and dined by princes and crowned heads of Europe and accepted by the authorities as the leader of the American Negro. He was an advocate of the gospel of work and so careful a publication as *The Independent*, after his speech on Abraham Lincoln, pronounced him the most forceful speaker living. He was more than an orator, organizer, educator. He was a great writer. His first great book in 1901 was *Up from Slavery*, in which he told to the world his inspiring story of his struggle from the humblest state of the slave to a coveted place among the foremost men of his day and time. He was wont to address his students at Tuskegee in Sunday evening talks, and in a splendid volume he gathered them together in his book entitled *Character*, in which he emphasized the growth of habit and the priceless possession of good character. He is the author of other books, *The Life of Frederick Douglas; My Experience; The Future of the America Negro; Sowing and Reaping; Tuskegee and Its People; and The Negro in Business*. With a clear and forceful style and an abundance of practical facts he has impressed this country and the world. It is said that his *Up from Slavery* has been translated into more foreign languages than any other work by an American Negro. The lustre of his life, fame and works sheds glory upon the whole Negro race.

George Washington Ellis, investigator, writer, and statesman, served the United States government as secretary of the American Legation to the Republic of Liberia. While in Liberia he studied the social conditions of Africa, collecting folklore stories and African proverbs, and contributed to leading magazines and newspapers on African problems and questions, in Eu-

rope and America. Mr. Ellis was a contributing editor to the *Journal of Race Development*, of Clark University, is the author of *Liberia in the Political Psychology of West Africa; Islam as a Factor in West African Culture; Dynamic Factors in the Liberian Situation; Negro Culture in West Africa; The Leopard's Claw; Negro Achievements in Social Progress*; and other subjects. Of his *Negro Culture in West Africa*, the Neale Publishing Company has this to say:

Undoubtedly, this volume is among the more important contributions to the literature of the Negro race to be published, from whatever angle it is viewed. For eight years, while Secretary of the American Legation to Liberia, this Negro studied social conditions in Africa, collected folk-lore stories and proverbs, took photographs of Negroes at their occupations, and during their social intercourse. In this volume are specimen stories written in Vai tongue, with translations of them. The author was well equipped when he undertook this work.

Prof. Frederick Starr, of the University of Chicago, in his introduction to *Negro Culture in West Africa*, said of Mr. Ellis:

He was a faithful and competent official, giving good service. He has been useful to Liberia since his return and his thoughtful and valuable articles regarding Liberian conditions and affairs have done much to keep alive American interest regarding the only republic in Africa. During the period of his service in Africa, Mr. Ellis found time and occasion to pursue the studies, the results of which are here represented. Consuls and diplomatic officers have exceptional opportunities to enrich our knowledge of other lands and peoples. Many such officials—British, French, German, Russian—have made important contributions of that sort. American officials who have done so are surprisingly few. Mr. Ellis sets an example that is worthy of wide imitation. Mr. Ellis is the third colored man to make conspicuous contributions to the knowledge of conditions and peoples in

the Liberian region. Neither Blyden nor Crummell have gone quite into the field which Mr. Ellis enters. As a scientific investigation, as a contribution to social problems, as a basis for political action, his book has a definite mission.

Mr. Ellis for his distinguished services rendered Liberia was decorated by that government, knight commander of the Order of African Redemption. Mr. Ellis completed his life's work in Chicago in November 1919. He seemed to be a special envoy and literary ambassador extraordinary, sent to earth by Dame Nature in behalf of the great movements of democracy, interracial concord, and cooperation. For, as is the custom of such high and special missions, he took his leave as soon as his work was done. Among his papers and documents that he left he has a message for the South and the white races of the world.

Passing from this room we entered *Fiction Hall*, a room just as spacious and more beautiful. This room was crowded with great figures and I wondered if they were visitors like myself, but they looked so much at home, though some were very antique. My guides told me that these were the authors themselves. Naturally I looked for the colored faces—and I found them.

There was a very distinguished gentlemen who came up and said to me in French, "Good evening, Miss" (*Bon Soir, Mademoiselle*), and then I knew him—we all know him, the greatest of all colored novelists, Alexandre Dumas, born in France in the first half of the nineteenth century, author of the world renowned *Count of Monte Cristo*; its sequel; *Edmund Dantes*; *Three Guardsmen*; *Twenty Years After*; *The Man in the Iron Mask*; *The Bastille*; *The Queen's Necklace*; *La Tulipe Noire*; and many other notable works that have interested and delighted the world of letters. Some critics place him at the head of the world's novel writers in style, as well as the development and portrayal of characters. His influence for good has been world wide and he has immortalized the Negro in tales of romance and fiction. His name recalls to our minds the great and immortal novelists,

Defoe and Dickens of England, Victor Hugo of France, Harriet Beecher Stowe of America, Alexandre Pushkin of Russia, and Cervantes of Spain.

Another distinguished looking gentlemen whom I recognized at once was W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, an American Negro, who for the last fifteen years has been writing some of the world's best compositions. This author has done much to influence the giving of higher education to the Negro boy and girl. His works have caused the world to discuss anew the Negro problem. His renowned book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, has been read by millions and entitled him to a permanent place among the fiction writers of the globe. With a charm and felicity of style he has disclosed the inner feelings and emotions of the American black people under the peculiar and embarrassing environment of the American social and political conditions. He is also the author of a recognized and standard work on *The Negro Slave Trade* and is regarded as one of the most brilliant men ever graduated from Harvard University. From the press there has been issued more recently *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, reviewed by William Stanley Braithwaite, another brilliant writer of our race. I fancy I see in his hands a picture of a young Negro boy and girl standing in a cotton field and I recall Bless Ahlyn and Zora in their quest of the silver fleece. This was followed by his historical sketch, *The Negro*, issued from the University Press of Cambridge. This little volume, together with his newest work, *Darkwater*, have brought new lustre and fame to the author and will be read with increasing interest and enthusiasm by thousands of black and white, throughout the world. He is the editor of *The Crisis*, a national Negro publication creating and moulding sentiment everywhere for equality and justice to Negro peoples. We might justly say of him what Shakespeare said of Brutus:

He was mild and gentle and the elements so mixed in him that all nature might stand up and say, "this is a man."

Of the world's great Negroes of this present era we think with pride and delight of Du Bois

as a scholar and American race champion; of Blyden as a linguist and champion of the African Negro; of Kelly Miller as the thinker and race controversialist, and of Washington as the practical organizer and leader of men.

Sliding doors opened into Poets' Hall. This was the most beautiful of all. Here I also found the little African girl, Phillis, who in 1761 [sic] was sold in a Boston slave market to a very cultured and loving woman, Mrs. John Wheatley, who grew to love little Phyllis dearly and trained her in the fine arts. There were many beautiful poems written from the depths of her pure young heart between the years of 1763 and 1784. The poem addressed to Gen. George Washington brought to her a lovely letter of thanks from the father of our country. Her translation of one of Ovid's stories was widely published in Europe. It was she who said:

T'was mercy brought me from my pagan land
And taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God—that there's a Saviour too;
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.

My guide told me that the next brown, aristocratic personage who greeted me was Alexander Sergeivitch Pushkin, a Russian poet of splendid family. His great grandfather was the distinguished Negro general Hannibal of Peter the Great. This illustrious poet was born at Moscow, May 26, 1799, and educated at the imperial lyceum of Tsarskoe Selo, where he acquired a reputation for his liberal opinions. In 1817 he entered the service of the government, and soon became one of the most prominent figures in fashionable society. In 1820 he published his romantic poem of *Ruslan and Liudmila*, which met with flattering reception from the public. The incidents are laid in the legendary times of Vladimir, the Russian Charlemagne. During the next five years Pushkin gave to the world his *Plennik Kavkaskoi* (Prisoner of the Caucasus), which narrates the escape of a young Russian from a Circassian horde by the help of a Circassian maid; and his "Fountain

of Bakhtchiserai," in 1824, a poem of singular beauty and interest. These were followed by "Tzigani" (The Gypsies), a picture of a wild gypsy life in Bessarabia, and "Evgenii Onaegin," a humorously sarcastic description of Russian society, after the fashion of Byron's "Beppo." In 1829 he published his narrative poem, "Pultava," and about the same time he wrote a dramatic poem entitled "Boris Godunov," one of the best of all his works. He has to his credit the fact that he was the founder of the realistic school in Russian fiction, antedating the English masters of the same school. He is rated as the finest poet that Russia has produced. His countrymen call him the "Russian Byron"; however, it is claimed that he excels the latter in vigor of imagery and impassioned sentiment.

Next, I found a young man, very young, who had written poems since his childhood until his pathetic death in 1906, the beloved poet of the American Negro, Paul Laurence Dunbar. He is to us as Robert Burns singing to the Scotch among the hills of his native land. He wrote many poems on the lowly life of his people. He wrote of their sorrows and their joys and the common walks of their daily life and gave them in permanent literary form to the reading world. Most of his poems are in dialect. They are compiled in several volumes, among them, *Lyrics of Lowly Life*; *Lyrics of Love and Laughter*; *Lyrics of the Hearthside*; and others of equal merit. It was he who expressed life so poetically and incisively:

A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in,
A minute to laugh and an hour to weep in;
A pint of joy and a peck of trouble,
And never a laugh but the moans come
double;

And that is Life.

A crust and a corner that love makes
precious
With the smiles to warm and the tears to
refresh us
And joy seems sweeter when care comes
after
And a moan is the finest of foils for
laughter;
And that is Life.

It would be difficult to find in the whole range of literature lines more immortally beautiful than these from the soul of this Negro poet:

An angel robed in spotless white
Stooped down to kiss the sleeping night;
Night woke to blush; the Sprite was
gone:
Man saw the blush and called it Dawn.

When I left the World's Literature Building my heart was joyful and filled with exceeding gladness.

May our authors ever write and our poets ever sing, and in the end may they be heard way out upon the uplifted plains of the future in one grand sweet strain:

Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown Him Lord of all.

BRENDA RAY MORYCK

A Point of View (An *Opportunity* Dinner Reaction) (1925)

"Irvin Cobb and Octavus Roy Cohen,—recognized experts in the field of the short story of ebony hue and chocolate flavor? Why, I thought they were white men!"

"I thought so too."

"But they can't be!"

"Why not?"

"Because they write Negro stories."

"Well—suppose they do."

"Then they must be Negroes themselves. We are told that people can only write very well of their own race because they know that race best."

"Indeed."

The foregoing bit of conversation was recently overheard in a Southern city.

And there you have it,—the Caucasian, with his facile pen, sketching life, wherever he finds it, excelling in any field to which he turns his art, while he recommends with sincerest sophistry that his darker brother keep within the narrow and prescribed area of his own racial precincts.

A paradox,—a white man may be an expert in his treatment of a theme on black folk, but a colored man, and I say "colored" advisedly, is not to be encouraged to emulate his example by reciprocation. Strange, too, when colored people always have known, and always will know, as long as white people continue to depend upon them for the most intimate personal services one human being can render another, far more

about them individually and collectively than they will ever know about the black race.

Yet one of the most popular arguments advanced by modern critics, to convince the Negro writer of the wisdom of curtailing whatever free play he might care to allow his imagination in the treatment of any and all themes is the one which states that he knows best about his own people. Granted that he does, is it not possible that in the range of his varied experiences he may not, through intimate contact with other peoples, come to know them equally as well, even as Thomas Nelson Page, Ruth McEnery Stuart, Joel Chandler Harris, and others, not omitting the estimable Messrs. Cobb and Cohen, have come to know and understand a certain type of Negro? I venture to say that a Negro writer living North could excel some of his present peers in the handling of an Irish or Jewish or Italian or Polish or even upper-class Caucasian theme if he were to try, for living and attending school for the most part, as he does, among the heterogeneous type of Americans, native, or foreign-born, contemptuously classed as "poor white trash," and either working for or with,—no matter which, so the daily contact is there, a better class Caucasians from clerks to royalty, he runs the gamut of the social scale in his daily existence and may be presumed to have direct knowledge of all classes of white people.

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Then, too, his schooling, whether little or much, if academic training is as valuable as it is purported to be, should have contributed vastly to his understanding of white people. Whether or not the Negro writer has attended mixed schools or colored schools, been tutored by white or colored instructors, or by both, is of scant importance. The essential point is that his entire history and literature courses have been built up almost exclusively about the genealogy, character, growth, development, and achievements of the Caucasian race. Where more than a passing reference to Negroes or Mongolians has been made in a school text, it has been by way of some dry-as-dust anthropological treatise intended to draw the attention of an esoteric few. The daily newspapers with exception of those few Afro-American sheets which recently became so popular with both blacks and whites, are journals of Caucasian customs, manners, habits, pursuits, enterprises and engagements. The intelligent Negro lives in a white world perforce, for since he is outnumbered ten to one according to the census count, he can not ward off this daily enlightenment as to how the other nine-tenths live, even if he would. He begins the *a b c* of knowledge of the white race with his first academic studies, and does not take his final degree in "Caucasianology" until the hour of his death, frequently being ministered to by a white physician during his passing, by which time he merits every award given for high attainment and proficiency in a prescribed course. His natural endowment of curiosity renders him an apt pupil in the school of life.

If then, familiarity with the subject is the first requisite for intelligent writing about it, the educated Negro possesses the proper basic material in a pre-eminent degree. Pause but a moment and think of the beautiful and appealing love lyrics of the Negro poet,—on his haunting and wistful nature poems, so devoid of any reference to color,—so charmingly free of all race consciousness. Consider "Fog," as a prose example, the story which took first prize in a recent literary contest in augurated to discover Negro talent. With a masterly and impersonal stroke, the author has handled varied classes,

types and races of people,—the Negro element in his theme, sketched in evidently to make it conform to the rules of competition, being the weakest part. The Negro poet has long since discarded the bonds of Negro dialect as the sole vehicle of his expression and gloriously transcended themes purely subjective in character. His fancy wanders where it lists. Why not the Negro writer of fiction?

I am not, however, advocating that he direct his talent to delineating Caucasian character to the utter exclusion of his interest in his own race. My intention is merely to point out his ability to write freely on any subject, should he elect to do so, contrary to the advice of his well-wishers and critics.

There is a danger, it seems to me, in confining a writer to certain limits. His vision is narrowed, his imagination is dwarfed and warped, and his theme is robbed of its universality of appeal if he must forever be bound to the task of depicting racial reactions peculiar to the Negro. The Negro race as a whole now differs from the white race in externals only. "Death and the mysteries of life, the pain and the grief that flesh and souls are heirs to, the eternal problems that address themselves to all generations and races, produce in the soul of the Negro the same reactions as in any other individual," says Robert T. Kerlin in his essay on "Contemporary Poetry of the Negro." Granted that intrinsically the Negro of pure African stock is more emotional, has greater depth of feeling, larger capacity for enjoyment, vaster appreciation for sensuous beauty than his white brother,—is essentially more of the artist,—more of the poet,—and also more of the buffoon, still he exhibits his atavistic traits after three hundred years of cultivation and adulteration only in proportion as he is removed from modern civilized culture. The individual differences so avidly hit upon by contemporary writers are found only in a certain type of Negro—a very captivating colorful creature of swiftly changing moods, and unexpected humorous or sad reactions it is true, but one type only, nevertheless.

The writer who wishes to confine either his realism or his imagination to the still primitive

groups, groups, whose precinct is Seventh Street or Seventh Avenue, Chicago or Alabama, will find an unfailing wealth of marketable material whose novel appeal can not be denied. And the author who would make the prose literature of his race, can not afford to discount the valuable contribution which a study of any people still in the elementary stages of American civilization furnishes. Myra Kelly has given us those charming stories, "Little Citizens" and "Little Aliens," Kathleen Norris, with her delightful gift for portraying Irish humor and Irish pathos still paints the Americanized descendants of Ireland's emigrants; O. Henry offered us young America of the gutter and the curbstone, and I am told, upon excellent authority that "Little Afro-Americans" is now in the process of being manuscripted.

Further still, the Negro writer must delve into the past and steep himself in all the tragic lore of the South prior to the Civil War, adding to his present invaluable memory-store of slave history and slave legend, those poignant episodes of Negro life so replete with the very essence of reality, and with his native capacity for relishing the dramatic,—the sad as well as the gay, interpret them for the World, as only he can, if he would complete and enrich the racial literature which will some day be held precious.

But when he has finished this task of painting tragic history, albeit history embellished by the imagination,—when he wearies of the grotesque and the humorous in his race, when his pen lags over the delineation of those superstitions and credulous characters once so numerous in the south but now fast disappearing; when he is done with slush and maudlin sentimentality, to what shall he turn his attention?

There still remains a rich unexplored field if he must continue the study of his own race,—the vast domain of the colored *hoi polloi*—the middle class Negro, neither unintelligent nor yet cultured,—and the realm of the highly cultivated few,—few, not in numbers, but by comparison. Jessie Fauset, in "There is Confusion," has sketched both classes, and Walter White, with another motive than that of pure entertainment, has presented us the problems and difficulties daily faced by the ambitious,

educated groups of Negroes in his book *The Fire in the Flint*. Other writers may follow their lead with similar works, but such stories, estimable though they are, do not represent purely creative art. They are both, more or less, propaganda novels, conceived for the purpose of presenting to a white audience certain faces and conditions concerning Negroes. They are not the charming impersonal themes so ably handled by many of the best Caucasian writers and not always the best either, but the most widely read.

Let the young writer try his hand at this sort of writing for the sole purpose of entertaining. He will discover before very long, when he writes of life as he finds it, and so will his audience and his critics, that he is writing not of Negroes but of just people,—people no different in standards, customs, habits and culture from any other enlightened American groups,—merely American people. I say American, because the Negro is now American thoroughly so,—having through amalgamation of blood,—there is no denying it when one views the ever increasing Nordic features and coloring appearing among the so-called blacks,—through assimilation of ideas and ideals and conscious and unconscious imitation, absorbed every iota of the good and bad in American life.

Undoubtedly, if he had been allowed to remain in his native land, Africa, and his black blood had never known the taint of many nations diffused through it in honorable and dishonorable ways, he would still have been as distinctly different in character as the Mongolian or Jew alienated from other peoples either by physical, political, or racial barriers, and developing in isolation a distinct race consciousness. Or, if, having been brought to America, he had been huddled into a pale or ghetto, there to develop solely among his own kind, we should still see among all classes, traits and characteristics peculiarly individual to him. We should then probably have had a black Tolstoi writing of a dusky Anna Karenina.

But the Negro, for a large part, is no longer a Negro. He is an American, or living abroad, an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a German, according to his present place of abode, with

sometimes a dark skin and sometimes a skin not so dark. Contrary to the premise submitted by many so-called scientists that one drop of Negro blood makes a man a Negro, the black blood is not strong, but weak, and when once permeated by the Caucasian complex, the Negro becomes a Caucasian in all but his physique and frequently even in that. He sheds his peculiarly different African heritage with the ease with which a chameleon changes its colors and dons a new garment which, in the fifth and sixth generation of American civilization,—the heritage which many Negroes can now boast, has become his skin.

How long has the Jew or any other immigrant remained racially different once he has become a part of America? Only so long as he has been forced to keep to himself and has not been assimilated in the great melting pot. Once he has acquired money and grappled to himself those advantages which he came seeking, he emerges from racism, just as an American citizen. Witness the upper-class Jew in any community or study the high-born Mongolians numerous in diplomatic circles in Washington or on the Pacific Coast. Seldom, if ever, are their reactions in any way peculiarly racial once they have become Americanized. They differ only as any other people differ according to both and breeding. That too when both races have carefully preserved their racial integrity.

In any untutored people, we find emotionalism, unrestraint, and novel and unexpected responses to the experiences of life, hence the naivete of the masses of Negroes, who have long fascinated the white public and recently have begun to charm their own people. In any peoples just emerging from a long period of subjugation to a dominant group, we find greater depth of feeling, more intense religious fervor, a more serious and challenging outlook on life, than in the chosen few, who are the lords of the earth. The ordinary Negro is but a part of the great human family.

Likewise does he run true to form in the upper strata of society. He has on the one hand, all the airs, graces, superficialities and hypocrisies of the white race; all the shallowness, the meanness, the irreverence for holy

things, the insatiable thirst for pleasure, the irritation at restraint, the envy, the jealousy; the contempt for the weak, the repudiation of the idea that he is his brother's keeper and the rejection of the Golden Rule which have ever characterized the over-sophisticated and too successful since the days of Babylon's glory, while on the other hand, he possesses in the same degree as all other representatives of a high degree of civilization,—the tampering of his white forbears is responsible for the present degree—noble ideals, lofty thought, keen intellect, sane philosophy, sound judgment, hunger for knowledge, and a craving for all that is finest and best in life.

Prejudice against his color, when he shows any, has greatly hampered his progress as far as his material desires are concerned. But in spite of Fate, the mass Negro, the financially successful Negro, and the cultured Negro as a whole, parallel their Caucasian complements in all but monetary wealth.

A story of any one of these types can be worked up into a purely Negro theme of course, by depicting the tragedies and disappointments wrought by discrimination, and injustice, common occurrences in the daily lives of colored people—but at best such works are morbid. Yet any other attempt to portray the normal ordinary pursuits of the classes of Negroes just described, unless spattered with constantly repeated references to color or to race, becomes at once, simply an account of individuals, not of Negroes as such.

Konrad Bercovici, in a recent article published in the Harlem number of the *Survey Graphic*, argues that the Negro should preserve his racial heritage even as the Jew has held fast to his. The cases are not analogous, even in the instances where Jews are found to be true to the original type. Their ranks were closed against all modifying and assimilating influences of their religion. Now that their orthodoxy is somewhat weakening in this country, even they are becoming more and more like any other Americans. "The Good Provider" an undeniably true picture of prosperous American Jewish life gives patent evidence of that fact. "Humoresque" likewise a gripping portrait of the

Jew, represents his gradual change in character in proportion to his contact with the broadening influences of life. The high-class young Jews found in private schools and colleges are exactly the prototype of other American youth.

Granted, however, that the Negro should wish to emulate the Jew in his earlier stages of development in America, it is too late. He was robbed forever of his opportunity of remaining a distinct group people long, long ago by his white ancestors. He is now from one-sixteenth to nine-tenths Caucasian and if he preserves any racial characteristics at all they must be of a Janus nature.

Mr. Bercovici likewise points out that in his study of Negro groups gleaned from intimate Harlem contacts with all classes of colored Americans, he found among them distinct differences of character and thought, peculiarly individual to the Negro.

I beg to differ with his findings.

Because I have discovered so few people whose opinions I value, to agree with me on this subject, and can quote no significant authorities, I must be intensely personal in what follows, offering my own experiences and those of others well known to me to support my contention. I therefore ask my readers' indulgence.

If Mr. Bercovici were to leave off his exquisite word-painting of gypsy and Roumanian life and write a story of his colored friends—a certain well-known Negro actor and his clever wife,—a chemist of recognized ability in her line,—would he find, I wonder, when that comedian had doffed the robes of the "Emperor Jones" or when Mrs. "Emperor Jones" had returned to her tiny New York apartment, or any of the others of the little Harlem group, anything especially different in their habits of life or manner of thought which would be a startling revelation to a jaded world fast learning how the other half lives? I think not.

Yet, not alone, either, are Konrad Bercovici and the other Caucasian critics, in staunchly advocating the idea that a Negro writer must forever write of Negroes, first because he lacks the necessary knowledge for any other sort of writing and second, because portrayal of the Negro character offers something new and refreshing.

They are warmly seconded by many of the ablest men of letters of the darker race. At a dinner not so long ago, I heard a prominent Negro, distinguished in a certain field of literature, eloquently argue for this same prescribed idea—he—a man of distinctly Caucasian features, and soft, straight hair, whose only identity with the race is his color and his wish,—whose wife is a highly cultivated young woman, charming and beautiful after the Spanish pattern, whose fair-skinned babies—four of them, two of them fair-haired also, gambol about their inviting playroom, just as any babies do, scrapping, hitting, pounding, banging, crying, only to don quickly their company manners and smile and curtsey adorably or offer a pink-dimpled hand when guests appear, just as any other well-bred infants do the world over, exhibiting in no-wise those peculiarly different characteristics attributed to the Negro and argued for by their father.

For pastime, I recently wrote an intimate study of an eminent Negro author and his lovely wife and submitted it to a number of personal friends for their diversion. Except for the use of names and a passing reference to the color and features of a child, no one recognized it as a "colored story." There was nothing in the scholarly elegance of the man nor in the gracious charm of the woman nor in the cunning capers of the three children to brand them as Negroes, although in reality this couple very ardently and energetically identifies itself with the black race.

These are but a few examples. A panoramic view of cultured American Negro life will reveal many, many others of the same cast all over the country. The colored schools are filled with the children of such parents, the large southern cities abound in their number,—not always with quite the same cultural attainment, as the very privileged few,—but with a background as fitting and an outlook as sane and devoid of emotion as any of their compatriots of the same level of society, whose ancestors have enjoyed some little education and certain additional advantages.

Without stressing the unpleasant and dismal element of race prejudice and its cursed results,

it would be impossible to construct a Negro theme as such, from the daily tragedies and joys and ordinary pursuits of colored people, except of those belonging to the untrained and inexperienced groups, who through continued lack of enlightenment and contact with refining influences have reverted or remained true to the African type, which I frankly and readily admit is peculiarly different from all other race types.

Above that class, the Negro becomes just a person, differing from all other persons in color, according to the amount of Negro blood in his veins,—in dress, tastes and habits, according to the degree of his cultivation, in manner of living, according to wealth. Proof of this fact may be found in the thousands of so-called colored people who yearly sever themselves with such ease from the race to which the laws of Virginia and South Carolina and a few other states, grown hysterical over what they once started and can not now control, have assigned them, to become lost in the milieu of an

immigrant crowded white world. If he were inherently different, the peculiar racial characteristics supposedly his would be as apparent in the white-skinned Negro as in the black.

If then, a survey of colored American life reveals the fact that people are people, white or black, the Negro prose writer with safe assurance may invade with his pen, any world he desires, for by merely knowing his own race people, he knows in addition all other people of his country not alone through study and observation but *per se*. Freedom of range of idea, unhampered by race consciousness or smothered by race pride, he as well as the poet must have, if the latent gift of creative art recently uncovered to the public is to reach the ripe fulfilment of its rich promise.

Not only then will he produce a great Negro literature, but beyond that in time, he too, will be added to that list of honored men, which bears the names of the makers of the creative literature of the world.

ARTHUR A. SCHOMBURG

The Negro Digs Up His Past (1925)

The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future. Though it is orthodox to think of America as the one country where it is unnecessary to have a past, what is a luxury for the nation as a whole becomes a prime social necessity for the Negro. For him, a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice. History must restore what slavery took away, for it is the social damage of slavery that the present generations must repair and offset. So among the rising democratic millions we find the Negro thinking more collectively, more retrospectively than the rest, and apt out of the very pressure of the present to become the most enthusiastic antiquarian of them all.

Vindicating evidences of individual achievement have as a matter of fact been gathered and treasured for over a century: Abbé Gregoire's

liberal-minded book on Negro notables in 1808 was the pioneer effort; it has been followed at intervals by less known and often less discriminating compendiums of exceptional men and women of African stock. But this sort of thing was on the whole pathetically over-corrective, ridiculously over-laudatory; it was apologetics turned into biography. A true historical sense develops slowly and with difficulty under such circumstances. But to-day, even if for the ultimate purpose of group justification, history has become less a matter of argument and more a matter of record. There is the definite desire and determination to have a history, well documented, widely known at least within race circles, and administered as a stimulating and inspiring tradition for the coming generations.

Gradually as the study of the Negro's past has come out of the vagaries of rhetoric and

it would be impossible to construct a Negro theme as such, from the daily tragedies and joys and ordinary pursuits of colored people, except of those belonging to the untrained and inexperienced groups, who through continued lack of enlightenment and contact with refining influences have reverted or remained true to the African type, which I frankly and readily admit is peculiarly different from all other race types.

Above that class, the Negro becomes just a person, differing from all other persons in color, according to the amount of Negro blood in his veins,—in dress, tastes and habits, according to the degree of his cultivation, in manner of living, according to wealth. Proof of this fact may be found in the thousands of so-called colored people who yearly sever themselves with such ease from the race to which the laws of Virginia and South Carolina and a few other states, grown hysterical over what they once started and can not now control, have assigned them, to become lost in the milieu of an

immigrant crowded white world. If he were inherently different, the peculiar racial characteristics supposedly his would be as apparent in the white-skinned Negro as in the black.

If then, a survey of colored American life reveals the fact that people are people, white or black, the Negro prose writer with safe assurance may invade with his pen, any world he desires, for by merely knowing his own race people, he knows in addition all other people of his country not alone through study and observation but *per se*. Freedom of range of idea, unhampered by race consciousness or smothered by race pride, he as well as the poet must have, if the latent gift of creative art recently uncovered to the public is to reach the ripe fulfilment of its rich promise.

Not only then will he produce a great Negro literature, but beyond that in time, he too, will be added to that list of honored men, which bears the names of the makers of the creative literature of the world.

ARTHUR A. SCHOMBURG

The Negro Digs Up His Past (1925)

The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future. Though it is orthodox to think of America as the one country where it is unnecessary to have a past, what is a luxury for the nation as a whole becomes a prime social necessity for the Negro. For him, a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice. History must restore what slavery took away, for it is the social damage of slavery that the present generations must repair and offset. So among the rising democratic millions we find the Negro thinking more collectively, more retrospectively than the rest, and apt out of the very pressure of the present to become the most enthusiastic antiquarian of them all.

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Gradually as the study of the Negro's past has come out of the vagaries of rhetoric and

propaganda and become systematic and scientific, three outstanding conclusions have been established:

First, that the Negro has been throughout the centuries of controversy an active collaborator, and often a pioneer, in the struggle for his own freedom and advancement. This is true to a degree which makes it the more surprising that it has not been recognized earlier.

Second, that by virtue of their being regarded as something "exceptional," even by friends and well-wishers, Negroes of attainment and genius have been unfairly disassociated from the group, and group credit lost accordingly.

Third, that the remote racial origins of the Negro, far from being what the race and the world have been given to understand, offer a record of credible group achievement when scientifically viewed, and more important still, that they are of vital general interest because of their bearing upon the beginnings and early development of culture.

With such crucial truths to document and establish, an ounce of fact is worth a pound of controversy. So the Negro historian to-day digs under the spot where his predecessor stood and argued. Not long ago, the Public Library of Harlem housed a special exhibition of books, pamphlets, prints and old engravings, that simply said, to skeptic and believer alike, to scholar and school-child, to proud black and astonished white, "Here is the evidence." Assembled from the rapidly growing collections of the leading Negro book-collectors and research societies, there were in these cases, materials not only for the first true writing of Negro history, but for the rewriting of many important paragraphs of our common American history. Slow though it be, historical truth is no exception to the proverb.

Here among the rarities of early Negro Americana was Jupiter Hammon's Address to the Negroes of the State of New York, edition of 1787, with the first American Negro poet's famous "If we should ever get to Heaven, we shall find nobody to reproach us for being black, or for being slaves." Here was Phyllis [sic] Wheatley's MSS. Poem of 1767 addressed to the students of Harvard, her spirited encomiums

upon George Washington and the Revolutionary Cause, and John Marrant's St. John's Day eulogy to the "Brothers of African Lodge No. 459" delivered at Boston in 1784. Here too were Lemuel Haynes' Vermont commentaries on the American Revolution and his learned sermons to his white congregation in Rutland, Vermont, and the sermons of the year 1808 by the Rev. Absalom Jones of St. Thomas Church, Philadelphia, and Peter Williams of St. Philip's, New York, pioneer Episcopal rectors who spoke out in daring and influential ways on the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Such things and many others are more than mere items of curiosity: they educate any receptive mind.

Reinforcing these were still rarer items of Africana and foreign Negro interest, the volumes of Juan Latino, the best Latinist of Spain in the reign of Philip V, incumbent of the chair of Poetry at the University of Granada, and author of Poems printed Granatae 1573 and a book on the Escorial published 1576; the Latin and Dutch treatises of Jacobus Eliza Capitein, a native of West Coast Africa and graduate of the University of Leyden; Gustavus Vassa's celebrated autobiography that supplied so much of the evidence in 1796 for Granville Sharpe's attack on slavery in the British colonies; Julien Raymond's Paris exposé of the disabilities of the free people of color in the then (1791) French colony of Haiti; and Baron de Vastey's *Cry of the Fatherland*, the famous polemic by the secretary of Christophe that precipitated the Haytian struggle for independence. The cumulative effect of such evidences of scholarship and moral prowess is too weighty to be dismissed as exceptional.

But weightier surely than any evidence of individual talent and scholarship could ever be, is the evidence of important collaboration and significant pioneer initiative in social service and reform, in the efforts toward race emancipation, colonization and race betterment. From neglected and rust-spotted pages comes testimony to the black men and women who stood shoulder to shoulder in courage and zeal, and often on a parity of intelligence and talent, with their notable white benefactors. There was the already cited work of Vassa that aided so

materially the efforts of Granville Sharpe; the record of Paul Cuffee, the Negro colonization pioneer, associated so importantly with the establishment of Sierra Leone as a British colony for the occupancy of free people of color in West Africa; the dramatic and history-making exposé of John Baptist Phillips, African graduate of Edinburgh, who compelled through Lord Bathurst in 1824 the enforcement of the articles of capitulation guaranteeing freedom to the blacks of Trinidad. There is the record of the pioneer colonization project of Rev. Daniel Coker in conducting a voyage of ninety expatriates to West Africa in 1820; of the missionary efforts of Samuel Crowther in Sierra Leone, first Anglican bishop of his diocese; and that of the work of John Russwurm, a leader in the work and foundation of the American Colonization Society.

When we consider the facts, certain chapters of American history will have to be reopened. Just as black men were influential factors in the campaign against the slave trade, so they were among the earliest instigators of the abolition movement. Indeed there was a dangerous calm between the agitation for the suppression of the slave trade and the beginning of the campaign for emancipation. During that interval colored men were very influential in arousing the attention of public men who in turn aroused the conscience of the country. Continuously between 1808 and 1845, men like Prince Saunders; Peter Williams; Absalom Jones; Nathaniel Paul; and Bishops Varick and Richard Allen, the founders of the two wings of African Methodism, spoke out with force and initiative; and men like Denmark Vesey (1822), David Walker, (1828) and Nat Turner (1831) advocated and organized schemes for direct action. This culminated in the generally ignored but important conventions of Free People of Color in New York, Philadelphia, and other centers, whose platforms and efforts are to the Negro of as great significance as the nationally cherished memories of Faneuil and Independence Halls. Then with Abolition comes the better documented and more recognized collaboration of Samuel R. Ward, William Wells Brown, Henry Highland Garnett, Martin Delaney[*sic*], Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Frederick

Douglass, with their great colleagues, Tappan, Phillips, Sumner, Mott, Stowe, and Garrison.

But even this latter group, who came within the limelight of national and international notice, and thus into open comparison with the best minds of their generation, the public too often regards as a group of inspired illiterates, eloquent echoes of their Abolitionist sponsors. For a true estimate of their ability and scholarship, however, one must go with the antiquarian to the files of the *Anglo-African Magazine*, where page by page comparisons may be made. Their writings show Douglass, McCune Smith, Wells Brown, Delaney[*sic*], Wilmot Blyden, and Alexander Crummell to have been as scholarly and versatile as any of the noted publicists with whom they were associated. All of them labored internationally in the cause of their fellows; to Scotland, England, France, Germany, and Africa, they carried their brilliant offensive of debate and propaganda, and with this came instance upon instance of signal foreign recognition, from academic, scientific, public, and official sources. Delaney's [*sic*] *Principia of Ethnology* won public reception from learned societies, Penington's discourses an honorary doctorate from Heidelberg, Wells Brown's three-year mission the entrée of the salons of London and Paris, and Douglass' tours receptions second only to Henry Ward Beecher's.

After this great era of public interest and discussion, it was Alexander Crummell, who, with the reaction already setting in, first organized Negro brains defensively through the founding of the American Negro Academy in 1874 at Washington. A New York boy whose zeal for education had suffered a rude shock when refused admission to the Episcopal Seminary by Bishop Onderdonk, he had been befriended by John Jay and sent to Cambridge University, England, for his education and ordination. On his return, he was beset with the idea of promoting race scholarship, and the Academy was the final result. It has continued ever since to be one of the bulwarks of our intellectual life, though unfortunately its members have had to spend too much of their energy and effort answering detractors and disproving popular fallacies. Only gradually have the men of this group been

able to work toward pure scholarship. Taking a slightly different start, The Negro Society for Historical Research was later organized in New York, and has succeeded in stimulating the collection from all parts of the world of books and documents dealing with the Negro. It has also brought together for the first time co-operatively in a single society African, West Indian, and Afro-American scholars. Direct offshoots of this same effort are the extensive private collections of Henry P. Slaughter of Washington, the Rev. Charles D. Martin of Harlem, of Arthur Schomburg of Brooklyn, and of the late John E. Bruce, who was the enthusiastic and far-seeing pioneer of this movement. Finally and more recently, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History has extended these efforts into a scientific research project of great achievement and promise. Under the direction of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, it has continuously maintained for nine years the publication of the learned quarterly, *The Journal of Negro History*, and with the assistance and recognition of two large educational foundations has maintained research and published valuable monographs in Negro history. Almost keeping pace with the work of scholarship has been the effort to popularize the results, and to place before Negro youth in the schools the true story of race vicissitude, struggle and accomplishment. So that quite largely now the ambition of Negro youth can be nourished on its own milk.

Such work is a far cry from the puerile controversy and petty braggadocio with which the effort for race history first started. But a general as well as a racial lesson has been learned. We seem lately to have come at last to realize what the truly scientific attitude requires, and to see that the race issue has been a plague on both our historical houses, and that history cannot be properly written with either bias or counter-bias. The blatant Caucasian racialist with his theories and assumptions of race superiority and dominance has in turn bred his Ethiopian counterpart—the rash and rabid amateur who has glibly tried to prove half of the world's geniuses to have been Negroes and to trace the pedigree of nineteenth-century Americans from the Queen of Sheba. But fortunately to-day

there is on both sides of a really common cause less of the sand of controversy and more of the dust of digging.

Of course, a racial motive remains—legitimately compatible with scientific method and aim. The work our race students now regard as important, they undertake very naturally to overcome in part certain handicaps of disengagement and omission too well-known to particularize. But they do so not merely that we may not wrongfully be deprived of the spiritual nourishment of our cultural past, but also that the full story of human collaboration and interdependence may be told and realized. Especially is this likely to be the effect of the latest and most fascinating of all of the attempts to open up the closed Negro past, namely the important study of African cultural origins and sources. The bigotry of civilization which is the taproot of intellectual prejudice begins far back and must be corrected at its source. Fundamentally it has come about from that depreciation of Africa which has sprung up from ignorance of her true rôle and position in human history and the early development of culture. The Negro has been a man without a history because he has been considered a man without a worthy culture. But a new notion of the cultural attainment and potentialities of the African stocks has recently come about, partly through the corrective influence of the more scientific study of African institutions and early cultural history, partly through growing appreciation of the skill and beauty and in many cases the historical priority of the African native crafts, and finally through the signal recognition which first in France and Germany, but now very generally, the astonishing art of the African sculptures has received. Into these fascinating new vistas, with limited horizons lifting in all directions, the mind of the Negro has leapt forward faster than the slow clearings of scholarship will yet safely permit. But there is no doubt that here is a field full of the most intriguing and inspiring possibilities. Already the Negro sees himself against a reclaimed background, in a perspective that will give pride and self-respect ample scope, and make history yield for him the same values that the treasured past of any people affords.

FRED DEARMOND

A Note on the Sociology of Negro Literature (1925)

No people can be understood without some study of their literature and other artistic expression. And the literature of a race, group, or nationality, to be rightly appraised and interpreted must be considered with reference to the facts of that people's history, religion, and sociology. A failure to appreciate these basic truths is, I believe, a strong contributing cause for the complete ignorance of the Negro on the part of white America, as well as the Negro's lack of conception as to his own powers.

The average Nordic, particularly in the South, has become so accustomed to wearing that attitude of lofty superiority and amused tolerance toward blacks that he knows no more about their mental processes than he does about Chinese ideals or Brahman theology. To the rude mind, Negro poetry, art, and religion are no more serious than the diverting antics of a favorite pet animal. A great fiction has thus grown up around the Negro character, and the Negro himself, with his unusual histrionic ability, has accepted the false conception and fostered it with his feigned burlesque and mimicry. There are few even of our college professors, congressmen, and D. D.'s discerning enough to perceive that the "good nigger" is merely a good actor, that all this extravagant deference, feudal manners, and Ham Bone humor is merely a form of guile and subtle flattery by which Negroes secure those privileges which other men are expected to stand up and demand as their rights.

To attain the understanding that will straighten all such distorted views, race literature must be studied not by direct comparison, but in the light of the influences that have affected it. American literature proper not only has a brilliant provincial history of over two hundred years, but it is a direct branch both in blood and tradition, of that stalwart oak, the roots of which go back to the England of Chaucer's day. If I may be excused for using the

metaphor still further, I would say that the writing of the American Negro is a healthy sprout that has sprung up within the shade of its mighty progenitor. Sixty-five years ago the race languished in a bondage so hopeless that only by the slyest stealth could any person of color learn to read and write. "Negroes by law are prohibited from learning to read and write," wrote Rev. John Aughey, a Northern clergyman sojourning in Mississippi in 1861. "I had charge of a Sabbath school for the instruction of blacks in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1853. The school was put down by the strong arm of the law, shortly after my connection with it ceased. In Mississippi a man who taught slaves to read or write would be sent to the penitentiary instanter." Frederick Douglass relates in his autobiography how he was deprived of the only real pleasure he ever remembers during his slave days in Maryland, when the school that he was teaching on Sundays was broken up and suppressed by his master. He had previously, by many subterfuges and by the assistance of a kind mistress, succeeded in getting for himself a smattering of the rudiments. At one time he had over forty pupils meeting with the greatest secrecy in a barn, in order that they might taste the delights of knowledge. One of the men who helped to suppress the school by force was a very religious character who had taught the neighboring slaves about the Bible, professing much interest in saving their souls.

But it is not so much the educational development of the Negro under enormous difficulties that constitutes the outstanding feature of his artistic accomplishment, as it is his marvelous adaptability to Caucasian civilization. In reading one of Claude McKay's poems, or listening to Roland Hayes singing, or admiring the pictures of Tanner, one should remind oneself of the vast gulf that the artist has bridged between his art and his savage African ancestry—at most only a few generations away.

Wherever the Ethiopian has been transplanted to other parts of the world, he has shown himself remarkably adaptable to foreign civilization.

The record of "America's subject race" has given a flavor of the exotic to our history, an element of color that creates a most enchanting background for literature. Drama and romance are conjured in the imaginative mind by such events as the slave trade, the underground railroad, the gallant dash of colored troops in the war of the rebellion, emancipation, and the aftermath of reconstruction with all those bizarre incidents of poetic justice to the former masters. All epochs in the struggle for human liberty have had their interpreters; the Negro people believing as they do that they are still in process of emancipation from the disabilities imposed by race prejudice, have never had such able, eloquent and sincere spokesmen as at this time.

The blighting effect of slavery can hardly be appreciated in its full influence on artistic expression as well as social life. Consciously or unconsciously it imposed on the race a servile feeling of inferiority that centuries will not wipe out. Thus it is only from a feeling of great power that a Negro writer can assert himself with any of that confident ego that we have been wont to expect from genius. There is discernible in Dunbar's poetry a sort of hesitating modesty that causes the reader to feel that some hereditary race consciousness was restraining the highest flights of his genius. It is something of the same inferiority complex that prompted a Negro teacher of an industrial school appearing before a committee of the legislature in a Southern state to apologize for wearing such a good suit. Socially the taint of bondage has exerted a tremendous influence. It should not be forgotten that the institution of marriage properly dates only from Reconstruction. Booker Washington, sitting down to write his autobiography, did not even know his father's name. Frederick Douglass could not remember having seen his mother but a few times in his life and then only when she had stolen away at night and walked many miles that she might snatch a few hours with her child. The word "father" was not in the slave child's vocabulary. Many of

the first families of Virginia maintained their aristocratic station by the refined and lucrative business of breeding slaves for the Southern markets.

White observers have made much of the Negro moral code but said little about these causes that account for a distinction in that respect. In T. S. Stribling's *Birthright*, Peter Siner, an educated and refined Negro laments the low standards and the atavism of his race. No such pessimism is justified. It is rather with satisfaction and pride that Negroes should contemplate the progress of sixty years. Most characterizations by white observers are gross exaggerations and caricatures and will be recognized as such by those who see and think for themselves. The lascivious stories set to the familiar Rastus-Liza cast are an example. As they are related with loud guffaws to groups of male hearers by those verbose gentlemen who know "the niggers" so thoroughly, these anecdotes have about as much realism as the raptures of a California realtor.

James Weldon Johnson, the distinguished colored poet, has called attention to what he considers the greatest obstacle in the way of artistic expression by his race. This is, in the South at least, the all-consuming tensity of the race struggle. Not only does this problem dissipate the intellectual energy of the Negroes, he says, but also in almost equal degree of the Southern whites, accounting for H. L. Mencken's somewhat exaggerated statement: "In all this vast region . . . there is not a single poet, not a serious historian, not a creditable composer, not a critic good or bad, not a dramatist dead or alive." Heywood Broun called the Southern fear of the Negro "an intensified specialization that atrophies the mind of the South."

There has been an absence of objective thought on this subject, either written or spoken, throughout the South; a dogmatism built on such stale repetitions as "the Southern white man is the only person that understands the Negro," "We need no meddling interference from the North," "The Negro is an irresponsible child," etc. The Southern Negroes on their part, while making great strides industrially, have left the intellectual leadership to the North,

where the dominant race, instead of hostility, has shown only indifference.

The Great Migration to the North seems to be one of the practical economic forces working toward a solution of the race problem. This movement, by better distributing the Negro population, is certain to make the question more nearly what it should always have been—national and not sectional in scope and interest. The changing order is already finding expression in the race literature. Bards are singing more of Harlem dance halls and less of Mississippi plantations. The new setting is the big industrial centers of the North, which are soon to vie with the Cotton Belt as the black center of population. Jean Toomer, the new star on the firmament of Negro prose fiction, picks many of his characters from the flotsam of the big city. Miss Fauset scorns precedent by writing a novel of polite Negro society, minus dialect and other thought-to-be-indispensable ear-marks of race literature. Poets like Countée Cullen bare their souls and display secret emotions long repressed. A freedom from the inhibitions of the Southland is shown by the Negro press, the pulpit, and by publicists, black and white.

Most Southern white men have professed to see in the exodus from the late Confederacy only rainbow-chasing, bound to end in disillusionment for the emigrants. But this opinion is not concurred in by the Negro observers nor by such white writers as Rollin Lynde Hartt and Frank Tannenbaum. Hartt's conclusion is that the principal incentive is the hope of increased security and equal protection of the law. In his new home we see the Negro's facility for adapting himself to changed environment. Every year this quality is enabling thousands to surmount vocational barriers, as it will eventually be the means of overcoming discrimination.

The continuing improvement in inter-racial relations will have the effect of turning Negro thought away from channels of controversy and propaganda. It will release the writers of philippics for more creative work, just as the final abolition of slavery turned Whittier and Lowell from fiery abolition poems to the greater and broader classics on which their fame chiefly rests in our day.

A study of the colored press, such as Robert T. Kerlin has made in *The Voice of the Negro*, reveals an undeniably aggressive and bitter feeling against mob-law, disfranchisement, peonage, and "Jim-Crowism." Most of the periodicals are strongly pessimistic and cynical. L. M. Hussey writes in *The American Mercury*: "This cynicism distinguishes all his current utterances. It informs and enlivens the propaganda that he prints in his periodicals. These periodicals are seldom naive. They make use of the weapon of irony. To the white brethren seeking civilized amusement, to the Nordic overman a bit soured by the pallid timidities of his accustomed journals, I recommend a trial glance at such Negro papers as *The Crisis*, *The Messenger*, and *Opportunity*. Taken after a dose of the usual savorless blather of white journalism, their effect is akin to that of four ounces of ethyl hydroxide."

The bellicosity of those journals like *The Chicago Defender*, *The Black Dispatch* of Oklahoma City, and *The Houston Informer* will surprise all those who have been deceived by the stage deference of the blacks into thinking that the race as a whole is quiescent and contented. According to a writer in *World's Work*, in some parts of the black belt of the South the radical Chicago papers are considered as vicious contraband by the authorities, which necessitates their being smuggled in surreptitiously and sold among the Negroes much in the same manner that Garrison's *Liberator* was circulated during slavery. But even in the South there are few of the colored organs that follow the idea of non-resistance. In expressing opinions that are anathema to the orthodox Southerner they seem to encounter less intolerance than would be vented on the white man who gave voice to the same heresies. While we are a long way from having a free press in these United States, it is at least gratifying to reflect on our improvement since the time of Elijah Lovejoy.

Religious fervor is strongly reflected in the literature of the Negro. There is a faith deeply emotional and strictly fundamentalist, imbued with the imagery of a personal Savior, a very real Satan and Hell, and a literal construction of the Scriptures. Booker Washington related that he found a pathetic aspiration to learn reading

and writing among the older men and women who had spent their youth in slavery. They attended his night schools faithfully and repeatedly told him that they did so solely with the ambition of reading the Bible for themselves before they died.

This strong spiritual craving is traceable to slavery. It was very deliberately cultivated by the masters with the object of providing an emotional outlet that would keep them quiescent. According to Frederick Douglass, drunkenness was encouraged for the same reason. On the Maryland plantations it was customary to give all the field hands a week or two of holiday during the Christmas season, when it was expected that the slaves would waste their time, and their money if they happened to have any, in riotous carousing. Then it was certain that no dangerous ideas would occupy their minds and turn their thoughts to freedom.

There is also a close connection between this fervid Christianity inherited by the freedman from the slave, and the Negro spirituals, the most distinctive artistic contribution of the race to our American civilization. Mr. Kerlin in his essay "Contemporary Negro Poetry" has shown the undoubted kinship between the new

Negro poetry and the old spirituals. Both, he says, "bear the stamp of African genius." In the course of evolution we may well expect that the musical theme of the spirituals will be further interpreted in our generation.

In those feeling old hymns, legacy from "Black and Unknown Bards of Long Ago," there is much to provoke the interest of all students of original sources in American life and history. Whether considered as poetry, music, or religion, the force and originality of the spirituals are striking. As poetry they symbolized the intense yearning of a people for freedom; as music they were the flight of troubled spirits in spontaneous, melancholy song; as religion they were the primitive appeal of tortured slave souls to a higher power.

Various Negro leaders have charged their people with being too self-conscious and urged them not to exhibit diffidence in displaying their own distinctive qualities, to cease aping white customs and develop themselves in their own way; in short, to take a pride in their race and in preserving its entity. They insist that the black race has a very distinct place in the future of America, and in the fullest realization of that future there should be no real clash of interests.

ALBERT C. BARNES

Negro Art, Past and Present (1926)

A score of years ago, most of those persons who watched the beginning of a new era in art were profoundly astonished to realize that its source of inspiration was the work of the race for centuries despised and condemned to a servile status.* Nothing could have seemed more unbelievable that idols made to be worshipped by savages, and masks designed for use in Heathen rites, should have shown the way out of an artistic impasse apparently hopeless. Just at the moment when the traditions of European painting had been completely summed up in the work of Renoir and Cézanne and had found a monumental expression unrivaled since the days of Rembrandt, Velásquez, and the

Masters of the Italian Renaissance, contemporary art seemed suddenly to have lost its creative powers. Art threatened to decline into a period of academicism and eclecticism, like that which occurred in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the critical moment, as M. Paul Guillaume has shown, the treasures of Negro sculpture were recaptured from the anthropologist and the antiquarian, and from them was derived a new impetus toward creative work in plastic art, in music, and in poetry.

* Address delivered at the Woman's Faculty Club, Columbia University, New York, March 26, 1926.

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Masters of the Italian Renaissance, contemporary art seemed suddenly to have lost its creative powers. Art threatened to decline into a period of academicism and eclecticism, like that which occurred in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the critical moment, as M. Paul Guillaume has shown, the treasures of Negro sculpture were recaptured from the anthropologist and the antiquarian, and from them was derived a new impetus toward creative work in plastic art, in music, and in poetry.

* Address delivered at the Woman's Faculty Club, Columbia University, New York, March 26, 1926.

To persons who understood either the distinguished aesthetic ancestry of Negro sculpture or the psychological makeup of the Negro himself, it is not, however, surprising that the failing powers of European art should have been revived by the art of the Negro. The greatest of all sculptures, that most purely classic in conception and execution—the Egyptian—was itself African. Late Egyptian (Ptolemaic) sculpture had been enriched by the influence of Greek art and the influence of Egypt is clearly apparent in the massiveness, the intense structural conviction, and the fine sense of decoration which Negro art abundantly displays. The greatest traditions of antiquity were as much the birthright of the Negro as of the European, and in the best Gabon, Sudan, and Ivory Coast work, we find the use of these traditions quite as sensitive and individual as Donatello's and Michael Angelo's, and certainly more distinctively sculptural in character. The eruption of Negro influence into European art of the twentieth century was thus not a mingling of two alien and incongruous influences, but a recovery by European art of an important element in its own past. The place of the Negro in modern art is not that of a parvenu or an intruder, but of one who belongs there by natural right and artistic inheritance.

Mere inheritance, however distinguished, would not qualify any individual or race for a place among the elect in art. The real secret of the Negro's achievement lies in his temperament, in his natural gifts. An examination of these gifts, as they have been developed or stifled by his circumstances, will reveal both the source of his accomplishment in the past and the promise of even greater accomplishment in the future. If we consider the result of his contact with the white race, we shall see why Negro art declined 400 years ago and how, at present, it is struggling out of its long eclipse.

Primitive Negro sculpture was the manifestation of a life which was a stable organization, thoroughly adjusted to its surroundings, and was therefore able to find natural authentic expression. Before the coming of the Portuguese into Central Africa, the Negroes had established a mode of life in harmony with their

environment and congenial to their temperament. Their material wants were slight, they required little shelter or clothing, food was abundant. As they had no commerce with the world, they were free from economic pressure. Hence they had almost unlimited leisure for the free exercise of their powers, and especially of their vivid and dramatic religious instinct, enriched by their luxuriant imagination. Although they lacked all scientific conception and their religious rites were consequently full of superstition, the very naivete of their religion made it more colorful and dramatic. It was a religion into which they could pour all their instincts—their fondness for music, for the dance, for histrionics, for ceremony; in general, for participation in a natural, spontaneous, rhythmic group activity.

Into this paradise came the Europeans in the early sixteenth century, and very soon the natural life of the Negro was at an end. The material powers of the white races, and the prestige which this conferred, deprived the Negroes of their freedom, their self-confidence, and their initiative. Reduced to a status of inferiority, they sought to imitate the Europeans and their art sank into a debased and mongrel form.

For American Negroes, the most important event in the history of their relations with white men was the transplanting of many thousands of their race to America. Torn from their native environment and from their carefree, irresponsible life, they were herded together on Southern plantations, given over to an incessant toil, and compelled to rebuild their existence from its foundations. The new civilization of which they were forcibly made a part was totally alien to them, and their history in it was that of a long and painful effort towards adjustment. A radically novel set of habits and customs was imposed upon them by their American conquerors. At first, their reaction was one of simple despair, with occasional bursts of blind revolt. Gradually, however, they began to adjust themselves; self-expression was found in the adaptation of their ancient heathen rites, in which belief in the supernatural was paramount. After several generations of worship by incantation and exorcism, conversion to Christianity

was almost universal. At the start, Christianity was chiefly a means of consolation. Since their freedom and natural spontaneous life seemed almost hopelessly lost in this world, it was inevitable that they should seek compensation in dreams of another and happier supernatural life. Religion is always a search for harmony, for environment which shall meet and satisfy our desires, and in which we can feel at home. It is almost a psychological necessity for a race partially frustrated and depressed, above all for a race so richly endowed emotionally and imaginatively, to find a satisfactory religion. But the Christianity adopted by the Negroes had little theological quality. It was much more closely akin to the rites of their African forests than to the orthodox Christianity of the whites. What interested them in it was its assurance to the lowly of their intrinsic importance and value and its promise to the disinherited and the outcast that a happier existence was in store for him. They were also deeply moved by ceremonials, by all the ways of giving expression to collective emotion; hence the denomination which first gained their allegiance was the Baptists. Subsequently, the Methodists, which also provided a highly emotional ritual and which all could share, gained many converts. Both of these churches held frequent camp meetings, at which the instincts of the Negro were given full play, his imagination, stimulated by that of his fellows, made vividly real to him both his present woes—largely symbolized by images of hellfire and blood—and the glories for which he pined, but which were so conspicuously absent from his earthly habitation. The intensity of his vision and the completeness of its mastery over him, was testified to by its accompaniment of physical abandon—stamping, shrieking and shouting, rushing to and fro, wild waving of arms, laughter and tears, and often the rigidity of the trance.

In Africa, the tribal priest had been not only a religious leader and counsellor, but a master of tribal ceremonies, a medicine man, a magician who controlled the powers of nature. Many of these functions were taken over by the preacher of his church when he came under Christianity, and, although some of them were

discarded, religion remained the point about which all common activities were focussed. Even today, in the South, the church is not only a house of worship, but a place where societies and lodges meet, suppers are held, entertainments and lectures are given, charity distributed, and views exchanged. It is a community center—much as the Roman Catholic Church was in the Middle Ages. And just as the great artistic achievement of the Middle Ages, the building of the cathedrals, was an outgrowth of community life inspired by religion, so the greatest artistic achievement of the Negroes, and, indeed, of America, was the “spirituals” in which the sufferings, griefs, and hopes of the slaves were given an embodiment at once religious and aesthetic.

These spirituals originated ultimately in African tribal chants, but their form, and the images embodied in them, were determined by the customs of congregational worship in the South. The sermons of the preacher were not theological or ethical discussions; they were exhortations to believe in what has been called the Christian Ethic—to believe and so to be comforted. Their substance was not thought but emotion and imagination, a fact which accounted for the deep earnestness, the fervid eloquence of the exhorter. Rhythm, poetry, music form the natural language of emotion, and for this reason, and also in order that all might participate in the ceremony, hymns in which the speaker's images were repeated and embroidered inevitably became part of the service. What had at first been merely a wail of sorrow or a dirge became articulate in words the burden of which was the misery of life and the happiness of Heaven—a song at once plaintive and ecstatic. These hymns were anonymous—each of them represented not the work of any one man, but the gradual development of sentiments common to whole groups of men. Like the Homeric poems, also the work of generations of singers, they thus came to represent the griefs and aspirations of a race. Their appeal was universal; they embodied the souls of a whole people.

The nominal emancipation of the Negroes, though it brought the worst of their sufferings

to an end, was by no means a real liberation. Disfranchisement, poverty, denial of equal privilege, a menial function in life, were still the lot of the Negro. Without power or prestige, the Negro's frame of mind remained abject, apologetic, or sullenly defiant. No free and full development of his capacities was possible while he stayed in a state of economic serfdom and profound self-distrust. Real freedom, material and spiritual, was out of the question until economic security was established and full self-respect achieved. Of the two, the latter was probably the more important, since an intelligent, resolute effort toward material improvement is impossible in the absence of independence of mind and self-confidence.

The Negro's achievement of respect for himself and his race was a slow process. For many years he did not suspect the artistic importance of his own spirituals, and they were looked upon by him and his white neighbors as merely the manifestation of an illiterate and inferior race. Their general popularity did not begin until 1871, when the Fisk University singers toured the country to make their living and to raise money for Fisk. At Oberlin, they first won recognition and were invited to give a concert at Brooklyn; after this their fame spread all over America. Nevertheless, the spirituals remained for many years merely a form of light entertainment. A few discerning judges recognized their value, and Dvořák used some of them in his "New World Symphony"; but their true importance was not appreciated until recent years, and the work of collecting, editing, and publishing them did not begin until a very few years ago. For much of this pioneer work credit is due to two American negroes, the Work brothers, John and Frederick.

The Negro's pride in his race, the foundations of which were largely laid by recognition of his musical accomplishment, has been powerfully fortified by the rediscovery of ancient Negro sculpture and by acknowledgment, on the part of the most important contemporary artists, of the magnitude of their debt to it. It has revealed an entirely unsuspected wealth of plastic endowments in the Negro race, a sense for the visible essentials of natural objects, and

an ability to arrange forms in varied, rhythmic, harmonious, moving designs which do not suffer by comparison with the most distinguished classic achievements of any of the other races. It is no exaggeration to claim that the best of what has been developed in contemporary art during the past twenty years owes its origin to the inspiration of primitive Negro sculpture. In the painting and sculpture of the acknowledged leaders of our age—Picasso, Matisse, Modigliani, Lipchitz, Soutine, and others—any trained observer can recognize the Negro motive. The music of the French group known as The Six—Satie, Auric, Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc, and Talliaferro—is the ancient Negro spirit embodied in musical forms representative of the highest degree of musical culture and knowledge. Much of Stravinsky's best work belongs to the same category. Diaghlieff drank deeply at the ancient African spring, fused its feelings with the spirit of Russian music and dance, and there emerged a number of the best pieces of the famous Russian ballet. The poetry and prose of Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob, Blaise Cendrars, and Reverdy are likewise fundamentally Negro in emotional content and formal expression. The leading dressmaker of our age, Paul Poiret of Paris, acknowledges to his companion of his early career, Paul Guillaume, the debt of awakening the creative spirit through contact with Negro sculpture that Paul Guillaume surrounded himself with, nearly twenty years ago. No informed visitor to the great Paris Exposition of 1925, Art Décoratif, could have failed to be impressed with the predominance of the Negro motive in the really creative work of the decorators of all the great countries represented at that exhibition. In Paris today, the posters that arrest the attention were unmistakably inspired by primitive Negro sculpture. All these great and widely spread influences—in painting, sculpture, music, poetry, literature, decoration—are freely acknowledged by the creators of the worthwhile art of the past eighteen years. Appreciation of this sculpture has been rare, especially among the Negroes themselves, but as it becomes more generally diffused, there is every reason to look for an abatement of the superciliousness on the part

of the white race and the unhappy sense of inferiority in the Negro himself, which have been detrimental to the true welfare of both races.

It is in poetry and music that the most important contemporary accomplishments of the Negro are to be found. The Negro is a poet by nature. The very deficiencies with which he is sometimes charged, his indifference to science and technology, have been an assistance to him here. Free from preoccupation with the abstract and the mechanical, his attention has been unwaveringly fixed upon the concrete, the immediate, the colorful. His mind runs to rich, luxuriant images, organized to meet the demands of an intensely emotional temperament. This temperament appears in everything he does; it is able to lend a charm, a picturesqueness to the most trivial occurrences of everyday life. My extensive experience in the employment of Negroes has afforded innumerable opportunities to observe them at their daily work. If left to themselves and allowed to do what they have to do in their own way, they display an unlimited ability not only to do it efficiently, but to make a drama out of it. Their motions are rhythmic and the tones of their voices are real music. The Negro's recital of anything that may happen, if he is encouraged to tell it in the way natural to him, is never a mere record of facts: it is full of humor, color, dramatic suspense. The Negro lives his poetry. It is

a part of his life, not an embellishment laid on from without. When he comes to express his experience in words, the expression is as spontaneous, as harmonious, as full of personality, as is Life itself.

All this is abundantly illustrated in the work which the poets of the Negro race have produced. The poetry of James Weldon Johnson, Angelina Grimké, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and many others conforms in the highest degree to Milton's rule for great poetry, that it must be "simple, sensuous and passionate." The images are vivid and full of color; they express the personal sorrows, hopes, and aspirations of the poet, transfigured by imagination and given universal human significance. They have the emotional harmony, the rhythmic surge, the poignancy and rapture which are the authentic note of poetic inspiration. In the work of the Negro novelists at its best, the same vivid realism is combined with imaginative vision. The modern literary movement among the Negroes is rapidly advancing, and, in conjunction with the new interest in Negro sculpture and music, is undoubtedly the chief agent in making the Negro aware of his actual spiritual stature. When this consciousness is fully spread through his own race and the race of his oppressors, the Negro will be assured of the high place he deserves in American civilization.

THOMAS L. G. OXLEY

Survey of Negro Literature, 1760–1926 (1927)

This article is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of Negro literature, for it is only a prolegomena to that increasing storehouse of literature produced by colored writers. Negro literature has attained such a remarkable standard of excellence that it would be difficult to analyze all the works written by colored men and women. The growth of Negro literature is unparalleled in all history. And this is one of the many significant proofs that the Negro

advances socially, educationally, and otherwise; and it is more striking when one notes although handicapped in nearly every way imaginable, he still clings to the proverbial motto: "Forward and up!"

The history of Negro literature must claim our full attention in a special degree. It is intensely national as well as American. In fact, it is more American than anything else. In producing such remarkable literary works the black

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man enriches and beautifies American literature; he even adds culture, giving to it a sort of a veneered finish. The high humanity of its content, its naturalness, and sincerity are the characteristic manner of Negro literature. The writings of the black race is one of the most interesting to-day. It is not only rich in distinguished writers but these writers have a marked Negro individuality, and for these reasons we are surely justified in claiming a national literature for the race over which nations have ridden rough-shodden. Hardly any literature equals the Negro in producing the spiritual struggles of men, of a race oppressed for centuries. . . . The literature of the Negro is saturated with new color; it expands, it breathes, it arrests; it becomes infinitely more plentiful in motives, observations, ideas. It is the soul of black folk that understands the finite as well as the infinite phases of life.

Negro poetry begins where almost all poetry begins—in the rude ceremonial of a primitive people placating an unknown and dreaded world. The poetry of the first American Negro poet was first expressed in the dialect language several hundred years ago. In this language he voiced the sentiments of his heart and soul in wonderful, poignant expressions. Who have not enjoyed reading the dialect verses of the slaves? Who have not found some beauty in the dulcifluous spirituals of the slaves, passion-souled slaves? Beauty is the word for spiritual. At times the Negro sings with a broken heart; at another instant he tunes his lyre and forgets the world and its cares.

Truly, no branch of Negro literature can boast of the same degree of originality, naturalness, and philosophical axioms as its dialect poetry. It may be said that the birth of American Negro poetry was first voiced in the spirituals. Although religion found a ready and eloquent expression in some of the spirituals, denunciation of social abuses were quite as numerous, whilst they were frequently more remarkable from a literary point of view. To know the Negro then, we must know his literature. The spirituals of the Negro, plenty of which are still preserved in the people, are wonderfully rich and full of the deepest interest. No nation

possesses such an astonishing wealth of traditions, tales, and lyric folk-songs—some of them of the greatest spiritual beauty—and such a rich cycle of archaic epic songs as the Negro does. . . .

After the Civil War Negro literature acquired an idiosyncrasy of its own. The disappearance of the hypothetical primitive dialect productions of the slaves may have deprived us of some curious specimens of early art. But what has come down to us are examples of the Negro's creative ability as a poet. One need only to examine their spirituals or folk-lore. The folk-lore of the American Negro is rich in all qualities, giving to life itself a new aspect. And it is the only folk-lore of America.

The first poet of the American Negro, who was he? Jupiter Hammon was the first American Negro to publish a book of poetry. His poems are all religious; they are crude and methodless. His first poem, *An Evening Thought*, bears the date of 1760. Hammon was a slave belonging to Mr. Lloyd of Queen's Village, Long Island. In 1778 he wrote *An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley, Ethiopian Poetess*, and in 1782, *A Winter Piece: Being A Serious Exhortation, With A Call to the Unconverted*. With *An Evening Thought* entered the American Negro into American literature. The birth and death of Hammon are unknown.

Nine years after the publication of Hammon's first poems came Phillis Wheatley, the little slave girl who was brought to America a slave among slaves. She was born in Africa about 1753 and was brought to America in 1761, between seven and eight years of age. She was purchased by John Wheatley, a well-to-do tailor in Boston. She was taught to read and write by her mistress and Mary Wheatley and was treated like a member of the family. In 1773 she accompanied John Wheatley to London. While in London she was cordially entertained by the Countess of Huntingdon and was presented with a volume of Milton's poems by the Lord Mayor of London. In the midst of her popularity she was suddenly recalled from England by the illness of her benefactress. In 1773 there appeared in London the first and best edition of her poems: *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects: Religious and Moral, By Phillis Wheatley of Boston, in New England*.

In 1775 she addressed a poem *To His Excellency, General Washington*, then stationed at Cambridge. Reverend J. Lathrop said in a letter dated Boston, August 14, 1775: "Yes, Sir, the famous Negro Phillis, is a servant of Mrs. Lathrop's mother. She is indeed a singular genius. Mrs. Lathrop taught her to read, and by seeing others use the pen, she learned to write; she early discovered a turn for poetry, and being indulged to read and furnish her mind, she does now, and will, if she still lives, make a considerable figure in the poetical way. She is now in London with Lady Huntingdon, and . . . I hope her going to England may do her no hurt."

Phillis Wheatley was a singular genius indeed; she was a girl genius and she never sounds a native note. She kept close to the white man's ideas. She wrote the white man's poetry—the poetry of Gray and Pope. She wrote nothing of her picturesque Africa, nor sounded a note against the vile institution of servile oppression under which her people groaned. Her heart gave her lips no lyric music, nor sonnets to land the Nubian skin of her people. After the death of her mistress the home was broken up, and Phillis soon accepted an offer of marriage from a young Negro called Doctor Peters and who was sometimes a lawyer. Her three children died at an early age. She died on the 5th of December, 1784. . . . Phillis Wheatley was highly religious and sincere. She deserves a far greater respect than America has accorded her. She was the first American Negro woman to show any remarkable literary perfection.

George Moses Horton ranks third in giving his name to American Negro literature. In 1829, George Moses Horton of North Carolina published a book entitled: *Poems By A Slave*, and in 1845 appeared *Poetical Works*. Horton taught himself to read and write; there is a current story that the poet was in the habit of picking up pieces of paper hoping to find verses written on them. His first book of poems was published before he was able to write. His friends hoped that enough copies could be sold to secure the freedom of the poet, but the publisher's note to a second edition, in 1837, states that the money obtained from the first impression were insufficient to obtain his manumission papers.

Mrs. Francis Ellen Watkins Harper wrote in the same period as Horton. Mrs. Harper was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1825. She was educated by her uncle, the Reverend William Watkins, who taught a school for free colored children in Baltimore. In 1851 she removed to Little York, Pennsylvania and in 1854 she began her career as a public lecturer against the institution of slavery. In 1860 she was married to Fenton Harper of Cincinnati. *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* appeared in 1854 prefaced by William Lloyd Garrison. More than 10,000 copies of her books were sold. Mrs. Hemans, Longfellow, and Whittier were her models. Mrs. Harper's poetry is beauty; it is also authentic drama, true, poignant, striking into the depths of humanity. She wrote life, not about life. Her grace is elegant; her style far from being burdensome. Throughout her work one finds scintilla gems which adds beauty to her subject. Her verse is smooth and sonorous, often a little too smooth and sonorous. She shows at times a pathos that grips the heart because she was herself deeply moved. Her novel *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, is remarkable for its conciseness and truth. She was a splendid forger of aphorisms. Mrs. Harper died February 22, 1911.

Two great figures stand apart, singularly alike in many ways—James Madison Bell and Alberry A. Whitman. Bell was an anti-slavery orator and a friend of the immortal John Brown of Harper's Ferry fame. Bell was born at Gallipolis, Ohio, in 1826. In 1842 his family removed to Cincinnati where he learned the plasterer's trade. He pursued his trade by day and studied at night, and attended school for a short time; 1854 found him in Canada where he was busily engaged in the activities of the Underground Railroad. In 1860 he returned to the United States, and in the middle of the same year removed to California. Five years later he removed to Toledo, Ohio.

Bell was a powerful and fervent writer. Self-educated he gained an access to the wisdom of books. He uttered and the air became songful with wisdom; he wrote and his words congeal into exemplars of classicism. Of the Emersonian philosophy he surely was!

His poems are terse and are elucidated with sporadical aphorisms. His phrasing is exuberant; there is often a metallic quality bordering on brassiness. There is a willful flambuoyancy in his impetuous periods. Bell wrote in standard English and Byron was his model.

Alberry A. Whitman, Bell's contemporary, was born in Kentucky shortly after the Civil War. He was a slave. He graduated from Wilberforce University and later became its financial agent. He began life as a Methodist minister. In 1877 a collection of his poems entitled *Not A Man and Yet A Man* appeared. In 1884 he published his longest and most ambitious poem: *Twasinta's Seminoles, or The Rape of Florida*. Whitman, like Bell, wrote in standard English. His poems are long and have romantic charms; a wealth of beauty and imagery exists throughout his poems. They are tragic tales of love and romance. The beauty of the South adds charms to their exquisite naturalness. The consciousness of his power is in every line, the characters though they are so life-like and spontaneous in their action, fall into line and group themselves like puppets at the waving of the magician's hand. In 1901 Whitman published *An Idyll of the South*. He died several years ago.

It is necessary to mention the names of a few outstanding Negro writers who published books during this period. Charles L. Reason's *Freedom* (1847), a poem of 168 lines, possesses both imagination and dignity. Its central idea is based upon historic struggles of various peoples and concludes with a prayer for freedom in America. Even at this time Negro literature was in its adolescent stage; it had not yet attained its nebulous maturity. Ten years previous the progress made in literature by the American colored writer was microscopical. In 1859 Northrup published *Twenty Years A Slave*. This is a very interesting autobiography recording the sufferings of the author and his people and his final triumphs in life. There is no literary value to his work; the only significant thing about it is its truthfulness and brevity of style. William Wells Brown published some years after *Rising Son and Black Man*, a book remarkable for its style, history, and comprehensiveness. He pictures the ancient glory of the black

man and paints in bright colors the coruscation of the Negro's tomorrow. There is nothing esoterically evasive about his style. Bishop Payne published *Recollections of Seventy Years*, a work covering his activities in the ministerial field. His style is not trite, not commonplace. *Men of Mark*, a compendium compiled by Reverend William J. Simmons, is a most factual encyclopedia recording the achievements of black men in American life. George Williams published a *History of the Negro Race In America*. Williams was a prolific writer; he knew his subject well. Like Wells Brown, he endeavored to record the Negro in American history. Thomas T. Fortune [sic] published *Black and White*, a book of a little over 200 pages. It deplores the situation between the two races in the South and citations of statistical reports are numerous. He also published a volume of his poems. Other representative works are: *Morning Glories* by Mrs. Josephine Heard; *Negro Melodies* by Rev. Marshall Taylor; and *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* by Mrs. Gertrude N. Mossell.

At the close of the nineteenth century dozens of Negro writers published small, fugitive volumes of prose and poetry. This may be called the second renaissance of Negro literature. The significance of these works cannot be overestimated. It was the period when the Negro entered more seriously into the world of self-criticism and self-consciousness. It is not the sensitivity of the writer that makes him an artist, but this added to his transmutation of it into a form that acquires esthetic significance. The writings of several of these authors were unpolished and crude; they were devoid of form and system. And we could not expect that Negroes recently emancipated from centuries of the most dehumanizing slavery should be capable of producing great literature. . . . Even at this period the writings of the white man were in some instances imperfect and methodless. But these unfinished, unveneered products of the colored writers eventually formed the nucleus of Negro literature.

With the dawn of a new century, the Negro writer was to create for himself a higher and nobler place on the pedestal of fame. He was to become a great factor in the empire of American

literature. He advances steadily, oftentimes without recognition but with ambition and hope. In this era Paul Laurence Dunbar appeared like a bright star from out of the West. Paul Laurence Dunbar was born in Dayton, Ohio, June 27, 1872. His father escaped from slavery, made his home for sometime in Canada, and returned to the United States to bear arms in a Massachusetts regiment in the Civil War. Dunbar was schooled at Dayton and graduated from the Dayton High School in 1891. After graduation he secured a position as elevator operator. He was brought before the attention of the public in 1892, when he delivered in verse the address of welcome at the Dayton meeting of the Western Association of Writers. In the same year he published his first book of poems entitled *Oak and Ivy*. William Dean Howells in his Introduction to *Majors and Minors* (1896) hailed him as "the first instance of an American Negro who had innate distinction in literature" and "the only man of pure African blood and of American civilization to feel the Negro life aesthetically and express it lyrically." In 1897 Dunbar went to England and upon his return to America published *Lyrics of Lowly Life*. Some of his other works are: *The Uncalled: The Love of Landry*; *Lyrics of the Hearthside*; *Lyrics of Love Laughter*; *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow*; and numerous other short stories and poems. In 1916 Dodd, Mead and Company published *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. Dunbar died in Dayton, Ohio February 9, 1906.

Paul Laurence Dunbar stands out as foremost Negro interpreter of Negro life. The real Dunbar, the merry or sad, is to be found only in his poems, and by them alone can we judge justly of his greatness as a poet. He may be rightly called the fathers of American Negro poetry. In truth, Dunbar is a reality as Burns and Riley are realities. Of verse he was the absolute sovereign, the indefatigable forger of rhythms, the magical equilibrist, the constantly fortunate manipulator of rhyme. He gave wings to qualities ties, a human heart to the inanimate, and expressed no idea without metaphor. . . . All tones are his, especially a tone of inexorable majesty and solemnity. Paul Laurence Dunbar created the modern poetic language; he freed it from dead

hyperbolisms and false solemnity; he brought it closer to the living language of the people, and gave it sincerity, dignity, flexibility, and vigor. . . . Who shall express thy charms oh! Dunbar?

Negro literature lost in Paul Laurence Dunbar a writer disconcertingly original of exuberant and apparently universal talent whose influence upon his contemporaries and successors has altogether been fruitful and has at all events been penetrating.

The name of Booker Taliaferro Washington is universally known. Booker Taliaferro Washington was born on a plantation near Hale's Ford, Franklin county, Virginia, in 1859. In 1872, "by walking, begging rides both in wagons and in the cars" he traveled 500 miles to the Hampton (Virginia) Normal and Agricultural Institute where he remained three years, working as janitor for his board and education, and graduated in 1875. He was the founder of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. . . . Harvard conferred upon him the honorary degree of A.M. in 1896 and Dartmouth that of L.L.D. in 1901.

Among his publications are a remarkable autobiography entitled *Up From Slavery*. Other notable productions are *The Future of the American Negro* (1889); *Sowing and Reaping* (1900); *Character Building* (1902); *Working With the Hands* (1904); *Tuskegee and Its People* (1905); *Putting the Most Into Life* (1906); *Life of Frederick Douglass* (1907); *The Negro in Business* (1907); and *The Story of the Negro* (1909).

Up From Slavery is a wonderful piece of work. It is one of the enigmas in Negro literature. Washington's style is simple and comprehensive and pleasing. He was a hard, conscientious worker, a finished crafts man who turned out a great volume of copy. *Up From Slavery* is an intelligible and convincing autobiography and one that is destined to live in history and furnish an inspiration for present and future generation. It takes no sides, it does not argue, it is cheerful and is best noted for its syntony of style, which may be called a luminous serenity. It is the soul of a man yearning for intellectual freedom; it is a human document.

William E. Burghardt Du Bois was born at Great Barrington, Massachusetts, 1868. He

received his education at Fisk University, Harvard University, and the University of Berlin. He is the author of *The Souls of Black Folk; Dark Water*, and numerous other books. He is editor of *The Crisis*. Dr. Du Bois is too poetic to be logical. As a sociologist he is pre-eminent. But his mind is too poetical to make him a profound and logical philosopher. He writes with a style intensely original and beautiful. What a wonderful writer he is! And of such an interesting personality! Dr. Du Bois is sometimes too personal, sometimes of the esoterical type. But after all these are no faults at all. Well, what of it? A man's defects are organically related to his virtues; take out the one and lo, you often discover that you have extricated the other. But what are such objections as these when weighed against the singing beauty that Du Bois has woven into his exquisite books? His works are admirable for their charms; he is a stylist of rare ability; he possesses a brilliant wit and is a fertile coiner of sparkling epigrams. Du Bois understands the passions of the Negro. He feels their heart beats. His pleasure in these souls, black souls, is his pleasure in life—a paradoxical, ironical, mystical intoxication.

Dr. Kelly Miller is a professor of sociology in Howard University. He is the author of several prose works. Dr. Miller is probably the soundest analytical thinker and philosopher of the Negro race. There is something of the poet, too, in him. His lines have a beauty that derives from something more animate than a lexicographer's lair. He is the author of *Out of the House of Bondage*, and several other books of merit.

James Weidom Johnson was born at Jacksonville, Florida, 1871. He was schooled at Atlanta University and at Columbia University. He was for seven years U. S. consul in Venezuela and Nicaragua. Authorship: *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, and *Fifty-Years and Other Poems*. He is the secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Mr. Johnson is not a poet of the inner soul; he is a poet of the intellect, but he has produced some excellent compositions. His best poem, *Fifty Years*, has grace and freshness, and a distinguished simplicity lends to this apparently spontaneous composition greater

vitality than is to be found in any of his other poems.

George Reginald Margetson was born in St. Kitts, British West Indies, in 1877. He was educated at the Moravian school in St. Kitts. In 1897 he came to America. He is the author of *Songs of Life; The Fledgling Bard and the Poetry Society*; and *England in the West Indies*. Mr. Margetson is the only poet of color to develop perfectly the sonnet form. They are of beauty and sing always abundantly for the ear. His poetry is of velvet and the dusk; of bronze and flashing light. Among the writers of this generation who have enriched or at least variegated the garden of Negro poetry with exotics, Margetson has cultivated some rare plants of poetry. It is to be deplored that his works are not more familiarly known to the general public. He has woven a magic web of mists and shadows until each of his poems becomes "an idyll made of shadows there afar in distant forests." They may be likened to a grey shadowland, a mountain mist, often lifting to reveal fair regions of noble verse, or crystallizing into exquisite single lines, now limpidly clear as running water, now gleaming as a sun-glint through the mist. His ferventness is puerile.

Claude McKay is pre-eminently the poet of Negro soul. Mr. McKay was born in Jamaica, B. W. I. in 1889. He received his early education from his brother, and served for some time as a member of the Kingston constabulary force. In 1912 he came to America and was a student of agriculture at the Kansas State College. Authorship: *Songs of Jamaica*, *Spring in New Hampshire*, and *Harlem Shadows*.

Life is sparkling in his songs, ballads, and verbal paintings; there is often pain and sadness and a longing for unmitigated freedom in his melodies; at times he is bitter, full of indignation and stinging mockery. His satire is heavy and effective. He is clever and original. His poems are sharply lyrical; he sings no anemic beauties; his beauty is born of pain; often, indeed, it is pain set to music, or rather pain transmuted into music.

Joseph Seamon Cotter, Charles B. Johnson, Georgia D. Johnson, Jessie R. Fauset, Leslie P. Hill, Walter E. Hawkins, Fenton Johnson,

J. A. Rogers, William Pickens, Charles S. Johnson, Langston Hughes, and dozens of others are writers possessing a remarkable scope of originality and power.

Walter F. White, who is the assistant secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, published a remarkable book in 1925. *Fire in the Flint* is an artistic criterion; it is a miniature masterpiece of psychological fiction. Mr. White is the Lochinvar come out of the West. And his mount is a thoroughbred. *Fire in the Flint* is a novel of passion and power and hatred, of a haunting cantical beauty, of the South's cruelty to the Negro. It has brought music and glamour, without sacrificing an iota of the crude biological realities. Sociology and psychology are blended into Mr. White's first novel. It is an appealing work of fine fabric and deep sentiment.

Countee Cullen is a young poet of remarkable ability. He was born in New York a little over twenty-two years ago. His poems have appeared in various white and Negro periodicals. Mr. Cullen is a prolific writer. He possesses a marvelous power of imagination and is among the greatest Negro poets of today. His poems are of exotic imagery, flaring with color and passion of life, pagan joy, and daring imagination. Mr. Cullen is a young poet. He has not yet reached his maturity. It is folly to say that Mr. Cullen is the leader of Negro poets. He wants two qualities essential to great poetry—truth and humanity. I say this because there are

critics who speak of him as though he were Isaiah. He, like Johnson, is a poet of the intellect. No critic should single out a writer as being primarily in the field of literature. Art must be judged by its own perfection rather than by persons defining standards to judge the compositions of a writer. Art is beauty which becomes, not a sort of emotional titillation or intellectual obsequiousness but a something essential at the heart of things that has been disassociated from its temporary, transient trappings and presented in its eternal aspect. Art is best judged by its inner experience, by its authenticity and esthetic qualities. Negro literature is today expanding more rapidly than ever. The present century has witnessed what must certainly be considered a remarkable phenomenon—the resuscitation of the language, style and literature of the Negro. The Negro race has the broadest comedies and the deepest tragedies. He blends his passion with these two elements. . . . The rôle of great Negro writers is endless. There are some persons who are skeptically inclined to believe that the American black man has not produced anything great in the world of literature. Let them remember that in order to form any adequate judgment as to the greatness of the Negro in the empire of literature, they should first study his works. In the dawn of another few years we may see already emerging more native qualities of finish, directness, composition, measure, chastened emotion—with an added sensitiveness and suppleness, and a greater intimacy.

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

Race Prejudice and the Negro Artist (1928)

What Americans call the Negro problem is almost as old as America itself. For three centuries the Negro in this country has been tagged with an interrogation point; the question propounded, however, has not always been the same. Indeed, the question has run all the way from whether or not the Negro was a human being, down—or up—to whether or not the

Negro shall be accorded full and unlimited American citizenship. Therefore, the Negro problem is not a problem in the sense of being a fixed proposition involving certain invariable factors and waiting to be worked out according to certain defined rules. It is not a static condition; rather, it is and always has been a series of shifting interracial situations, never precisely

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the same in any two generations. As these situations have shifted, the methods and manners of dealing with them have constantly changed. And never has there been such a swift and vital shift as the one which is taking place at the present moment; and never was there a more revolutionary change in attitudes than the one which is now going on.

The question of the races—white and black—has occupied much of America's time and thought. Many methods for a solution of the problem have been tried—most of them tried *on* the Negro, for one of the mistakes commonly made in dealing with this matter has been the failure of white America to take into account the Negro himself and the forces he was generating and sending out. The question repeated generation after generation has been: what shall we do with the Negro?—ignoring completely the power of the Negro to do something for himself, and even something to America. It is a new thought that the Negro has helped to shape and mold and make America. It is, perhaps, a startling thought that America would not be precisely the America it is to-day except for the powerful, if silent, influence the Negro has exerted upon it—both positively and negatively. It is a certainty that the nation would be shocked by a contemplation of the effects which have been wrought upon its inherent character by the negative power which the Negro has involuntarily and unwittingly wielded.

A number of approaches to the heart of the race problem have been tried: religious, educational, political, industrial, ethical, economic, sociological. Along several of these approaches considerable progress has been made. To-day a newer approach is being tried, an approach which discards most of the older methods. It requires a minimum of pleas, or propaganda, or philanthropy. It depends more upon what the Negro himself does than upon what someone does for him. It is the approach along the line of intellectual and artistic achievement by Negroes, and may be called the art approach to the Negro problem. This method of approaching a solution of the race question has the advantage of affording great and rapid progress with least friction and of providing a common

platform upon which most people are willing to stand. The results of this method seem to carry a high degree of finality, to be the thing itself that was to be demonstrated.

I have said that this is a newer approach to the race problem; that is only in a sense true. The Negro has been using this method for a very long time; for a longer time than he has used any other method, and, perhaps, with farther-reaching effectiveness. For more than a century his great folk-art contributions have been exerting an ameliorating effect, slight and perhaps, in any one period, imperceptible, nevertheless, cumulative. In countless and diverse situations song and dance have been both a sword and a shield for the Negro. Take the spirituals: for sixty years, beginning with their introduction to the world by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, these songs have touched and stirred the hearts of people and brought about a smoothing down of the rougher edges of prejudice against the Negro. Indeed, nobody can hear Negroes sing this wonderful music in its primitive beauty without a softening of feeling toward them.

What is there, then, that is new? What is new consists largely in the changing the attitude of the American people. There is a coming to light and notice of efforts that have been going on for a long while, and a public appreciation of their results. Note, for example, the change in the reaction to the spirituals. Fifty years ago white people who heard the spirituals were touched and moved with sympathy and pity for the "poor Negro." To-day the effect is not one of pity for the Negro's condition, but admiration for the creative genius of the race.

All of the Negro's folk-art creations have undergone a new evaluation. His sacred music—the spirituals; his secular music—ragtime, blues, jazz, and the work songs; his folk lore—the Uncle Remus plantation tales; and his dances have received a new and higher appreciation. Indeed, I dare to say that it is now more or less generally acknowledged that the only things artistic that have sprung from American soil and out of American life, and been universally recognized as distinctively American products, are the folk-creations of the Negro. The one

thing that may be termed artistic, by which the United States is known the world over, is its Negro-derived popular music. The folk creations of the Negro have not only received a new appreciation; they have—the spirituals excepted—been taken over and assimilated. They are no longer racial, they are national; they have become a part of our common cultural fund. Negro secular music has been developed into American popular music; Negro dances have been made into our national art of dancing; even the plantation tales have been transformed and have come out as popular bedtime stories. The spirituals are still distinct Negro folk-songs, but sooner or later our serious composers will take them as material to go into the making of the “great American music” that has so long been looked for.

But the story does not halt at this point. The Negro has done a great deal through his folk-art creations to change the national attitudes toward him; and now the efforts of the race have been reinforced and magnified by the individual Negro artist, the conscious artist. It is fortunate that the individual Negro artist has emerged; for it is more than probable that with the ending of the creative period of blues, which seems to be at hand, the whole folk creative effort of the Negro in the United States will come to a close. All the psychological and environmental forces are working to that end. At any rate, it is the individual Negro artist that is now doing most to effect a crumbling of the inner walls of race prejudice; there are outer and inner walls. The emergence of the individual artist is the result of the same phenomenon that brought about the new evaluation and appreciation of the folk-art creations. But it should be borne in mind that the conscious Aframerican artist is not an entirely new thing. What is new about him is chiefly the evaluation and public recognition of his work.

II

When and how did this happen? The entire change, which is marked by the shedding of a new light on the artistic and intellectual

achievements of the Negro, the whole period which has become ineptly known as “the Negro renaissance,” is the matter of a decade; it has all taken place within the last ten years. More forces than anyone can name have been at work to create the existing state; however, several of them may be pointed out. What took place had no appearance of a development; it seemed more like a sudden awakening, an almost instantaneous change. There was nothing that immediately preceded it which foreshadowed what was to follow. Those who were in the midst of the movement were as much astonished as anyone else to see the transformation. Overnight, as it were, America became aware that there were Negro artists and that they had something worthwhile to offer. This awareness first manifested itself in black America, for, strange as it may seem, Negroes themselves, as a mass, had had little or no consciousness of their own individual artists. Black America awoke first to the fact that it possessed poets. This awakening followed the entry of the United States into the Great War. Before this country had been in the war very long there was bitter disillusionment on the part of American Negroes—on the part both of those working at home and those fighting in France to make the world safe for democracy. The disappointment and bitterness were taken up and voiced by a group of seven or eight Negro poets. They expressed what the race felt, what the race wanted to hear. They made the group at large articulate. Some of this poetry was the poetry of despair, but most of it was the poetry of protest and rebellion. Fenton Johnson wrote of civilization:

I am tired of work; I am tired of building
up somebody else's civilization.
Let us take a rest, M'lissy Jane.

You will let the old shanty go to rot, the
white people's clothes turn to dust, and
the Calvary Baptist Church sink to the
bottomless pit.

Throw the children into the river;
civilization has given us too many. It is
better to die than it is to grow up and
find out that you are colored.

Pluck the stars out of the heavens. The stars
mark our destiny. The stars marked my
destiny.
I am tired of civilization.

Joseph Cotter, a youth of twenty, inquired plaintively from the invalid's bed to which he was confined:

Brother, come!
And let us go unto our God.
And when we stand before Him
I shall say,
"Lord, I do not hate,
I am hated.
I scourge no one,
I am scourged.
I covet no lands,
My lands are coveted.
I mock no peoples,
My people are mocked."
And, brother, what shall you say?

But among this whole group the voice that was most powerful was that of Claude McKay. Here was a true poet of great skill and wide range, who turned from creating the mood of poetic beauty in the absolute, as he had so fully done in such poems as "Spring in New Hampshire," "The Harlem Dancer," and "Flame Heart," for example, and began pouring out cynicism, bitterness, and invective. For this purpose, incongruous as it may seem, he took the sonnet form as his medium. There is nothing in American literature that strikes a more portentous note than these sonnet-tragedies of McKay. Here is the sestet of his sonnet, "The Lynching":

Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds
came to view
The ghastly body swaying in the sun:
The women thronged to look, but never a
one
Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue;
And little lads, lynchers that were to be,
Danced round the dreadful thing in
fiendish glee.

The summer of 1919 was a terrifying period for the American Negro. There were race riots

in Chicago and in Washington and in Omaha and in Phillips County, Arkansas; and in Longview, Texas; and in Knoxville, Tennessee; and in Norfolk, Virginia; and in other communities. Colored men and women, by dozens and by scores, were chased and beaten and killed in the streets. And from Claude McKay came this cry of defiant despair, sounded from the last ditch:

If we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common
foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us still be
brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one
death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous,
cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting
back!

But not all the terror of the time could smother the poet of beauty and universality in McKay. In "America," which opens with these lines:

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth

he fused these elements of fear and bitterness and hate into verse which by every test is true poetry and a fine sonnet.

The poems of the Negro poets of the immediate post-war period were widely printed in Negro periodicals; they were committed to memory; they were recited at school exercises and public meetings; and were discussed at private gatherings. Now, Negro poets were not new; their line goes back a long way in African-American history. Between Phillis Wheatley, who as a girl of eight or nine was landed in Boston from an African slave ship, in 1761, and who published a volume of poems in 1773, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, who died in 1906, there were more than thirty Negroes who published

volumes of verse—some of it good, most of it mediocre, and much of it bad. The new thing was the effect produced by these poets who sprang up out of the war period. Negro poets had sounded similar notes before, but now for the first time they succeeded in setting up a reverberating response, even in their own group. But the effect was not limited to black America; several of these later poets in some subtle way affected white America. In any event, at just this time white America began to become aware and to awaken. In the correlation of forces that brought about this result it might be pointed out that the culminating effect of the folk-art creations had gone far toward inducing a favorable state of mind. Doubtless it is also true that the new knowledge and opinions about the Negro in Africa—that he was not just a howling savage, that he had a culture, that he had produced a vital art—had directly affected opinion about the Negro in America. However it may have been, the Negro poets growing out of the war period were the forerunners of the individuals whose work is now being assayed and is receiving recognition in accordance with its worth.

III

And yet, contemporaneously with the work of these poets a significant effort was made in another field of art—an effort which might have gone much farther at the time had it not been cut off by our entry into the War, but which, nevertheless, had its effect. Early in 1917, in fact on the very day we entered the War, Mrs. Emily Hapgood produced at the Madison Square Garden Theater three plays of Negro life by Ridgley Torrence, staged by Robert Edmond Jones, and played by an all-Negro cast. This was the first time that Negro actors in drama commanded the serious attention of the critics and the general public. Two of the players, Opal Cooper and Inez Clough, were listed by George Jean Nathan among the ten actors giving the most distinguished performances of the year. No one who heard Opal Cooper chant the dream in the "Rider of Dreams" can ever forget the thrill of it. A sensational feature of the

production was the singing orchestra of Negro performers under the direction of J. Rosamond Johnson—singing orchestras in theaters have since become common. The plays moved from the Garden Theater to the Garrick, but the stress of war crushed them out. In 1920, Charles Gilpin was enthusiastically and universally acclaimed for his acting in "The Emperor Jones." The American stage has seldom seen such an outburst of acclamation. Mr. Gilpin was one of the ten persons voted by the Drama League as having done most for the American theater during the year. Most of the readers of these pages will remember the almost national crisis caused by his invitation to the Drama League Dinner. And along came "Shuffle Along"; and all of New York flocked to an out of the way theater in West Sixty-third Street to hear the most joyous singing and see the most exhilarating dancing to be found on any stage in the city. The dancing steps originally used by the "policeman" in "Shuffle Along" furnished new material for hundreds of dancing men. "Shuffle Along" was actually an epoch-making musical comedy. Out of "Shuffle Along" came Florence Mills, who, unfortunately, died so young but lived long enough to be acknowledged here and in Europe as one of the finest singing comediennes the stage had ever seen and an artist of positive genius. In 1923 Roland Hayes stepped out on the American stage in a blaze of glory, making his first appearances as soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and later with the Philharmonic. Few single artists have packed such crowds into Carnegie Hall and the finest concert halls throughout the country as has Roland Hayes; and, notwithstanding the éclat with which America first received him, his reputation has continued to increase and, besides, he is rated as one of the best box-office attractions in the whole concert field. Miss Marian Anderson appeared as soloist with the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra and in concert at the Lewisohn Stadium at New York City College. Paul Robeson and J. Rosamond Johnson and Taylor Gordon sang Spirituals to large and appreciative audiences in New York and over the country, giving to those songs a fresh interpretation and a new vogue.

Paul Robeson—that most versatile of men, who has made a national reputation as athlete, singer, and actor—played in Eugene O'Neill's "All God's Chillun" and added to his reputation on the stage, and, moreover, put to the test an ancient taboo; he played the principal role opposite a white woman. This feature of the play gave rise to a more acute crisis than did Gilpin's invitation to the Drama League Dinner. Some sensational newspapers predicted race riots and other dire disasters, but nothing of the sort happened; the play went over without a boo. Robeson played the title role in a revival of "The Emperor Jones" and almost duplicated the sensation produced by Gilpin in the original presentation. There followed on the stage Julius Bledsoe, Rose McClendon, Frank Wilson, and Abbie Mitchell, all of whom gained recognition. At the time of this writing each of these four is playing in a Broadway production. Paradoxical it may seem, but no Negro comedian gained recognition in this decade. Negro comedians have long been a recognized American institution and there are several now before the public who are well known, but their reputations were made before this period. The only new reputations made on the comedy stage were made by women, Florence Mills and Ethel Waters. In addition there are the two famous Smiths, Bessie and Clara, singers of Blues and favorites of vaudeville, phonograph, and radio audiences. Of course there is Josephine Baker, but her reputation was made entirely in Europe. Nevertheless, these magical ten years have worked a change upon Negro comedy. Before Miller and Lyles brought "Shuffle Along" to New York, managers here could hardly conceive of a Negro musical comedy playing a Broadway house. When Williams and Walker, Cole and Johnson, and Ernest Hogan were in their heyday, people who wanted to see them had to go to theaters outside the great white-light zone. George Walker died before the "new day," and up to his retirement from the stage he kept up a constant fight for a chance for his company to play a strictly Broadway theater. Since "Shuffle Along," hardly a season has passed without seeing one or more Negro musical comedies

playing in the finest theaters in New York. In fact, Negro plays and Negro performers in white plays on Broadway have become usual occurrences.

Odd has been the fate of the younger poets who were instrumental in bringing about the present state of affairs. It is a fact that none of them, with the exception of Claude McKay, quite succeeded in bridging over into it. Three of them, Roscoe Jamison, Lucian Watkins, and Joseph Cotter, are dead, all dying in their youth. Fenton Johnson is almost silent. And Claude McKay has for the past four or five years lived practically in exile. However, several of the older writers are busily at work, and there has sprung up in the last three or four years a group of newer creative writers. Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes have achieved recognition as poets. Jean Toomer, Walter White, Eric Walrond, and Rudolph Fisher have made a place among writers of fiction. And Claude McKay, after a period of silence as a poet, has published his *Home to Harlem*, a generally acclaimed novel. These are names that carry literary significance, and they take their places according to individual merit in the list of the makers of contemporary American literature. In addition, there are more than a score of younger writers who are not yet quite in the public eye, but will soon be more widely known. Writers such as these are bound to be known and in larger numbers, because their work now has the chance to gain whatever appreciation it merits. To-day the reagents that will discover what of it is good are at work, the arbiters of our national letters are disposed to regard their good work as a part of American literature, and the public is prepared to accept it as such. This has not always been the case. Until this recent period, the several achievements in writing that have come to light have been regarded as more or less sporadic and isolated efforts, and not in any sense as having a direct relation to the national literature. Had the existing forces been at work at the time, the remarkable decade from 1895 to 1905, which brought forth Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*, W. E. Burghardt Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, Charles Chesnutt's stories

of Negro life, and Paul Laurence Dunbar's poetry, might have signalled the beginning of the "Negro literary renaissance."

During the present decade the individual Negro artist has definitely emerged in three fields, in literature, in the theater, and on the concert stage; in other fields he has not won marked distinction. To point to any achievement of distinction in painting the Negro must go back of this decade, back to H. O. Tanner, who has lived in Europe for the past thirty-five years; or farther back to E. M. Bannister, who gained considerable recognition a half century ago. Nevertheless, there is the work of W. E. Scott, a mural painter, who lives in Chicago and has done a number of public buildings in the Middle West, and of Archibald J. Motley, who recently held a one-man exhibit in New York which attracted very favorable attention. The drawings of Aaron Douglas have won for him a place among American illustrators. To point to any work of acknowledged excellence in sculpture the Negro must go back of this decade to the work of two women, Edmonia Lewis and Meta Warrick Fuller, both of whom received chiefly in Europe such recognition as they gained. There are several young painters and sculptors who are winning recognition. But the strangest lack is that with all the great native musical endowment he is conceded to possess, the Negro has not in this most propitious time produced a single outstanding composer. There are competent musicians and talented composers of songs and detached bits of music, but no original composer who, in amount and standard of work and in recognition achieved, is at all comparable with S. Coleridge-Taylor, the English Negro composer. Nor can the Negro in the United States point back of this decade to even one such artist. It is a curious fact that the American Negro through his whole history has done more highly sustained and more fully recognized work in the composition of letters than in the composition of music. It is the more curious when we consider that music is so innately a characteristic method of expression for the Negro.

IV

What, now, is the significance of this artistic activity on the part of the Negro and of its reactions on the American people? I think it is twofold. In the first place, the Negro is making some distinctive contributions to our common cultural store. I do not claim it is possible for these individual artists to produce anything comparable to the folk-art in distinctive values, but I do believe they are bringing something fresh and vital into American art, something from the store of their own racial genius: warmth, color, movement, rhythm, and abandon; depth and swiftness of emotion and the beauty of sensuousness. I believe American art will be richer because of these elements in fuller quantity.

But what is of deeper significance to the Negro himself is the effect that this artistic activity is producing upon his condition and status as a man and citizen. I do not believe it an overstatement to say that the "race problem" is fast reaching the stage of being more a question of national mental attitudes toward the Negro than a question of his actual condition. That is to say, it is not at all the problem of a moribund people sinking into a slough of ignorance, poverty, and decay in the very midst of our civilization and despite all our efforts to save them; that would indeed be a problem. Rather is the problem coming to consist in the hesitation and refusal to open new doors of opportunity at which these people are constantly knocking. In other words, the problem for the Negro is reaching the plane where it is becoming less a matter of dealing with what he is and more a matter of dealing with what America thinks he is.

Now, the truth is that the great majority of Americans have not thought about the Negro at all, except in a vague sort of way and in the form of traditional and erroneous stereotypes. Some of these stereotyped forms of thought are quite absurd, yet they have had serious effects. Millions of Americans have had their opinions and attitudes regarding their fellow

colored citizens determined by such a phrase as, "A nigger will steal," or "Niggers are lazy," or "Niggers are dirty." But there is a common, widespread, and persistent stereotyped idea regarding the Negro, and it is that he is here only to receive; to be shaped into something new and unquestionably better. The common idea is that the Negro reached America intellectually, culturally, and morally empty, and that he is here to be filled—filled with education, filled with religion, filled with morality, filled with culture. In a word, the stereotype is that the Negro is nothing more than a beggar at the gate of the nation, waiting to be thrown the crumbs of civilization. Through his artistic efforts the Negro is smashing this immemorial stereotype faster than he has ever done through any other method he has been able to use. He is making it realized that he is the possessor of a wealth of natural endowments and that he has long been a generous giver to America. He is impressing upon the national mind the conviction that he is an active and important force in American life; that he is a creator as well as a creature; that he has given as well as received; that he is the potential giver of larger and richer contributions.

In this way the Negro is bringing about an entirely new national conception of himself; he has placed himself in an entirely new light before the American people. I do not think it too much to say that through artistic achievement the Negro has found a means of getting at the

very core of the prejudice against him, by challenging the Nordic superiority complex. A great deal has been accomplished in this decade of "renaissance." Enough has been accomplished to make it seem almost amazing when we realize that there are less than twenty-five Negro artists who have more or less of national recognition; and that it is they who have chiefly done the work. A great part of what they have accomplished has been done through the sort of publicity they have secured for the race. A generation ago the Negro was receiving lots of publicity, but nearly all of it was bad. There were front page stories with such headings as, "Negro Criminal," "Negro Brute." To-day one may see undesirable stories, but one may also read stories about Negro singers, Negro actors, Negro authors, Negro poets. The connotations of the very word "Negro" have been changed. A generation ago many Negroes were half or wholly ashamed of the term. To-day they have every reason to be proud of it. For many years and by many methods the Negro has been overcoming the coarser prejudices against him; and when we consider how many of the subtler prejudices have crumbled, and crumbled rapidly under the process of art creation by the Negro, we are justified in taking a hopeful outlook toward the effect that the increase of recognized individual artists fivefold, tenfold, twentyfold, will have on this most perplexing and vital question before the American people.

WALTER WHITE

Negro Literature (1931)

Negro literature has begun to come into its own only during the last decade. This is especially true of novels, poems, plays and essays about the Negro *by the Negro*, but to a considerable degree it is true also of treatment of the Negro in literature by other than Negro writers.

This development, however, has not sprung full-grown into being over night. Instead, there

are back of what already has been done and what is likely to be done three centuries packed tight with drama, tragedy, humor, exultant faith: life chock-full of situations as tense and sometimes as heart-breaking as any the world has ever known. All too often these have been born of spirit-destroying barbarities which would have crushed any but a strong-willed people.

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There are, for example, back of current Negro literature two and a half centuries of the slave trade: of black men and women seized in swift-darting raids, packed in slave ships so vile no animal would have been placed in them, transported to the Western world and there bound into captivity. In yellowed papers long forgotten, buried in the attics of England, Portugal, Spain, and the United States is material in which the great Russian writers like Dostoevsky would have reveled.

There is, too, back of this literature a half-century and more of the building of what was intended to be an inflexible system of caste which forbade anything but the master-menial relationship between white and black. Into this era also were woven somber and exciting threads which have in them, should these United States ever muster sufficient courage to face them, a wealth of dramatic situations.

One need not, however, dwell exclusively on the unpleasant aspects of this material. To do so would produce an untrue and distorted picture, for the Negro has been able to save himself by the saving grace of humor. Observers who are not keen enough to see beyond the surface interpret this as being a light-hearted, happy-go-lucky indifference, where in reality, to quote the brilliant Negro poet, Langston Hughes, this humor serves

to keep from cryin'
Ah opens mah mouth an' laughs.

The rigid wall between white and black which the former sought to erect, while it has failed largely to prevent human relationships, did help to create certain stereotypes of the Negro which clung persistently to the American mind until very recent years. This stereotype was born of minstrel end-men with gaudy clothing, patches on their pants, mouthing exaggerated and sometimes ribald and ridiculous humor. Or, again, it was born of the picture found in reports of Negroes haled before criminal courts. Or, a third stereotype which clung and yet clings is that of the loved but definitely sycophantic servant—the "black mammy," or the faithful house servant who towards the end of the third act totters painfully on to the stage,

suffering from lumbago or rheumatism, to give his young master his life savings, hidden away in a sock, which saves the master from prison and disgrace and enables him to marry the beautiful and eternally virginal heroine.

It was these factors which led to the acceptance for many years of the Negro characters found only in the stories of Octavus Roy Cohen, Hugh Wiley, Irvin Cobb, E. K. Means, Thomas Dixon, or Thomas Nelson Page.

II

Here and there, however, the Negro sought en masse or individually to break through this iron circle. Back in the 80's and 90's the dean of Negro writers, Charles W. Chesnutt, born in North Carolina and now a resident of Cleveland, wrote with discernment and marked ability of the Negro as he, a Negro, knew him. Chesnutt taught school in his native North Carolina during the violent days of the Reconstruction period. He saw with rare acuteness the factors which went into the making of that turbulent epoch. He saw, too, that the majority of white Americans "derived their opinions of him [the Negro] from the 'coon song' and the police reports." Chesnutt not only utilized the folk material so richly abundant in the life of his people but dared to write with power and courage of the more serious and dramatic aspects of the Negro life of his time. Chesnutt was neither an apologist nor a myopic "race champion." If he wrote in *The Marrow of Tradition* of the barriers placed in the path of the Negro who sought to achieve, he also with humor and sharp wit pictured the foibles and faults of the Negro.

Chesnutt wrote during the late Victorian period. His novels in this period of realism and post-realism may be considered by some as definitely dated; properly to evaluate them one needs to judge them not against the background of the 1930s but against that in which they were written, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Paul Laurence Dunbar, a contemporary of Chesnutt, deservedly gained far greater fame

for his poetry than for his short stories and novels. Nevertheless his four novels, with all their defects, are significant in that they played a small part in smashing the tradition that only whites were competent to write of Negro life.

The most definite step toward sincerity and truth, and especially in departure from the sentimentality with which Negro writers in particular wrote, was the publication by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903 of *The Souls of Black Folk*. Though this was not a novel, but instead a collection of essays, the powerful beauty of the prose of the book came like a thunderclap to those who read it, insofar as their notions of the Negro were concerned. Nine years later there appeared in Boston a novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which, published anonymously, foretold with uncanny accuracy the development of the Negro and of Negro art during the two decades to follow. Here was a book which was neither servile nor truculent; with calm detachment its anonymous author, later revealed to be James Weldon Johnson, painted a picture of disturbing power and of moving beauty.

It was not until after the World War, however, that the Negro entered American literature as a potent and not to be ignored figure. I am not one of those who attempt to appraise all life in terms of economic interpretation, but one cannot escape the economic factor which led to this emergence. The World War stopped immigration from Europe upon which American industries were largely dependent for their supply of common labor. This immigration had kept the Negro in the South and had made painfully true the phrase that "the Negro can earn money in the South but can't spend it, and he can spend money in the North but can't earn it." The resulting surplus of labor had made the South indifferent to its value, while the North, having no need for Negro labor save as menials, entertained all sorts of notions as to the inadequacy of Negro labor in a highly industrialized society.

With dramatic suddenness America awoke to find that the Negro had definitely achieved a place as an important factor in the literature and art of his country. Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson, and Jules Bledsoe achieved acclaim as concert artists, which in some instances was as

rhapsodic as had been the indifference or hostility of the past. *Shuffle Along* appeared in an obscure theater off Broadway in 1921, and, to quote James Weldon Johnson's *Black Manhattan*, "all New York flocked to the 63rd Street Theater to hear the most joyous singing and see the most exhilarating dancing to be found on any stage in the city." Not only did *Shuffle Along* make its impress so definitely upon the American theater that its influence and that of its many successors may be seen in the dancing especially of practically every musical show on Broadway to-day, but it helped introduce Florence Mills, who enjoyed a phenomenal success until appendicitis put an untimely end to her brilliant career. Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* and *All God's Chillun Got Wings* gave to the theater Charles Gilpin and Paul Robeson, and, whatever their inadequacies as portrayals of Negro life and psychology, these plays brought sharply to the attention of the theater-going public that in Negro life are to be found dramatic potentialities yet unsuspected.

These and other achievements by Negroes in the theater and concert worlds were accompanied by, and helped to open, a path for the Negro writer and for the white writer who wanted to use Negro life and characters. The fame of Negro Harlem grew overnight and became a symbol throughout the world of Negro achievement which all too often was far in excess of actual accomplishment. Writers of power and ability, and sometimes of genius, began to be published in the more intelligent magazines and their books began to appear upon the lists of the better publishers.

James Weldon Johnson, in his *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, published in 1922, again achieved the rôle of prophet. In the introduction to that anthology, Mr. Johnson pointed out to America the reasons for expectation and hope for notable literary accomplishment by Negro writers, and reminded America that the only things artistic which have sprung from American soil and gained world recognition as distinctive American contributions to the art were Negro in origin and largely Negro in development, these four being Negro folklore, Negro spirituals, modern dancing, and jazz.

It was during this period that various poets began to be heard: Claude McKay in his *Harlem Shadows*; Langston Hughes in *The Weary Blues* and *Fine Clothes to the Jew*; Countée Cullen in *Color, Copper Sun, The Black Christ*. Some of the work by these and other poets, among them James Weldon Johnson, at first considered excellent poems "for a Negro," in a short period began to be recognized as distinctive poetry, judged by any standard, however rigid.

In the field of fiction steady progress also was made. It was less than a decade ago that one of the most successful publishers of that time turned down a novel by a Negro writer "because it did not picture the Negro as the American public is used to thinking of him." It was but a few years after this episode that not only no first-rate publisher would take so absurd a position, but, on the contrary, it became the popular thing for every publisher to have at least one Negro novelist on his list. For a time we passed through a period when the Negro novelist was judged not on his merits as a novelist, but was judged as a Negro novelist. Fortunately this attitude, as harmful as the indifference or hostility which preceded it, has about passed.

The tidal wave of Negro novels swept in with it many strange creations. There were novels by Negro and white writers which treated of what is loosely termed the lower classes. Among these novels may be put DuBose Heyward's *Porgy*; Langston Hughes's *Not Without Laughter*; Arna Bontemps's *God Sends Sunday*; Julia Peterkin's *Green Thursday, Black April, Scarlet Sister Mary*; Howard Odum's *Rainbow Round My Shoulder, Wings on My Feet*; E.C.L. Adams's *Congaree Sketches* and *Nigger to Nigger*; Rudolph Fisher's *The Walls of Jericho*; Gilmore Millen's *Sweet Man*; Haldane Macfall's *The Wooings of Jezebel Pettyfer*; and Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, to name only a few.

There have also been novels of sophistication which, interestingly enough, have been laid in scenes other than the American. Also interestingly enough is the circumstance that only one of these which may be included in this classification was written by a Negro—Fisher's *The Walls of Jericho*, resting as it does on the

borderline between the foregoing grouping and the present one. Other novels in this section are *Prancing Nigger* by Ronald Firbank; *Black Magic* by Paul Morand, a collection of short stories and novels; *Latterday Symphony* by Romer Wil-som; and *Moonraker* by Tennyson Jesse.

A third general grouping of these novels might be termed novels of ambition, where some, if not all, of the principal Negro characters seek definitely to rise above their levels, fired by ambition common to all human nature. T. S. Stribling's *Birthright*; Jessie Fauset's *There Is Confusion*; David Garnett's *The Sailor's Return*; DuBose Heyward's *Mamba's Daughters*; Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*; Langston Hughes's *Not Without Laughter*; W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Dark Princess*; my own *Fire in the Flint* and *Flight*; H. A. Shands's *White and Black* and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and *Passing*.

There are other novels and stories which are not so easy of classification, among them Waldo Frank's *Holiday* and Jean Toomer's *Cane*, in which these two writers, one white and the other a Negro, have sought with measured success to strip their stories to stark essentials and paint with powerful and poetic beauty the drama of white and black protagonists and their inter-relationship. Unfortunately, Toomer's voice has been silent after the publication of *Cane*, in which both promise and accomplishment were so markedly evident.

Another story difficult of classification is George S. Schuyler's *Black No More*. Of all the Negro writers, Schuyler has shown more definitely than any other the gift of satire. That he could not more successfully achieve the etched-in-acid portraiture which was latent in the theme of *Black No More* is to be regretted; but the book has significance in its furtherance of that objectivity in appraisal and utilization of his material without which the Negro writer will never be able to achieve great literature.

Perhaps inevitably in a creative movement which sprang out of a highly complex social, economic and spiritual background, certain schools of expression and imposed modes of thought have dominated the movement at times. Luckily these have been of comparatively short duration. For example, there were Negro

writers who leaned so far backwards in dodging the charge of being propagandists they almost denuded their stories of substance, little realizing that they ran the danger of setting up for themselves as proscribed an area of expression as did those "propagandists" they professed to scorn. In like manner they ran a perhaps even more dangerous course in trying to ignore every phase of Negro life which smacked of conflict when that conflict was, in these democratic United States, almost as indigenous as eating and sleeping and making love, as inevitable as the cycles of birth and life and death.

They served, however, an excellent transitional rôle in correcting the tendencies of those writers who saw life about them and especially Negro-white relationships only in terms of conflict—where all whites were imbued with Negrophobia and all Negroes were sable angels ground down under the heel of white chauvinism.

In like manner were some of the Negro writers influenced by white confreres and publishers, or rather, by what they thought white publishers wanted. They witnessed the phenomenal success of Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*, and some could see from that time on only certain aspects of Negro life in Harlem. That it is always easier to write of exotic and unusual life, life that is filled with the sudden, sharp clash of unmasked and unashamed jealousy and love and lust, than it is to create living, breathing characters in a less dramatic milieu helped to induce this following of a trend. As the success of *Shuffle Along* had fixed the pattern of Negro theater so did *Nigger Heaven*, *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo*, *Porgy*, and a few less successful novels come close to fixing Negro literature in a fast and immovable rut.

Mind you, I do not condemn this period nor do I think that it was not of vast value in the growth of Negro literature from adolescence to manhood. *Nigger Heaven*, for example, more than any other novel taught white readers that there were many strata of Aframerican life, that the old phrase, "all coons look alike to me" not only never had been true but was less true than it had ever been before. That readers, white and Negro, remembered the cabaret characters

more vividly than they did the doctors and society people was perhaps less due to the writer than to the fact that dullness and lack of vivid living is the price Negroes as well as whites pay for respectability. DuBose Heyward and Claude McKay shocked some of their readers—and, more keenly, those who did not take the trouble to read them but who were none the less voluble in their critical comments of *Porgy* and *Home to Harlem*—in much the same fashion that Zola and Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis pulled off the cover from unloveliness and stupidity and made the nice-nellies view what lay beneath.

Other tendencies rose and flourished and happily passed on. Most painful of these was the patronizing attitude of some whites who fell over themselves in surprise in suddenly discovering that there were Negroes other than those creations of Octavus Roy Cohen and Irvin Cobb and Thomas Dixon. Where before there had been ignorance or indifference these whites burst into ecstatic praise of a novel because it was so good "for a Negro"—precisely as one would go to the old Hippodrome to see waltzing elephants, not to determine how well the elephants waltzed but to marvel that an elephant could be trained to waltz at all. It wasn't the smug patronizing which did most damage. It was the tendency to encourage careless work by Negro writers when a few novels and short stories were published which properly would have been turned down in all likelihood had white writers written them. Fortunately this period soon passed and the poor Negro novels were forgotten along with the thousands of poor white novels which poured from the presses between the depression of 1921 and the stock market crash of 1929.

III

In the foregoing paragraphs there has not been included a list of all the books which form a part in the portraiture of the Negro. The writers and volumes chosen are not selected in an effort at either cataloging or appraisal of what is significant in this literature. They are instead

selected for the purpose of pointing out the varied aspects of the literature and the life upon which it is based. It is to be regretted that there are still those who speak of "the Negro" and in doing so visualize a being who completely and accurately combines in his person every aspect, every ambition and every circumstance of his race. One need run no risk as a prophet in declaring that only the surface of Negro literature has been scratched. For those who would think of the Negro as a single being one need only catalogue a few of the Negroes. There is the Negro of the cotton field and the levee. There is the Negro of the gambling den and the bawdy house. There is the Negro school teacher of the rural Southern town who must try to plant the dynamite of knowledge in the minds of his pupils and at the same time avoid incurring the implacable hostility of his white environment. There is the Negro business man, the professional man, the minister, and the social worker. Of all types and all degrees of honor and ability and outlook, they have all the problems of their white brothers and many more which race

adds. There is the Negro migrant fresh from the Mississippi cotton field, who by the exigencies of war and ambition was thrust into the highly competitive life of industrial civilization. There is the Negro—and he is legion in number—of Harlem, of Chicago's State Street, and of Pittsburgh's Wiley Avenue. Each one of these broad classifications—and there are many more—may be divided into scores of sub-divisions and in each of these sub-divisions there is for him who has sufficient discernment material for a thousand novels, plays, stories, and poems.

One would be unwise to try to appraise at this stage the Negro in fiction or in any other of the arts in terms of fully-rounded and developed achievement. While the body of accomplishment to date carries this movement beyond that of being only a fad, what has been accomplished is, in the opinion of the writer, chiefly pioneer work for that which is certain to come. This essay, therefore, is but a note written during the period of gestation, and the definitive appraisal of both the scope and value of the Negro's contributions must be deferred to a later day.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

Characteristics of Negro Expression (1934)

Drama

The Negro's universal mimicry is not so much a thing in itself as an evidence of something that permeates his entire self. And that thing is drama.

His very words are action words. His interpretation of the English language is in terms of pictures. One act described in terms of another. Hence the rich metaphor and simile.

The metaphor is of course very primitive. It is easier to illustrate than it is to explain because action came before speech. Let us make a parallel. Language is like money. In primitive communities actual goods, however bulky, are bartered for what one wants. This finally evolves into coin, the coin being not real wealth

but a symbol of wealth. Still later even coin is abandoned for legal tender, and still later for checks in certain usages.

Every phase of Negro life is highly dramatized. No matter how joyful or how sad the case there is sufficient poise for drama. Everything is acted out. Unconsciously for the most part of course. There is an impromptu ceremony always ready for every hour of life. No little moment passes unadorned.

Now the people with highly developed languages have words for detached ideas. That is legal tender. "That-which-we-squat-on" has become "chair." "Groan-causer" has evolved into "spear" and so on. Some individuals even conceive of the equivalent of check words, like "ideation" and "pleonastic." Perhaps we might

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say that *Paradise Lost* and *Sartor Resartus* are written in check words.

The primitive man exchanges descriptive words. His terms are all close fitting. Frequently the Negro, even with detached words in his vocabulary—not evolved in him but transplanted on his tongue by contact—must add action to it to make it do. So we have “chop-ax,” “sitting-chair,” “cool-pot” and the like because the speaker has in his mind the picture of the object in use. Action. Everything illustrated. So we can say the white man thinks in a written language and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics.

A bit of Negro drama familiar to all is the frequent meeting of two opponents who threaten to do atrocious murder one upon the other.

Who has not observed a robust young Negro chap posing upon a street corner, possessed of nothing but his clothing, his strength and his youth? Does he bear himself like a pauper? No, Louis XIV could be no more insolent in his assurance. His eyes say plainly “Female, halt!” His posture exults “Ah, female, I am the eternal male, the giver of life. Behold in my hot flesh all the delights of this world. Salute me, I am strength.” All this with a languid posture, there is no mistaking his meaning.

A Negro girl strolls past the corner lounger. Her whole body panging and posing. A slight shoulder movement that calls attention to her bust, that is all of a dare. A hippy undulation below the waist that is a sheaf of promises tied with conscious power. She is acting out. “I’m a darned sweet woman and you know it.”

These little plays by strolling players are acted out daily in a dozen streets in a thousand cities, and no one ever mistakes the meaning.

Will to Adorn

The will to adorn is the second most notable characteristic in Negro expression. Perhaps his idea of ornament does not attempt to meet conventional standards, but it satisfies the soul of its creator.

In this respect the American Negro has done wonders to the English language. It has often

been stated by etymologists that the Negro has introduced no African words to the language. This is true, but it is equally true that he has made over a great part of the tongue to his liking and has his revision accepted by the ruling class. No one listening to a Southern white man talk could deny this. Not only has he softened and toned down strongly consonanted words like “aren’t” to “aint” and the like, he has made new force words out of old feeble elements. Examples of this are “ham-shanked,” “battle-hammed,” “double-teen,” “bodaciously,” “muffle-jawed.”

But the Negro’s greatest contribution to the language is: (1) the use of metaphor and simile; (2) the use of the double descriptive; (3) the use of verbal nouns.

1. *Metaphor and Simile*

One at a time, like lawyers going to heaven.
You sho is propaganda.

Sobbing hearted.

I’ll beat you till: (a) rope like okra, (b) slack like lime, (c) smell like onions.

Fatal for naked.

Kyting along.

That’s a lynch.

That’s a rope.

Cloakers—deceivers.

Regular as pig-tracks.

Mule blood—black molasses.

Syndicating—gossiping.

Flambeaux—cheap café (lighted by flambeaux).
To put yo’self on de ladder.

2. *The Double Descriptive*

High-tall.

Little-tee-ninchy (tiny).

Low-down.

Top-superior.

Sham-polish.

Lady-people.

Kill-dead.

Hot-boiling.

Chop-ax.

Sitting-chairs.

De watch wall.

Speedy-hurry.
More great and more better.

3. Verbal Nouns

She features somebody I know.
Funeralize.
Sense me into it.
Puts the shamery on him.
Taint everybody you kin confidence.
I wouldn't friend with her.
looking—playing piano or guitar as it is done
in Jook-houses (houses of ill-fame).
Uglying away.
I wouldn't scorn my name all up on you.
Bookooing (beaucoup) around—showing off.

4. Nouns from Verbs

Won't stand a broke.
She won't take a listen.
He won't stand straightening.
That is such a compliment.
That's a lynch.

The stark, trimmed phrases of the Occident seem too bare for the voluptuous child of the sun, hence the adornment. It arises out of the same impulse as the wearing of jewelry and the making of sculpture—the urge to adorn.

On the walls of the homes of the average Negro one always finds a glut of gaudy calendars, wall pockets and advertising lithographs. The sophisticated white man or Negro would tolerate none of these, even if they bore a likeness to the Mona Lisa. No commercial art for decoration. Nor the calendar nor the advertisement spoils the picture for this lowly man. He sees the beauty in spite of the declaration of the Portland Cement Works or the butcher's announcement. I saw in Mobile a room in which there was an over-stuffed mohair living-room suite, an imitation mahogany bed and chiffonobe, a console victrola. The walls were gaily papered with Sunday supplements of *The Mobile Register*. There were seven calendars and three wall pockets. One of them was decorated with a lace doily. The mantel-shelf was covered with a scarf of deep home-made lace, looped up with

a huge bow of pink crepe paper. Over the door was a huge lithograph showing the Treaty of Versailles being signed with a Waterman fountain pen.

It was grotesque, yes. But it indicated the desire for beauty. And decorating a decoration, as in the case of the doily on the gaudy wall pocket, did not seem out of place to the hostess. The feeling back of such an act is that there can never be enough of beauty, let alone too much. Perhaps she is right. We each have our standards of art, and thus are we all interested parties and so unfit to pass judgment upon the art concepts of others.

Whatever the Negro does of his own volition he embellishes. His religious service is for the greater part excellent prose poetry. Both prayers and sermons are tooled and polished until they are true works of art. The supplication is forgotten in the frenzy of creation. The prayer of the white man is considered humorous in its bleakness. The beauty of the Old Testament does not exceed that of a Negro prayer.

Angularity

After adornment the next most striking manifestation of the Negro is Angularity. Everything that he touches becomes angular. In all African sculpture and doctrine of any sort we find the same thing.

Anyone watching Negro dancers will be struck by the same phenomenon. Every posture is another angle. Pleasing, yes. But an effect achieved by the very means which an European strives to avoid.

The pictures on the walls are hung at deep angles. Furniture is always set at an angle. I have instances of a piece of furniture in the *middle* of a wall being set with one end nearer the wall than the other to avoid the simple straight line.

Asymmetry

Asymmetry is a definite feature of Negro art. I have no samples of true Negro painting unless we count the African shields, but the sculpture

and carvings are full of this beauty and lack of symmetry.

It is present in the literature, both prose and verse. I offer an example of this quality in verse from Langston Hughes:

I aint gonna mistreat ma good gal any
more,
I'm just gonna kill her next time she makes
me sore.

I treats her kind but she don't do me right,
She fights and quarrels most ever' night.

I can't have no woman's got such low-down
ways
Cause de blue gum woman aint de style
now'days.

I brought her from the South and she's goin'
on back,
Else I'll use her head for a carpet track.

It is the lack of symmetry which makes Negro dancing so difficult for white dancers to learn. The abrupt and unexpected changes. The frequent change of key and time are evidences of this quality in music. (Note the St. Louis Blues.)

The dancing of the justly famous Bo-Jangles and Snake Hips are excellent examples.

The presence of rhythm and lack of symmetry are paradoxical, but there they are. Both are present to a marked degree. There is always rhythm, but it is the rhythm of segments. Each unit has a rhythm of its own, but when the whole is assembled it is lacking in symmetry. But easily workable to a Negro who is accustomed to the break in going from one part to another, so that he adjusts himself to the new tempo.

Dancing

Negro dancing is dynamic suggestion. No matter how violent it may appear to the beholder, every posture gives the impression that the dancer will do much more. For example, the performer flexes one knee sharply, assumes a ferocious face mask, thrusts the upper part of

the body forward with clenched fists, elbows taut as in hard running or grasping a thrusting blade. That is all. But the spectator himself adds the picture of ferocious assault, hears the drums and finds himself keeping time with the music and tensing himself for the struggle. It is compelling insinuation. That is the very reason the spectator is held so rapt. He is participating in the performance himself—carrying out the suggestions of the performer.

The difference in the two arts is: the white dancer attempts to express fully; the Negro is restrained, but succeeds in gripping the beholder by forcing him to finish the action the performer suggests. Since no art ever can express all the variations conceivable, the Negro must be considered the greater artist, his dancing is realistic suggestion, and that is about all a great artist can do.

Negro Folklore

Negro folklore is not a thing of the past. It is still in the making. Its great variety shows the adaptability of the black man: nothing is too old or too new, domestic or foreign, high or low, for his use. God and the Devil are paired, and are treated no more reverently than Rockefeller and Ford. Both of these men are prominent in folklore, Ford being particularly strong, and they talk and act like good-natured stevedores or mill-hands. Ole Massa is sometimes a smart man and often a fool. The automobile is ranged alongside of the oxcart. The angels and the apostles walk and talk like section hands. And through it all walks Jack, the greatest culture hero of the South; Jack beats them all—even the Devil, who is often smarter than God.

Culture Heroes

The Devil is next after Jack as a culture hero. He can out-smart everyone but Jack. God is absolutely no match for him. He is good-natured and full of humor. The sort of person one may count on to help out in any difficulty.

Peter the Apostle is the third in importance. One need not look far for the explanation. The Negro is not a Christian really. The primitive gods are not deities of too subtle inner reflection; they are hard-working bodies who serve their devotees just as laboriously as the suppliant serves them. Gods of physical violence, stopping at nothing to serve their followers. Now of all the apostles Peter is the most active. When the other ten fell back trembling in the garden, Peter wielded the blade on the posse. Peter first and foremost in all action. The gods of no peoples have been philosophic until the people themselves have approached that state.

The rabbit, the bear, the lion, the buzzard, the fox are culture heroes from the animal world. The rabbit is far in the lead of all the others and is blood brother to Jack. In short, the trickster-hero of West Africa has been transplanted to America.

John Henry is a culture hero in song, but no more so than Stacker Lee, Smokey Joe, or Bad Lazarus. There are many, many Negroes who have never heard of any of the song heroes, but none who do not know John (Jack) and the rabbit.

Examples of Folklore and the Modern Culture Hero

Why de Porpoise's Tail is on Crosswise

Now, I want to tell you 'bout de porpoise. God had done made de world and everything. He set de moon and de stars in de sky. He got de fishes of de sea, and de fowls of de air completed.

He made de sun and hung it up. Then He made a nice gold track for it to run on. Then He said, "Now, Sun, I got everything made but Time. That's up to you. I want you to start out and go round de world on dis track just as fast as you kin make it. And de time it takes you to go and come, I'm going to call day and night." De Sun went zoonin' on cross de elements. Now, de porpoise was hanging round there and heard God what he told de Sun, so he decided he'd take dat trip round de world himself. He looked up and saw de Sun kytin' along, so he lit out too, him and dat Sun!

So de porpoise beat de Sun round de world by one hour and three minutes. So God said, "Aw naw, this aint gointer do! I didn't mean for nothin' to be faster than de Sun!" So God run dat porpoise for three days before he run him down and caught him, and took his tail off and put it on crossways to slow him up. Still he's de fastest thing in de water.

And dat's why de porpoise got his tail on crossways.

Rockefeller and Ford

Once John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford was woofing at each other. Rockefeller told Henry Ford he could build a solid gold road round the world. Henry Ford told him if he would he would look at it and see if he liked it and if he did he would buy it and put one of his tin lizzies on it.

Originality

It has been said so often that the Negro is lacking in originality that it has almost become a gospel. Outward signs seem to bear this out. But if one looks closely its falsity is immediately evident.

It is obvious that to get back to original sources is much too difficult for any group to claim very much as a certainty. What we really mean by originality is the modification of ideas. The most ardent admirer of the great Shakespeare cannot claim first source even for him. It is his treatment of the borrowed material.

So if we look at it squarely, the Negro is a very original being. While he lives and moves in the midst of a white civilization, everything that he touches is re-interpreted for his own use. He has modified the language, mode of food preparation, practice of medicine, and most certainly the religion of his new country, just as he adapted to suit himself the Sheik haircut made famous by Rudolph Valentino.

Everyone is familiar with the Negro's modification of the whites' musical instruments, so that his interpretation has been adopted by the white man himself and then re-interpreted. In so many words, Paul Whiteman is giving an

imitation of a Negro orchestra making use of white-invented musical instruments in a Negro way. Thus has arisen a new art in the civilized world, and thus has our so-called civilization come. The exchange and recharge of ideas between groups.

Imitation

The Negro, the world over, is famous as a mimic. But this in no way damages his standing as an original. Mimicry is an art in itself. If it is not, then all art must fall by the same blow that strikes it down. When sculpture, painting, dancing, literature neither reflect nor suggest anything in nature or human experience we turn away with a dull wonder in our hearts at why the thing was done. Moreover, the contention that the Negro imitates from a feeling of inferiority is incorrect. He mimics for the love of it. The group of Negroes who slavishly imitate is small. The average Negro glories in his ways. The highly educated Negro the same. The self-despisement lies in a middle class who scorns to do or be anything Negro. "That's just like a Nigger" is the most terrible rebuke one can lay upon this kind. He wears drab clothing, sits through a boresome church service, pretends to have no interest in the community, holds beauty contests, and otherwise apes all the mediocrities of the white brother. The truly cultured Negro scorns him, and the Negro "farthest down" is too busy "spreading his junk" in his own way to see or care. He likes his own things best. Even the group who are not Negroes but belong to the "sixth race," buy such records as "Shake dat thing" and "Tight lak dat." They really enjoy hearing a good bible-beater preach, but wild horses could drag no such admission from them. Their ready-made expression is: "We done got away from all that now." Some refuse to countenance Negro music on the grounds that it is niggerism, and for that reason should be done away with. Roland Hayes was thoroughly denounced for singing spirituals until he was accepted by white audiences. Langston Hughes is not considered a poet by this group because he writes of the man

in the ditch, who is more numerous and real among us than any other.

But, this group aside, let us say that the art of mimicry is better developed in the Negro than in other racial groups. He does it as the mocking-bird does it, for the love of it, and not because he wishes to be like the one imitated. I saw a group of small Negro boys imitating a cat defecating and the subsequent toilet of the cat. It was very realistic, and they enjoyed it as much as if they had been imitating a coronation ceremony. The dances are full of imitations of various animals. The buzzard lope, walking the dog, the pig's hind legs, holding the mule, elephant squat, pigeon's wing, falling off the log, seabord (imitation of an engine starting), and the like.

Absence of the Concept of Privacy

It is said that Negroes keep nothing secret, that they have no reserve. This ought not to seem strange when one considers that we are an outdoor people accustomed to communal life. Add this to all-permeating drama and you have the explanation.

There is no privacy in an African village. Loves, fights, possessions are, to misquote Woodrow Wilson, "Open disagreements openly arrived at." The community is given the benefit of a good fight as well as a good wedding. An audience is a necessary part of any drama. We merely go with nature rather than against it.

Discord is more natural than accord. If we accept the doctrine of the survival of the fittest there are more fighting honors than there are honors for other achievements. Humanity places premiums on all things necessary to its well-being, and a valiant and good fighter is valuable in any community. So why hide the light under a bushel? Moreover, intimidation is a recognized part of warfare the world over, and threats certainly must be listed under that head. So that a great threatener must certainly be considered an aid to the fighting machine. So then if a man or woman is a facile hurler of threats, why should he or she not show their wares to the community? Hence the holding of

all quarrels and fights in the open. One relieves one's pent-up anger and at the same time earns laurels in intimidation. Besides, one does the community a service. There is nothing so exhilarating as watching well-matched opponents go into action. The entire world likes action, for that matter. Hence prize-fighters become millionaires.

Likewise love-making is a biological necessity the world over and an art among Negroes. So that a man or woman who is proficient sees no reason why the fact should not be moot. He swaggers. She struts hippily about. Songs are built on the power to charm beneath the bed-clothes. Here again we have individuals striving to excel in what the community considers an art. Then if all of his world is seeking a great lover, why should he not speak right out loud?

It is all a view-point. Love-making and fighting in all their branches are high arts, other things are arts among other groups where they brag about their proficiency just as brazenly as we do about these things that others consider matters for conversation behind closed doors. At any rate, the white man is despised by Negroes as a very poor fighter individually, and a very poor lover. One Negro, speaking of white men, said. "White folks is alright when dey gits in de bank and on de law bench, but dey sho kin lie about wimmen folks."

I pressed him to explain. "Well you see, white mens makes out they marries wimmen to look at they eyes, and they know they gits em for just what us gits em for. 'Nother thing, white mens say they goes clear round de world and wins all de wimmen folks way from they men folks. Dat's a lie too. They don't win nothin, they buys em. Now de way I figgers it, if a woman don't want me enough to be wid me, 'thout I got to pay her, she kin rock right on, but these here white men don't know what do wid a woman when they gits her—dat's how come they gives they wimmen so much. They got to: Us wimmen works jus as hard as us does an come home an sleep wid us every night. They own wouldn't do it and its de mens fault. Dese white men done fooled theyself bout dese wimmen.

"Now me, I keeps me some wimmens all de time. Dat's what dey were put here for—us

mens to use. Dat's right now, Miss. Y'll wuz put here so us mens could have some pleasure. Course I don't run round like heap uh men folks. But if my ole lady go way from me and stay more'n two weeks, I got to git me somebody, aint I?"

The Jook

Jook is the word for a Negro pleasure house. It may mean a bawdy house. It may mean the house set apart on public works where the men and women dance, drink and gamble. Often it is a combination of all these.

In past generations the music was furnished by "boxes," another word for guitars. One guitar was enough for a dance; to have two was considered excellent. Where two were playing one man played the lead and the other seconded him. The first player was "picking" and the second was "framing," that is, playing chords while the lead carried the melody by dexterous finger work. Sometimes a third player was added, and he played a tom-tom effect on the low strings. Believe it or not, this is excellent dance music.

Pianos soon came to take the place of the boxes, and now player-pianos and victrolas are in all of the Jooks.

Musically speaking, the Jook is the most important place in America. For in its smelly, shoddy confines has been born the secular music known as blues, and on blues has been founded jazz. The singing and playing in the true Negro style is called "jooking."

The songs grow by incremental repetition as they travel from mouth to mouth and from Jook to Jook for years before they reach outside ears. Hence the great variety of subject-matter in each song.

The Negro dances circulated over the world were also conceived inside the Jooks. They too make the round of Jooks and public works before going into the outside world.

In this respect it is interesting to mention the Black Bottom. I have read several false accounts of its origin and name. One writer claimed that it got its name from the black sticky mud on the

bottom of the Mississippi river. Other equally absurd statements gummed the press. Now the dance really originated in the Jook section of Nashville, Tennessee, around Fourth Avenue. This is a tough neighborhood known as Black Bottom—hence the name.

The Charleston is perhaps forty years old, and was danced up and down the Atlantic seaboard from North Carolina to Key West, Florida.

The Negro social dance is slow and sensuous. The idea in the Jook is to gain sensation, and not so much exercise. So that just enough foot movement is added to keep the dancers on the floor. A tremendous sex stimulation is gained from this. But who is trying to avoid it? The man, the woman, the time and the place have met. Rather, little intimate names are indulged in to heap fire on fire.

These too have spread to all the world.

The Negro theater, as built up by the Negro, is based on Jook situations, with women, gambling, fighting, drinking. Shows like "Dixie to Broadway" are only Negro in cast, and could just as well have come from pre-Soviet Russia.

Another interesting thing—Negro shows before being tampered with did not specialize in octoroon chorus girls. The girl who could hoist a Jook song from her belly and lam it against the front door of the theater was the lead, even if she were as black as the hinges of hell. The question was "Can she jook?" She must also have a good belly wobble, and her hips must, to quote a popular work song, "Shake like jelly all over and be so broad. Lawd, Lawd, and be so broad." So that the bleached chorus is the result of a white demand and not the Negro's.

The woman in the Jook may be nappy headed and black, but if she is a good lover she gets there just the same. A favorite Jook song of the past has this to say:

SINGER: It aint good looks dat takes you through dis world.

AUDIENCE: What is it, good mama?

SINGER: Elgin movements in your hips

Twenty years guarantee.

And it always brought down the house too.

Oh de white gal rides in a Cadillac,
De yaller gal rides de same,
Black gal rides in a rusty Ford
But she gits dere just de same.

The sort of woman her men idealize is the type that is put forth in the theater. The art-creating Negro prefers a not too thin woman who can shake like jelly all over as she dances and sings, and that is the type he put forth on the stage. She has been banished by the white producer and the Negro who takes his cue from the white.

Of course a black woman is never the wife of the upper class Negro in the North. This state of affairs does not obtain in the South, however. I have noted numerous cases where the wife was considerably darker than the husband. People of some substance, too.

This scornful attitude towards black women receives mouth sanction by the mud-sills.

Even on the works and in the Jooks the black man sings disparagingly of black women. They say that she is evil. That she sleeps with her fists doubled up and ready for action. All over they are making a little drama of waking up a yaller wife and a black one.

A man is lying beside his yaller wife and wakes her up. She says to him, "Darling, do you know what I was dreaming when you woke me up?" He says, "No honey, what was you dreamin?" She says, "I dreamt I had done cooked you a big, fine dinner and we was setting down to eat out de same plate and I was setting on yo' lap jus huggin you and kissin you and you was so sweet."

Wake up a black woman, and before you kin git any sense into her she be done up and lammed you over the head four or five times. When you git her quiet she'll say, "Nigger, know whut I was dreamin when you woke me up?"

You say, "No honey, what was you dreamin?" She says, "I dreamt you shook yo' rusty fist under my nose and I split yo' head open wid a ax."

But in spite of disparaging fictitious drama, in real life the black girl is drawing on his

account at the commissary. Down in the Cypress Swamp as he swings his ax he chants:

Dat ole black gal, she keep on grumblin,
New pair shoes, new pair shoes,
I'm goint to buy her shoes and stockings
Slippers too, slippers too.

Then adds aside: "Blacker de berry, sweeter de juice."

To be sure the black gal is still in power, men are still cutting and shooting their way to her pillow. To the queen of the Jook!

Speaking of the influence of the Jook, I noted that Mae West in "Sex" had much more flavor of the turpentine quarters than she did of the white bawd. I know that the piece she played on the piano is a very old Jook composition. "Honey let yo' drawers hang low" had been played and sung in every Jook in the South for at least thirty-five years. It has always puzzled me why she thought it likely to be played in a Canadian bawdy house.

Speaking of the use of Negro material by white performers, it is astonishing that so many are trying it, and I have never seen one yet entirely realistic. They often have all the elements of the song, dance, or expression, but they are misplaced or distorted by the accent falling on the wrong element. Every one seems to think that the Negro is easily imitated when nothing is further from the truth. Without exception I wonder why the black-face comedians *are* black-face; it is a puzzle—good comedians, but darn poor niggers. Gershwin and the other "Negro" rhapsodists come under this same axe. Just about as Negro as caviar or Ann Pennington's athletic Black Bottom. When the Negroes who knew the Black Bottom in its cradle saw the Broadway version they asked each other, "Is you learnt dat *new* Black Bottom yet?" Proof that it was not *their* dance.

And God only knows what the world has suffered from the white damsels who try to sing Blues.

The Negroes themselves have sinned also in this respect. In spite of the goings up and down on the earth, from the original Fisk Jubilee Singers down to the present, there has

been no genuine presentation of Negro songs to white audiences. The spirituals that have been sung around the world are Negroid to be sure, but so full of musicians' tricks that Negro congregations are highly entertained when they hear their old songs so changed. They never use the new style songs, and these are never heard unless perchance some daughter or son has been off to college and returns with one of the old songs with its face lifted, so to speak.

I am of the opinion that this trick style of delivery was originated by the Fisk Singers; Tuskegee and Hampton followed suit and have helped spread this misconception of Negro spirituals. This Glee Club style has gone on so long and become so fixed among concert singers that it is considered quite authentic. But I say again, that not one concert singer in the world is singing the songs as the Negro song-makers sing them.

If anyone wishes to prove the truth of this let him step into some unfashionable Negro church and hear for himself.

To those who want to institute the Negro theater, let me say it is already established. It is lacking in wealth, so it is not seen in the high places. A creature with a white head and Negro feet struts the Metropolitan boards. The real Negro theater is in the jooks and the cabarets. Self-conscious individuals may turn away the eye and say, "Let us search elsewhere for our dramatic art." Let 'em search. They certainly won't find it. Butter Beans and Susie, Bo-Jangles and Snake Hips are the only performers of the real Negro school it has ever been my pleasure to behold in New York.

Dialect

If we are to believe the majority of writers of Negro dialect and the burnt-cork artists, Negro speech is a weird thing, full of "ams" and "Ises." Fortunately we don't have to believe them. We may go directly to the Negro and let him speak for himself.

I know that I run the risk of being damned as an infidel for declaring that nowhere can be found the Negro who asks "am it?" nor yet

his brother who announces "Ise oh gwinter." He exists only for a certain type of writers and performers.

Very few Negroes, educated or not, use a clear clipped "I." It verges more or less upon "Ah." I think the lip form is responsible for this to a great extent. By experiment the reader will find that a sharp "I" is very much easier with a thin taut lip than with a full soft lip. Like tightening violin strings.

If one listens closely one will note too that a word is slurred in one position in the sentence but clearly pronounced in another. This is particularly true of the pronouns. A pronoun as a subject is likely to be clearly enunciated, but slurred as an object. For example: "You better not let me ketch yuh."

There is a tendency in some localities to add the "h" to "it" and pronounce it "hit." Probably a vestige of old English. In some localities "if" is "ef."

In story telling "so" is universally the connective. It is used even as an introductory word, at the very beginning of a story. In religious expression "and" is used. The trend in stories is to state conclusions; in religion, to enumerate.

I am mentioning only the most general rules in dialect because there are so many quirks that belong only to certain localities that nothing less than a volume would be adequate.

Now He told me, He said: "You got the three witnesses. One is water, one is spirit, and one is blood. And these three correspond with the three in heben—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

Now I ast Him about this lyin in sin and He give me a handful of seeds and He tolle me to sow 'em in a bed and He tolle me: "I want you to watch them seeds." The seeds come up about in places and He said: "Those seeds that come up, they died in the heart of the earth and quickened and come up and brought forth fruit. But those seeds that didn't come up, they died in the heart of the earth and rotted."

"And a soul that dies and quickens through my spirit they will live forever, but those that dont never pray, they are lost forever."

(Rev. JESSIE JEFFERSON.)

BENJAMIN BRAWLEY

The Negro Genius (1937)

About the Negro in the United States two things are observable. One is that distinction so far won by members of the race has been most frequently in the arts. The other is that, aside from enforced labor, any influence exerted on civilization has been mainly in the field of æsthetics. As to the first point, we might refer to a long line of beautiful singers, to the sensuous poetry of Dunbar, the picturesque style of Du Bois, the mysticism of the paintings of Tanner, and to the striving of many younger artists. Even Booker T. Washington, most practical of men, is largely remembered for his anecdote and vivid illustration. The influence on the country's life will be referred to more than once as we proceed.

If one has taken note of the homes of Negro peasants in the South, he must have observed that the instinct for beauty insists upon an outlet. If no better picture is available, there will be a flaming advertisement on the walls. Few homes have not at least a rosebush in the garden or a geranium on the windowsill. Conversely, those things that are most picturesque make to the Negro the readiest appeal. *Faust* has been popular with those who would never think of going to another play of its class. The applause leaves one in no doubt as to the reason for Goethe's popularity. It is the suggestiveness of the love scenes, the red costume of Mephistopheles, the electrical effects, and the

his brother who announces "Ise oh gwinter." He exists only for a certain type of writers and performers.

Very few Negroes, educated or not, use a clear clipped "I." It verges more or less upon "Ah." I think the lip form is responsible for this to a great extent. By experiment the reader will find that a sharp "I" is very much easier with a thin taut lip than with a full soft lip. Like tightening violin strings.

If one listens closely one will note too that a word is slurred in one position in the sentence but clearly pronounced in another. This is particularly true of the pronouns. A pronoun as a subject is likely to be clearly enunciated, but slurred as an object. For example: "You better not let me ketch yuh."

There is a tendency in some localities to add the "h" to "it" and pronounce it "hit." Probably a vestige of old English. In some localities "if" is "ef."

In story telling "so" is universally the connective. It is used even as an introductory word, at the very beginning of a story. In religious expression "and" is used. The trend in stories is to state conclusions; in religion, to enumerate.

I am mentioning only the most general rules in dialect because there are so many quirks that belong only to certain localities that nothing less than a volume would be adequate.

Now He told me, He said: "You got the three witnesses. One is water, one is spirit, and one is blood. And these three correspond with the three in heben—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

Now I ast Him about this lyin in sin and He give me a handful of seeds and He tolle me to sow 'em in a bed and He tolle me: "I want you to watch them seeds." The seeds come up about in places and He said: "Those seeds that come up, they died in the heart of the earth and quickened and come up and brought forth fruit. But those seeds that didn't come up, they died in the heart of the earth and rotted."

"And a soul that dies and quickens through my spirit they will live forever, but those that dont never pray, they are lost forever."

(Rev. JESSIE JEFFERSON.)

BENJAMIN BRAWLEY

The Negro Genius (1937)

About the Negro in the United States two things are observable. One is that distinction so far won by members of the race has been most frequently in the arts. The other is that, aside from enforced labor, any influence exerted on civilization has been mainly in the field of æsthetics. As to the first point, we might refer to a long line of beautiful singers, to the sensuous poetry of Dunbar, the picturesque style of Du Bois, the mysticism of the paintings of Tanner, and to the striving of many younger artists. Even Booker T. Washington, most practical of men, is largely remembered for his anecdote and vivid illustration. The influence on the country's life will be referred to more than once as we proceed.

If one has taken note of the homes of Negro peasants in the South, he must have observed that the instinct for beauty insists upon an outlet. If no better picture is available, there will be a flaming advertisement on the walls. Few homes have not at least a rosebush in the garden or a geranium on the windowsill. Conversely, those things that are most picturesque make to the Negro the readiest appeal. *Faust* has been popular with those who would never think of going to another play of its class. The applause leaves one in no doubt as to the reason for Goethe's popularity. It is the suggestiveness of the love scenes, the red costume of Mephistopheles, the electrical effects, and the

rain of fire that give the thrill desired. *Faust* is a good show as well as a good play.

In some of our communities Negroes are often known to "get happy" in church. It is never a sermon on the theory of the Atonement that awakens such ecstasy. Instead, this accompanies a vivid description of the beauties of heaven—the walls of jasper, the angels with palms in their hands, and, best of all, the feast of milk and honey. It is the sensuous appeal that is most effective. The untutored Negro is thrilled not so much by the moral as by the artistic and pictorial elements of religion.

Just why this should be so is a question for the anthropologist. At present we are concerned simply with the fact. Behind any achievement of the race is temperament, and that of the Negro has been shown to be pre-eminently imaginative and sensuous. It is subjective too, so that in general Negro authors and composers have been better in poetry and music than in the novel and the drama. The temper seeks an outlet in vivid, striking expression. Naturally this would be seen first of all in the folklore.

In the life and history of the Negro has developed an unusual store of customs, superstitions, and tales. Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown called attention to this, but Charles W. Chesnutt was the first writer of the race to give it sustained literary treatment. Its chief monument so far has been in the Uncle Remus tales of Joel Chandler Harris. One must be careful of course not to claim too much for the Negro. The study of sources and analogues is far from being as simple as some might suppose. It takes one far afield, not only to Africa but even to India and the Continent of Europe.

Important as is Negro folklore, however, the folk-music is even more so. In recent years this has been claimed for other countries or nations; but, just as in the folklore there is distinctive imagination, so in the music there is a quality peculiarly the Negro's own. One has to consider both the "spirituals" and the secular songs.

Unlike the English and Scottish popular ballads, the spirituals depend for their merit more upon their tunes than their words. They are also more affected by nature. A meteoric shower, a thunder-storm, or the dampness of a furrow

was sufficient to give birth to a hymn; and there was the freest possible use of figures of speech. As in the ballads, the sentiment becomes universal, and there is a tendency toward what has been called incremental repetition; thus after a number of old people had been crooning "I'm a-Rollin" before a fire, someone would begin a stanza, "O brothers, won't you help me?" Then would follow, "O sisters, won't you help me?" Obviously such a process could be prolonged indefinitely. One soon observes different stages in the development of this music. The first gives that which is simple and elemental, taking one to the African wilderness, as in "See Fo' an' Twenty Elders on Deir Knees." The second stage exhibits the great class of Afro-American melodies, like "Steal Away" and "I've been a-listenin' all de night long." The third shows a blending of Negro music and that of the adopted country, as in "Bright Sparkles in the Churchyard." Those melodies that are most original are generally sorrowful in tone, growing out of the Negro's trials in slavery, like "Nobody Knows de Trouble I See" and "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." In some, however, there is a note of triumph, as in "Oh, Give Way, Jordan" and "I'm Gwine to Jine de Great 'Sociation." No one is able to tell just how many of these melodies are in existence, for, though there have been many collections, there is not yet one that is definitive.

Just as the spirituals reflect the higher life of the Negro—that of prayer and hope and yearning, with some influence from the evangelical hymns—so do the secular songs reflect his lower life—that of the railroad camp, the turpentine camp, and the chain-gang. Only within recent years have these received scholarly study. To some extent they were submerged by minstrelsy, and the influence of the churches was naturally against them. In 1911, however, Howard W. Odum began to publish articles on "Folk-Songs and Folk-Poetry as found in the Secular Songs of Southern Negroes," and he and Guy B. Johnson have since produced *The Negro and his Songs* and *Negro Workaday Songs*. Other writers have followed and Professor Johnson has also published *John Henry*, about the "big steel-drivin' man" who died with a

hammer in his hand. The ballads that have grown up about this heroic figure are typical of the songs at their best. It appears that John Henry had a contest with a steel-driving machine in which he was victorious at the cost of his life. "There is pretty good evidence that the ballad is based on an incident which occurred about 1871 during the building of the Big Bend Tunnel on the C. & O. Railroad in West Virginia."

John Henry said to his captain,
"Well, a man ain't nothing but a man,
But before I'll be beaten by your old steam
drill,
I'll die with my hammer in my han',
Lawd, I'll die with my hammer in my han'."

There are numerous other work songs, songs about women, and "blues," these last being "the sorrowful songs of the workaday Negro." There is also much "bad man stuff," one of the best known songs being about Stacker Lee (more commonly, Stagolee), who could shoot the buttons off a man's coat but whose reputation paled somewhat when he met John Henry.

Stagolee was a bully man an' everybody
knowed
When dey seed Stagolee comin' to give
Stagolee de road.
Oh, dat man, bad man, Stagolee done come.

This reference to the spirituals and even to songs of a different temper calls up something far deeper than sensuous beauty. No people can rise to the heights of art until it has passed through suffering. The Russians are a case in point; they have endured much and their literature is one of power. The same future beckons to the Negro. There is something elemental about the race—something that finds its origin in the forest and the sighing of the nightwind. There is something grim and stern about it too, something that speaks of the lash, of the child torn from its mother's bosom, of the body riddled with bullets and swinging all night by the roadside.

Naturally one might expect to find this temper best revealed in those members of the race who were strong characters but untouched by

the schools. So we do. Harriet Tubman was describing to an audience a great battle in the Civil War. "And then," she said, "we saw the lightning, and that was the guns; and then we heard the thunder, and that was the big guns; and then we heard the rain falling; and that was drops of blood falling; and when we came to git in the crops, it was dead men that we reaped." Sojourner Truth, the old prophetess with inimitable wit, was speaking to one who came to see her in her last illness. "I isn't goin' to die, honey," she said; "I's goin' home like a shootin' star."

John Jasper, of Richmond, Virginia, became famous a few years after the Civil War by reason of his sermon, "De Sun do Move." Even before the war he was well known in the vicinity for his picturesque discourses; and he preached not only on his favorite theme but also on "Dry Bones in the Valley," "The Hebrew Children in the Fiery Furnace," "The Raising of Lazarus," and other subjects that gave scope for his imagination. The Reverend William E. Hatcher, who heard him preach more than once, has described for us the portrayal of the King in his beauty. Said he of Jasper: "His earnestness and reverence passed all speech, and grew as he went. The light from the throne dazzled him from afar. There was the great white throne, there the elders bowing in adoring wonder, there the archangels waiting in silence for the commands of the King, there the King in his resplendent glory, there in hosts innumerable were the ransomed. In point of vivid description it surpassed all I had heard or read. The old Negro seemed glorified. Earth could hardly hold him. He sprang about the platform with a boy's alertness; he was unconsciously waving his handkerchief as if greeting a conqueror; his face was streaming with tears; he was bowing before the Redeemer; he was clapping his hands, laughing, shouting and wiping the blinding tears out of his eyes. It was a moment of transport and unmatched wonder to every one, and I felt as if it could never cease, when suddenly in a new note he broke into his chorus, ending with the soul-melting words, 'Oh, what mus' it be to be ther!'"

It is obvious, then, that if we would have at its best the element of which we have spoken,

we must take the race without adulteration or sophistication. It happens that those who belong to the Negro people in the United States form the most variegated group in the world. Ray Stannard Baker said thirty years ago that he had not been studying the South very long before he was forced to ask just what was a Negro. The statement of some persons that they belonged to the race he accepted against the testimony of his own senses. Some had blue eyes and flaxen hair. That is true; and because the persons of fairer hue have generally had better economic and cultural opportunity than others, it was a favorite diversion of some men in the nineteenth century to assert and try to prove that the ability of individuals was in direct proportion to their infusion of white blood.

In some cases this may have been true; but so far was it from being the general truth that we may now affirm that such distinction as the Negro has won in the arts is due primarily to the black rather than the mixed element in the race. People of mixed blood have given us the college presidents, the administrators, the Government employees; but the blacks are the singers and seers. Black slaves gave us the spirituals; modern composers of a lighter hue transcribe them. A modern author may reproduce in verse the sermons of the old exhorters, but it would hardly do to ask him to preach one of them. In other words, the mixed element in the race may represent the Negro's talent, but it is upon the black element that he must rely for his genius.

Let us not be misunderstood. In our emphasis on achievement in the arts, we do not mean to say that the Negro can not rise to distinction in any other sphere. He has recently made notable advance in scholarship, and some of the younger men have been especially brilliant in science. We do suggest, however, that every race has its peculiar genius and that, as far as we can at present judge, the Negro, with all his manual labor, is destined to reach his greatest heights in the field of the artistic. On every hand we have proof of this tendency.

For a long time this inclination was discounted or disregarded. The public associated

the Negro simply with minstrelsy, burlesque, and a few stereotyped characters. Then, in 1867, a sympathetic article on the spirituals by Thomas Wentworth Higginson in the *Atlantic* commanded attention, and within the next decade the Fisk Jubilee Singers were received with acclaim. At the close of the century Paul Laurence Dunbar won such success as was never before achieved by a Negro author. Two decades later, in connection with the World War and after, the change in attitude became general. Where formerly the Negro was ignored, he mounted to the crest of the wave. It became the popular thing to attend night clubs in Harlem. Publishers who formerly had frowned upon Negro novels were now eager to have one or two such books on their lists. By 1925 the new fad was in full career. In literature there was a so-called renaissance.

About the origin of jazz, which was now popular, there was much discussion. Some writers have insisted that the word is primarily a verb rather than a noun. That means, as Sigmund G. Spaeth reminded us (*Forum*, August, 1928), that "jazz is not a form of music. It is a treatment applied to music, and, incidentally, to all the arts, and to modern life in general. The jazz treatment, in brief, is a distortion of the conventional, a revolt against tradition, a deliberate twisting of established formulas. As such, it is thoroughly characteristic of the civilization of today." That may be, but it was generally understood that what was known as jazz in music originated in Negro slums; and it called for serious consideration in view of its far-reaching connections in modern art.

Whether the new impulse was an unmixed good, and whether it tended toward the development of what is best in literature, is an open question. Again we are primarily concerned with a fact. A change had taken place and as never before attention was directed to Negro life and Negro themes. It happened that interest was chiefly in life on the lowest plane, writers seeming to be moved by one or the other of two appeals. One was that of the sensational. Prostitutes and gamblers had to be featured by all means, and a whole stream of novels followed in the wake of Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*.

The other appeal was that of primitivism. This was more provocative.

It was about 1907 that some modernistic painters in Paris—Picasso, Derain, Matisse, and Vlaminck—in their endeavor to produce certain new effects on canvas, observed that similar effects had been achieved centuries before in primitive African art. About some samples of wood-carving that they found they realized that “these figures were not mere childish attempts to make our kind of statue; they were successful attempts to make an entirely different kind of statue.” In some ways they were even “a stage in advance of European evolution.” Clive Bell, writing in 1920, said of the efforts of the artists and their literary apostle, Guillaume Apollinaire, to find pieces of African workmanship in old shops: “Thus a demand was created which M. Paul Guillaume was there to meet and stimulate. The part played by that enterprising dealer is highly commendable; it was he who put the most sensitive public in Europe—a little cosmopolitan group of artists, critics, and amateurs—in the way of seeing a number of first-rate things.” In 1926, with the co-operation of the Barnes Foundation of Merion, Pennsylvania, Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro produced *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, a book that became almost the bible of the new movement. It called attention to the fact that Negro sculpture offered a compromise between representation and design, and concluded: “In an age when more than one voice has been heard to say that sculpture is obsolete, and the plastic arts exhausted, Negro art has brought creative forces that may prove to be inexhaustible.”

To some extent that statement was a challenge, and there were not lacking those willing to take up the gauntlet. To many it not only seemed that the fad was overdone, and largely promoted by commercialism, but that a fundamental question was raised as to the extent to which primitive African art had anything whatsoever to do with the achievement of Negro artists in America. Some Negroes were opposed to the fad by reason of its social and political implications. They felt that effort in connection with it was a subtle attempt to set them apart and fit them into a groove in American life, and

they insisted that for the Negro in the United States the influence of nationalism was stronger than that of race. Even Paul Laurence Dunbar twenty years previously had taken this position. A reporter once asked him about the poetry written by Negroes as compared with that of white people. Dunbar replied, “The predominating power of the African race is lyric. In that I should expect the writers of my race to excel. But, broadly speaking, their poetry will not be exotic or differ much from that of the whites. For two hundred and fifty years the environment of the Negro has been American, in every respect the same as that of all other Americans.” George S. Schuyler, writing under the title “The Negro-Art Hokum” in *The Nation* (June 16, 1926 [see elsewhere in this volume]), said: “Because a few writers with a paucity of themes have seized upon the imbecilities of the Negro rustics and clowns and palmed them off as authentic and characteristic Aframerican behavior, the common notion that the black American is so ‘different’ from his white neighbor has gained wide currency. . . . Negro art has been, is, and will be among the numerous black nations of Africa; but to suggest the possibility of any such development among the ten million colored people in this republic is self-evident foolishness.”

This attitude of protest is of course largely negative; it does not encourage a distinctive art. On the other hand one might note the position of Langston Hughes, who has also written in *The Nation* (June 23, 1926). Says he:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If the white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn’t matter either. We build our temples for to-morrow, strong as we know them, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

To some extent the temples have begun to be erected, but there is a shortcoming not always recognized by writers of the school of

Mr. Hughes. In their protest against the smugness and the self consciousness of the bourgeoisie, they laud "the so-called common element," the "lowdown folks," who "live on Seventh Street in Washington or State Street in Chicago," and they present again and again the roustabout, the gambler, and the prostitute. They protest against the older stereotypes; yet, if they do not watch, they will give us new stereotypes hardly better than the old.

It thus appears that in speaking of the Negro Genius we enter a field beset with explosives. At any turn one may run into a contradiction or an inconsistency. We can not reconcile all the differences of opinion, but about one thing at least we must be clear: we emphasize no

connection between primitive African art and that of the Negro in America to-day. An individual sculptor may indeed receive some suggestion or inspiration from a piece of African carving, but that would not say that his own culture was basically African. We recall that the English drama, an indigenous growth, at the time of Elizabeth received stimulus from Plautus and Seneca, but that stimulus did not make the English drama Latin. So we shall not attempt to overstate the present case. We do think, however, that the main observation will hold: The temperament of the American Negro is primarily lyrical, imaginative, subjective; and his genius has most frequently sought expression in some one of the arts.

HUBERT H. HARRISON

On a Certain Condescension in White Publishers (1922)

It is an undoubted, if ignored, truth that in the arts of buying and selling the black brother is the equal of the whites. I mean not here to challenge that fine fiction to which we in America have dedicated our lives, but simply to insist that when the American farmer wants to get pennies for his pumpkins the color of the hands from which those pennies fall is of little concern to him. And we may safely presume that what is true of farmers is true also of most other men who have something to sell.

In my mind's eye there lurks a light similitude between the tiller of the agricultural soil and his more pretentious brother who tills and traffics in the product of the intellectual soil. These also "raise their crop," deciding at their own risks what weeds shall grow or what goodly harvests shall come up. But the point of chief importance in our comparison lies in the fact that publishers as well as farmers do finally bring or send their crops to market, where the bane or blessing rests with the hands from which must roll in either case the pennies that pay for pumpkins. Now, out of this necessity there springs a certain rough democracy of dealing; since we must sell, and all buyers' coins are equal, let us extend the courtesies of the market in equal measure to all prospective purchasers. It is this courtesy of trade which helps to reconcile the brother in black to the capitalist system of the brother in white; if all men are not equal, at least all moneys are. One dollar from Sam Jones will buy as much social service as one dollar from Lloyd George—and trade courtesy is a social service.

But life, alas, has some hard shocks for logic and the white publishers of America have given me many such. It is now two years since I inaugurated in this newspaper the first (and up to now the only) regular book-review section known to Negro newspaperdom. Since that time I have observed that the magazine called *The Crisis* has been attempting to follow my

footsteps in the trail—with such success as was achievable by youth and inexperience.

When the book reviews were begun it was with this two-fold aim: to bring to the knowledge of the Negro reading public those books which were necessary if he would know what the white world was thinking and planning and doing in regard to the colored world; and to bring the white publisher and his wares to a market which needed those wares. Sometimes the books had been written by Negro authors with whose works Negro readers were thus made acquainted. I aimed to render a common service and to a certain extent I succeeded. But one would have thought that the white publishers would be eager to avail themselves of the novel opportunity thus offered to get some more pennies for their pumpkins. But it was not to be.

I recall my humorous amazement when, after writing to Boni and Liveright for a review copy of a book dealing with the anthropology of colored peoples, I received and read their reply. The supercilious magnificence of that reply was regal in its sweep. They wanted me to supply them with back numbers of this journal—and even then they simply subsided into silence. What could Negroes know of anthropology, whether as critics or simple readers? It reminded me so much of the outraged dowager's dignity of Mrs. Elsie Clews Parsons when a black man in West Africa wrote her some years ago for an exchange copy of *The Family*. She wrote to tell him in reply to his courteous request that the book was not of a sort to interest him and that, perhaps, he had been misled. It created laughter from Lagos to Sierra Leone—the man who had written was John Mensa Sarbah, the illustrious author of the *Fanti Customary Laws*, who knew just about five times as much of social anthropology as Mrs. Parsons.

So I laughed at the top-lofty airs of Boni and Liveright at that time. The readers of this journal will recall that *The Story of Mankind*,

by Hendrik Wellem Van Loon, was published by Boni and Liveright and was recently reviewed by me. All things change and white publishers may change also.

But Boni and Liveright were only an index. To this day I cannot get the New York representatives of Macmillan and company to take the Negro reading public seriously. It is more than three months since I wrote for a review copy of *A Social History of the American Negro*, by Benjamin Brawley—and up to now they have not even deigned to reply. Of course, one might raise the question of the intrinsic quality of the literary criticism done in this section. And that is fair enough, although I am stopped from taking the stand to testify. But other witnesses are not lacking. Eugene O'Neill, author of *The Emperor Jones*, has written to say that the review of that work done in this paper was one of the two or three best that had come from any source. The publishers of Hale's *Story of a Style*, Morel's *The Black Man's Burden*, Harris' *Africa Slave or Free* and Pratt's *Real South Africa*, have found, to their surprise, (and profit) that we can do workman-like work in book reviewing.

The publishers of Mr. Lothrop Stoddard's two books, *The Rising Tide of Color* and *The New World of Islam*, have had occasion to commend the thoroughness of our literary criticism of those two books; and Mr. Stoddard himself entered into friendly and faithful correspondence with us. Huebsch, Scribners, Doran and Dutton have had the product of their presses properly presented to our readers—to their mutual profit. And even the Macmillans have had *The Soul of John Brown*, by Stephen Graham, and *The Influence of Animism on Islam*, by Dr. Zwemer, reviewed by us. Yet the force of an ancient attitude is strong, and this and other publishing houses still seem unaware of the fact that many of the 12,000,000 Negroes in this country do buy and read not only books on the Negro but other literary and scientific works.

As the only "certificated" Negro book-reviewer in captivity I feel the onus of this back-

ward view which white publishers take of the market which the Negro reading-public furnishes for their wares. It is not complimentary to us: it is short-sighted and unsound. After all, pennies are pennies, and books are published to be sold. We believe that the Negro reading public will buy books—when they know of their existence. One sees proof of this in the amazing stream of letters and money orders which flow in to Mr. Rogers at 513 Lenox Avenue for his books, *From Superman to Man* and *As Nature Leads*. This young Negro author's continued success is also proof of the great intellectual awakening which has been brought about by the forces of the last decade.

And now, a word to our own. I foresee that in the near future there will be many book reviewers (which is the name for literary critics in their working clothes) among us. Indeed, they are already treading on my heels in this paper. May one veteran (since my book reviewing began in *The New York Times* in 1906) offer a word of advice to the new recruits? In the first place, remember that in a book review you are writing for a public who want to know whether it is worth their while to read the book about which you are writing. They are primarily interested more in what the author set himself to do and how he does it than in your own private loves and hates. Not that these are without value, but they are strictly secondary. In the next place, respect yourself and your office so much that you will not complacently pass and praise drivel and rubbish. Grant that you don't know everything; you still must steer true to the lights of your knowledge. Give honest service: only so will your opinion come to have weight with your readers. Remember, too, that you cannot well review a work on African history, for instance, if that is the only work on the subject that you have read. Therefore, read widely and be well informed. Get the widest basis of knowledge for your judgment; then back your judgment to the limit. Here endeth the First Encyclical.

WILLIS RICHARDSON

The Negro Audience (1925)

It is my opinion that the average Negro audience seldom goes to the theatre to hear a Negro play with open mind. They seem to think the Negro character should be portrayed on the stage as an angel. I distinctly remember the great howl that was sent up a few years ago by some of these audiences when Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* was played by the Howard University Players. Some wondered why the University would stoop to allow its students to give a performance of a play in which the leading character was a crap-shooter and escaped convict. One went so far as to say that O'Neill had no standing as a playwright. This last seemed rather strange to me in the face of the fact that O'Neill is the internationally admired American playwright at the present time, and the greatest ever developed in this country; but after reconsidering the matter I came to the conclusion that, although the person who made this strange statement was a respected teacher of English, he was somewhat uninformed concerning the development of the modern drama.

I had an amusing experience one night while listening to my own humble effort, *The Chip Woman's Fortune*. Every time the dialogue would fall from the perfect English (and it fell generally) a lady in front of me would make the correction in undertones to her companion. When Mr. Kirkpatrick playing Silas Green said "Ah aint," she whispered to her friend, "I'm not," and when the same actor took off his shoes on the stage she was totally scandalized.

This is the state of affairs. These average audiences do not generally like dialect, they do not like unpleasant characters and endings and the most important thing of all they forget, if they ever knew, that the main business of the drama is the portrayal of human character. Those characters may be beggars or kings, prostitutes or queens; that part of it should not matter. Some of the things which should matter are: whether the characters are well drawn, whether the dialogue is natural, whether the ending is consistent and whether the whole thing is interesting and logical. These are some of the things Negro audiences must learn if the Negro drama is to prosper and become "a thing of beauty and a joy forever." And I think it will prosper although its beginning is doubtful and filled with disappointment and pain as was the beginning of the often mentioned and justly admired Moscow Art Theatre, whose members have worked together for nearly a quarter of a century, and after overcoming hardships and criticisms merited and unmerited have developed the greatest of all dramatic organizations.

I, for one, truly expect this Negro drama finally to come into its own, "Not with a riot of flags and a mobborn cry," but rather with great labor, and quietly win the hearts of the people. For as Bjalmann Bergstrom says at the ending of "Karen Borneman": "It seems to be almost a law of life that nothing new can come into the world except through pain."

GEORGE W. JACOBS [GEORGE S. SCHUYLER]

Negro Authors Must Eat (1929)

Not long ago a Negro author addressed an audience of which I was a member. For no reason beyond the possible squeamishness of his own conscience, he apologized for certain unwholesome nuances in one of his latest works; and in doing so he uttered these three words: "Authors must eat."

My mind drifted back to the childhood of man. I gazed upon a hairy fellow poised upon a crag, playing a lute. Unconscious of an audience, oblivious of possible audiences, he played. For the moment he was enchanted by the sublime fact of nature. Suddenly the fellow stopped, leaped from the crag, and with his lute tucked under an arm raced toward a glade in the jungle where a dinosaur had just been slain. As the hunters hacked away at their respective portions of the kill, the lutist struck up a wanton tune that he had heard in a certain fancy cave. One of the hunters winked at him knowingly; then, tossed him a luscious dinosaur ear. When the lutist had eaten, he trudged away in the direction of his crag. From time to time he held his lute up before his eyes, focusing upon it a gaze both apologetic and caressing. Finally he said in a tone of resignation not untinged with remorse: "Oh well, lutists must eat."

In spite of the efforts of the lecturer I remained unconvinced that even the Negro author is justified in burdening his interpretation of nature with the servilities of a steward. Other men have shunted the burden of their support into channels separate from their art. Aeschylus was a soldier and public official. Sophocles was a general and the commander of a fleet. Cervantes was a naval commissary and tax collector. Art to them was more than a mere purveyor of groceries. "The literature of a people," wrote Lowell, "should be the record of its joys and sorrows, its aspirations and its shortcomings, its wisdom and its folly, the confidant of its soul."

One of the opportunities which presented itself to the Negro writer at the close of the late war was that of destroying the racial stereotypes, the perpetuation of which now preclude the possibility of any immediate, "literature of a people." Ten years ago the passion for a candid and comprehensive delineation of every phase of Negro life was such that the literate world clamored for, the Negro of artistic ability as it had clamored at no previous time since the emancipation of the race. In response to those clamors, the Negro writers of New York, to whom I shall confine this discussion, plunged beneath the surface of their environment: they hoisted the sewer system to one's very nose and, amid the jingling of many shekels, insisted that this was all that there was of black Harlem.

Almost from the beginning certain white writers saw in the Negro writers efforts to respond to these demands a politer form of amusement than that afforded by any of the Harlem night clubs. They trekked up to Harlem to show the little colored boys and girls the path to Parnassus: they redefined "the literature of a people" as "the record of a people's shortcomings and its follies." However, now that the clamors have become less insistent, one discovers with more regret than surprise that those Negro writers who the privilege of being patronized along the way to Parnassus have ebbed with the tide of interest. Many of them had passionately and honestly sought escape through art. They found new shackles in artistic patronage. The public ceased to accept the summary disposal of two hundred thousand Harlem Negroes in the words: idiotic, amoral, hyper-sexual.

The present Negro fiction writers of Harlem fall into two general types. One type subscribes unapologetically to the sensational. The other type subscribes no less unapologetically to a solitary contemplation of a black savage dropped bodily into a white culture. The prostitute is the

high priestess of the first type. Negro primitivism is the creed of the second. Extremists both.

Harry Hansen in reviewing Maxwell Bodenheim's *Georgie May* objected to the chief character on the ground that prostitutes as a whole are so free from inhibitions or nuances that their portrayal is unworthy of a writer capable of describing complex characters. There is merit in that criticism. Nevertheless, even among the Georgie Mays there are many individuals who, despite their flouting of conventional morality, possess personal codes of ethics, anti-social though they may be, which present a fascinating bundle of contradictions. If I object, then, to the role that the prostitute plays in latter-day fiction by Negroes, it is not on the ground that she lacks complexity of character, but on the ground that she is portrayed out of the depths of ignorance. She is, with scarce an exception, endowed with a physical hideousness, born of the ancient superstition that only the good should be presented as beautiful. She is endowed with a bestiality possible only to the vulgar rich.

Regarding the second type of Harlem fiction, this cult like the harlot-esque, was born along the path to Parnassus. One of the white apostles of the bizarre had chanced to see an "over-ginned" Negro girl "get loose" in a Harlem Honky Tonk. "What perfect abandon. How delightfully primitive!" that apostle had exclaimed. Once in Buffalo I saw a white woman similarly alcoholic and similarly voluptuous in her dancing. Somehow it never occurred to me that the woman might be anything other than pathetically drunk. This is no rash dismissal of all the primitivists as frauds. No doubt many of them are sincere. However, one does not go to pre-Druid England to delineate a Broadway character of English descent. Why, then, this insistence on returning to Africa to understand the Harlem black? I am not unmindful of the centuries which separate the white from pre-Druid England. I simply remind the reader that today, granted the same environmental conditions, the Harlem black and the Broadway white fit not dissimilarly into the mold of our mechanized American culture. This preoccupation with the primitive, therefore belongs more

properly to the fields of anthropology and archaeology than to fiction. It no more interprets Harlem than it does Broadway.

The sort of perspective I am advocating does not pay immediate dividends on the American mart. We must look for the Negro writer who is prepared to endure the rejection of his work long enough to starve the taste for sewer sensationalism and misguided primitivism. There are two women novelists in Harlem who are delightful exceptions to the prevailing vogue. Nella Larsen and Jessie Fauset have always had as their primary purpose the presentation of aesthetic truth. We look cheerfully toward an increasing skill and vision in these writers; and toward novels which will augment that public in which their art has created "the willing suspension of disbelief."

The question of the immutability of the types which the Negro author is to use in portraying the lives of colored folk is of such magnitude that I am forced to consider evidence on the question. In an article in *The American Mercury* for December, 1928, by way of apology for this continuation of the stereotypes, James Weldon Johnson said: "It would be straining the credulity of white America to the breaking-point for a Negro writer to put out a novel dealing with the wealthy class of colored people." He continues: "American Negroes as heroes form no part of white America's concept of the race." Again, he says: "So that whenever an Aframerican writer addresses himself to white America and attempts to break away from or break through these conventions and limitations, he makes more than an ordinary demand upon his literary skill and power."

Granted. But tell me, of what use are creative power that cannot meet this demand? A Flaubert could choose and reject, choose and reject, until he found the precise, the only word to express his exact meaning. An Ibsen could revise a play again and again until he achieved the perfection that his mind demanded. Are we concerned in this matter with artists—be those artists ever so embryonic—or are we concerned with plowboys who, though transplanted from clod to concrete, still plod on mentally behind

their mules, remaining one with their mules, looking ever and only toward sundown, and food and beds of dry straw?

Negro authors, once they free their art of the necessity of furnishing the means of life, will

drop the stereotypes into limbo with the assurance that real art will finally create in their readers a demand for honest treatment of every gradation of Negro life.

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

The Dilemma of the Negro Author (1928)

The Negro author—the creative author—has arrived. He is here. He appears in the lists of the best publishers. He even breaks into the lists of the best-sellers. To the general American public he is a novelty, a strange phenomenon, a miracle straight out of the skies. Well, he *is* a novelty, but he is by no means a new thing.

The line of American Negro authors runs back for a hundred and fifty years, back to Phillis Wheatley, the poet. Since Phillis Wheatley there have been several hundred Negro authors who have written books of many kinds. But in all these generations down to within the past six years only seven or eight of the hundreds have ever been heard of by the general American public or even by the specialists in American literature. As many Negro writers have gained recognition by both in the past six years as in all the generations gone before. What has happened is that efforts which have been going on for more than a century are being noticed and appreciated at last, and that this appreciation has served as a stimulus to greater effort and output. America is aware today that there are such things as Negro authors. Several converging forces have been at work to produce this state of mind. Had these forces been at work three decades ago, it is possible that we then should have had a condition similar to the one which now exists.

Now that the Negro author has come into the range of vision of the American public eye, it seems to me only fair to point out some of the difficulties he finds in his way. But I wish to state emphatically that I have no intention of making an apology or asking any special allowances for him; such a plea would at once

disqualify him and void the very recognition he has gained. But the Negro writer does face peculiar difficulties that ought to be taken into account when passing judgment upon him.

It is unnecessary to say that he faces every one of the difficulties common to all that crowd of demon-driven individuals who feel that they must write. But the Aframerican author faces a special problem which the plain American author knows nothing about—the problem of the double audience. It is more than a double audience; it is a divided audience, an audience made up of two elements with differing and often opposite and antagonistic points of view. His audience is always both white America and black America. The moment a Negro writer takes up his pen or sits down to his typewriter he is immediately called upon to solve, consciously or unconsciously, this problem of the double audience. To whom shall he address himself, to his own black group or to white America? Many a Negro writer has fallen down, as it were, between these two stools.

It may be asked why he doesn't just go ahead and write and not bother himself about audiences. That is easier said than done. It is doubtful if anything with meaning can be written unless the writer has some definite audience in mind. His audience may be as far away as the angelic host or the rulers of darkness, but an audience he must have in mind. As soon as he selects his audience he immediately falls, whether he wills it or not, under the laws which govern the influence of the audience upon the artist, laws that operate in every branch of art.

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Now, it is axiomatic that the artist achieves his best when working at his best with the

materials he knows best. And it goes without saying that the material which the Negro as a creative or general writer knows best comes out of the life and experience of the colored people in America. The overwhelming bulk of the best work done by Aframerican writers has some bearing on the Negro and his relations to civilization and society in the United States. Leaving authors, white or black, writing for coteries on special and technical subjects out of the discussion, it is safe to say that the white American author, when he sits down to write, has in mind a white audience—and naturally. The influence of the Negro as a group on his work is infinitesimal if not zero. Even when he talks about the Negro he talks to white people. But with the Aframerican author the case is different. When he attempts to handle his best known material he is thrown upon two, indeed, if it is permissible to say so, upon three horns of a dilemma. He must intentionally or unintentionally choose a black audience or a white audience or a combination of the two; and each of them presents peculiar difficulties.

If the Negro author selects white America as his audience he is bound to run up against many long-standing artistic conceptions about the Negro; against numerous conventions and traditions which through age have become binding; in a word, against a whole row of hard-set stereotypes which are not easily broken up. White America has some firm opinions as to what the Negro is, and consequently some pretty well fixed ideas as to what should be written about him, and how.

What is the Negro in the artistic conception of white America? In the brighter light, he is a simple, indolent, docile, improvident peasant; a singing, dancing, laughing, weeping child; picturesque beside his log cabin and in the snowy fields of cotton; naively charming with his banjo and his songs in the moonlight along the lazy Southern rivers; a faithful, ever-smiling and genufleeting old servitor to the white folks of quality; a pathetic and pitiable figure. In a darker light, he is an impulsive, irrational, passionate savage, reluctantly wearing a thin coat of culture, sullenly hating the white man, but holding an innate and unescapable belief in the white

man's superiority; an everlasting alien and irredeemable element in the nation; a menace to Southern civilization; a threat to Nordic race purity; a figure casting a sinister shadow across the future of the country.

Ninety-nine one-hundredths of all that has been written about the Negro in the United States in three centuries and read with any degree of interest or pleasure by white America has been written in conformity to one or more of these ideas. I am not saying that they do not provide good material for literature; in fact, they make material for poetry and romance and comedy and tragedy of a high order. But I do say they have become stencils, and that the Negro author finds these stencils inadequate for the portrayal and interpretation of Negro life today. Moreover, when he does attempt to make use of them he finds himself impaled upon the second horn of his dilemma.

II

It is known that art—literature in particular, unless it be sheer fantasy—must be based on more or less well established conventions, upon ideas that have some room in the general consciousness, that are at least somewhat familiar to the public mind. It is this that gives it verisimilitude and finality. Even revolutionary literature, if it is to have any convincing power, must start from a basis of conventions, regarding of how unconventional its objective may be. These conventions are changed by slow and gradual processes—except they be changed in a flash. The conventions held by white America regarding the Negro will be changed. Actually they are being changed, but they have not yet sufficiently changed to lessen to any great extent the dilemma of the Negro author.

It would be straining the credulity of white America beyond the breaking point for a Negro writer to put out a novel dealing with the wealthy class of colored people. The idea of Negroes of wealth living in a luxurious manner is still too unfamiliar. Such a story would have to be written in a burlesque vein to make it at all plausible and acceptable. Before Florence Mills

and Josephine Baker implanted a new general idea in the public mind it would have been worse than a waste of time for a Negro author to write for white America the story of a Negro girl who rose in spite of all obstacles, racial and others, to a place of world success and acclaim on the musical revue stage. It would be proof of little less than supreme genius in a Negro poet for him to take one of the tragic characters in American Negro history—say Crispus Attucks or Nat Turner or Denmark Vesey—, put heroic language in his mouth and have white America accept the work as authentic. American Negroes as heroes form no part of white America's concept of the race. Indeed, I question if three out of ten of the white Americans who will read these lines know anything of either Attucks, Turner or Vesey; although each of the three played a rôle in the history of the nation. The Aframerican poet might take an African chief or warrior, set him forth in heroic couplets or blank verse and present him to white America with infinitely greater chance of having his work accepted.

But these limiting conventions held by white America do not constitute the whole difficulty of the Negro author in dealing with a white audience. In addition to these conventions regarding the Negro as a race, white America has certain definite opinions regarding the Negro as an artist, regarding the scope of his efforts. White America has a strong feeling that Negro artists should refrain from making use of white subject matter. I mean by that, subject matter which it feels belongs to the white world. In plain words, white America does not welcome seeing the Negro competing with the white man on what it considers the white man's own ground.

In many white people this feeling is dormant, but brought to the test it flares up, if only faintly. During his first season in this country after his European success a most common criticism of Roland Hayes was provoked by the fact that his programme consisted of groups of English, French, German, and Italian songs, closing always with a group of Negro Spirituals. A remark frequently made was, "Why doesn't he confine himself to the Spirituals?" This in

face of the fact that no tenor on the American concert stage could surpass Hayes in singing French and German songs. The truth is that white America was not quite prepared to relish the sight of a black man in a dress suit singing French and German love songs, and singing them exquisitely. The first reaction was that there was something incongruous about it. It gave a jar to the old conventions and something of a shock to the Nordic superiority complex. The years have not been many since Negro players have dared to interpolate a love duet in a musical show to be witnessed by white people. The representation of romantic love-making by Negroes struck the white audience as somewhat ridiculous; Negroes were supposed to mate in a more primeval manner.

White America has for a long time been annexing and appropriating Negro territory, and is prone to think of every part of the domain it now controls as originally—and aboriginally—its own. One sometimes hears the critics in reviewing a Negro musical show lament the fact that it is so much like white musical shows. But a great deal of this similarity it would be hard to avoid because of the plain fact that two out of the four chief ingredients in the present day white musical show, the music and the dancing, are directly derived from the Negro. These ideas and opinions regarding the scope of artistic effort affect the Negro author, the poet in particular. So whenever an Aframerican writer addresses himself to white America and attempts to break away from or break through these conventions and limitations he makes more than an ordinary demand upon his literary skill and power.

At this point it would appear that a most natural thing for the Negro author to do would be to say, "Damn the white audience!" and devote himself to addressing his own race exclusively. But when he turns from the conventions of white America he runs afoul of the taboos of black America. He has no more absolute freedom to speak as he pleases addressing black America than he has in addressing white America. There are certain phases of life that he dare not touch, certain subjects that he dare not critically discuss, certain manners of treatment

that he dare not use—except at the risk of rousing bitter resentment. It is quite possible for a Negro author to do a piece of work, good from every literary point of view, and at the same time bring down on his head the wrath of the entire colored pulpit and press, and gain among the literate element of his own people the reputation of being the prostitutor of his talent and a betrayer of his race—not by any means a pleasant position to get into.

This state of mind on the part of the colored people may strike white America as stupid and intolerant, but it is not without some justification and not entirely without precedent; the white South on occasion discloses a similar sensitiveness. The colored people of the United States are anomalously situated. They are a segregated and antagonized minority in a very large nation, a minority unremittingly on the defensive. Their faults and failings are exploited to produce exaggerated effects. Consequently, they have a strong feeling against exhibiting to the world anything but their best points. They feel that other groups may afford to do otherwise but, as yet, the Negro cannot. This is not to say that they refuse to listen to criticism of themselves, for they often listen to Negro speakers excoriating the race for its faults and foibles and vices. But these criticisms are not for the printed page. They are not for the ears and eyes of white America.

A curious illustration of this defensive state of mind is found in the Negro theatres. In those wherein Negro players give Negro performances for Negro audiences all of the Negro weaknesses, real and reputed, are burlesqued and ridiculed in the most hilarious manner, and are laughed at and heartily enjoyed. But the presence of a couple of dozen white people would completely change the psychology of the audience, and the players. If some of the performances so much enjoyed by strictly Negro audiences in Negro theatres were put on, say, in a Broadway theatre, a wave of indignation would sweep Aframerica from the avenues of Harlem to the canebrakes of Louisiana. These taboos of black America are as real and binding as the conventions of white America. Conditions may excuse if not warrant them; nevertheless, it

is unfortunate that they exist, for their effect is blighting. In past years they have discouraged in Negro authors the production of everything but *nice* literature; they have operated to hold their work down to literature of the defensive, exculpatory sort. They have a restraining effect at the present time which Negro writers are compelled to reckon with.

This division of audience takes the solid ground from under the feet of the Negro writer and leaves him suspended. Either choice carries hampering and discouraging conditions. The Negro author may please one audience and at the same time rouse the resentment of the other; or he may please the other and totally fail to rouse the interest of the one. The situation, moreover, constantly subjects him to the temptation of posing and posturing for the one audience or the other; and the sincerity and soundness of his work are vitiated whether he poses for white or black.

The dilemma is not made less puzzling by the fact that practically it is an extremely difficult thing for the Negro author in the United States to address himself solely to either of these two audiences. If he analyzes what he writes he will find that on one page black America is his whole or main audience, and on the very next page white America. In fact, psychoanalysis of the Negro authors of the defensive and exculpatory literature, written in strict conformity to the taboos of black America, would reveal that they were unconsciously addressing themselves mainly to white America.

III

I have sometimes thought it would be a way out, that the Negro author would be on surer ground and truer to himself, if he could disregard white America; if he could say to white America, "What I have written, I have written. I hope you'll be interested and like it. If not, I can't help it." But it is impossible for a sane American Negro to write with total disregard for nine tenths of the people of the United States. Situated as his own race is amidst and amongst them, their influence is irresistible.

I judge there is not a single Negro writer who is not, at least secondarily, impelled by the desire to make his work have some effect on the white world for the good of his race. It may be thought that the work of the Negro writer, on account of this last named condition, gains in pointedness what it loses in breadth. Be that as it may, the situation is for the time one in which he is inextricably placed. Of course, the Negro author can try the experiment of putting black America in the orchestra chairs, so to speak, and keeping white America in the gallery, but he is likely at any moment to find his audience shifting places on him, and sometimes without notice.

And now, instead of black America and white America as separate or alternating audiences, what about the combination of the two into one? That, I believe, is the only way out. However, there needs to be more than a combination, there needs to be a fusion. In time, I cannot say how much time, there will come a gradual and natural rapprochement of these two sections of the Negro author's audience. There will come a breaking up and remodeling of most of white America's traditional stereotypes, forced by the advancement of the Negro

in the various phases of our national life. Black America will abolish many of its taboos. A sufficiently large class of colored people will progress enough and become strong enough to render a constantly sensitive and defensive attitude on the part of the race unnecessary and distasteful. In the end, the Negro author will have something close to a common audience, and will be about as free from outside limitations as other writers.

Meanwhile, the making of a common audience out of white and black America presents the Negro author with enough difficulties to constitute a third horn of his dilemma. It is a task that is a very high test for all his skill and abilities, but it can be and has been accomplished. The equipped Negro author working at his best in his best known material can achieve this end; but, standing on his racial foundation, he must fashion something that rises above race, and reaches out to the universal in truth and beauty. And so, when a Negro author does write so as to fuse white and black America into one interested and approving audience he has performed no slight feat, and has most likely done a sound piece of literary work.

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

Negro Authors and White Publishers (1929)

Negro writers, like all writing folks, have many things to complain about. Writers have always felt and many of them have plainly said that the world did not fully appreciate their work. This attitude has seldom been justified. The great or good writers who have not been acknowledged as such by the generation in which they lived are rare. And where such acknowledgment has not been accorded by the generations which touched an author's life, posterity has hardly ever revoked the unfavorable judgment.

Nevertheless, writers have many good reasons for complaining; for their lot is a hard one: And it may be that Negro writers have some special good reasons for complaining; I am not sure that at the present time this is so. However

that may be, there is one complaint that some younger Negro writers are uttering with greater and greater insistence which I do not think is based on the facts and which reacts to the injury of the writers uttering it. This complaint is: that the leading white publishers have set a standard which Negro writers must conform to or go unpublished; that this standard calls only for books depicting the Negro in a manner which tends to degrade him in the eyes of the world; that only books about the so-called lower types of Negroes and lower phases of Negro life find consideration and acceptance.

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primitive classes of Negroes as "lower". At least as literary material, they are higher. They have greater dramatic and artistic potentialities for the writer than the so-called higher classes, who so closely resemble the bourgeois white classes. The vicious and criminal elements—and we must admit that even in our own race there are such elements—are rightly termed "lower," but even they have more accessible dramatic values than the ordinary, respectable middle-class element. It takes nothing less than supreme genius to make middle-class society, black or white, interesting—to say nothing of making it dramatic.

But I am jotting down this brief essay with the prime purpose of pointing out the dangers, especially to young writers, in complaining that publishers refuse to consider their work because it portrays Negro life on too high a level. When a writer begins to say and then believe that the reason why he cannot get published is because his work is *too good* he is in a bad way. This is the way that leads to making a fetish of failure. It is a too easy explanation of the lack of accomplishment. It is this "superior work—sordid publishers—low brow public" complex that gives rise to the numerous small coteries of unsuccessful writers, white as well as colored; the chief function of the members of these coteries being the mutual admiration of each other's unpublished manuscripts. This attitude brings its adherents to a position of pathetic futility or ludicrous superiority.

Within these seven or eight years of literary florescence I doubt that any first class publisher has turned down first rate work by any Negro writer on the ground that it was *not on a low enough level*. Now, suppose we look at the actual facts as shown by the books published in these recent years by leading publishers. Let us first take fiction and list the books depicting Negro life on the "upper" levels or shedding a favorable light on the race that have been published:

There Is Confusion, Jessie Fauset
Fire In the Flint, Walter White
Flight, Walter White
The Prince of Washington Square, Harry F. Liscomb
Quicksand, Nella Larsen

Dark Princess, W.E.B. Du Bois
Plum Bun, Jessie Fauset
Passing, Nella Larsen

Now, those depicting Negro life on the "lower" levels:

Cane, Jean Toomer
Tropic Death, Eric Walrond
Home to Harlem, Claude McKay
Walls of Jericho, Rudolph Fisher
The Blacker the Berry, Wallace Thurman
Banjo, Claude McKay

The score is eight to six—with *Tropic Death*, *Walls of Jericho* and *Cane* on the border line. In non-fiction the "upper-level" literature scores still higher. In that class we have:

A Social History of the American Negro,
 Benjamin Brawley
Negro Folk Rhymes, Thomas W. Talley
The Book of American Negro Poetry,
 Ed. James Weldon Johnson
The New Negro, Ed. Alain Locke
The Book of American Negro Spirituals,
 Ed. James Weldon Johnson
*The Second Book of American Negro
Spirituals*, Ed. James Weldon Johnson
Color, Countée Cullen
Caroling Dusk, Ed. Countée Cullen
Darkwater, W.E.B. Du Bois
Gift of Black Folk, W.E.B. Du Bois
Plays of Negro Life, Ed. Locke and Gregory
God's Trombones, James Weldon Johnson
Copper Sun, Countée Cullen
Negro Labor in the United States,
 Charles H. Wesley
*A Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and
America*, Monroe N. Work
What the Negro Thinks, R.R. Moton
Rope and Faggot, Walter White
An Autumn Love Cycle, Georgia Douglas
 Johnson

In the other column, in non-fiction, we have only:

The Weary Blues, Langston Hughes
Fine Clothes to the Jew, Langston Hughes

And it must be said that although Mr. Hughes shows a predilection for singing the

"lower" and "humbler" classes of Negroes, these two volumes contain many poems that are highly inspirational.

In non-fiction the score is nineteen to two. I do not see how any one who looks at these figures can fail to see that the complaint against

the publishers is not in consonance with the facts. I believe that Negro writers who have something worth while to say and the power and skill to say it have as fair a chance today of being published as any other writers.

STERLING A. BROWN

Our Literary Audience (1930)

We have heard in recent years a great deal about the Negro artist. We have heard excoriations from the one side, and flattery from the other. In some instances we have heard valuable honest criticism. One vital determinant of the Negro artist's achievement or mediocrity has not been so much discussed. I refer to the Negro artist's audience, within his own group. About this audience a great deal might be said.

I submit for consideration this statement, probably no startling discovery: that those who might be, who should be a fit audience for the Negro artist are, taken by and large, fundamentally out of sympathy with his aims and his genuine development.

I am holding no brief for any writer, or any coterie of writers, or any racial credo. I have as yet, no logs to roll, and no brickbats to heave. I have however a deep concern with the development of a literature worthy of our past, and of our destiny; without which literature certainly, we can never come to much. I have a deep concern with the development of an audience worthy of such a literature.

"Without great audiences we cannot have great poets." Whitman's trenchant commentary needs stressing today, universally. But particularly do we as a racial group need it? There is a great harm that we can do our incipient literature. With a few noteworthy exceptions, we are doing that harm, most effectually. It is hardly because of malice; it has its natural causes; but it is nonetheless destructive.

We are not a reading folk (present company of course forever excepted). There are reasons,

of course, but even with those considered, it remains true that we do not read nearly so much as we should. I imagine our magazine editors and our authors if they chose, could bear this out. A young friend, on a book-selling project, filling in questionnaires on the reason why people did not buy books, wrote down often, with a touch of malice—"Too much bridge." Her questionnaires are scientific with a vengeance.

When we do condescend to read books about Negroes, we seem to read in order to confute. These are sample ejaculations: "*But we're not all like that.*" "*Why does he show such a level of society?*" "*We have better Negroes than that to write about.*" "*What effect will this have on the opinions of white people?*" (Alas, for the ofay, forever ensconced in the lumber yard!) . . . "*More dialect. Negroes don't use dialect anymore.*" Or if that sin is too patent against the Holy Ghost of Truth—"Negroes of my class don't use dialect anyway." (Which *mought* be so, and then again, which *moughn't*.)

Our criticism is vitiated therefore in many ways. Certain fallacies I have detected within at least the last six years are these:

We look upon Negro books regardless of the author's intention, as representative of all Negroes, i.e., as sociological documents.
We insist that Negro books must be idealistic, optimistic tracts for race advertisement.

We are afraid of truth telling, of satire.
We criticize from the point of view of bourgeois America, of racial apologists.

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In this division there are, of course, overlappings. Moreover all of these fallacies might be attributed to a single cause, such as an apologetic chip on the shoulder attitude, imposed by circumstance; an arising snobbishness; a delayed Victorianism; or a following of the wrong lead. Whatever may be the primary impulse, the fact remains that if these standards of criticism are perpetuated, and our authors are forced to heed them, we thereby dwarf their stature as interpreters.

One of the most chronic complaints concerns this matter of Representativeness. An author, to these sufferers, never intends to show a man who happens to be a Negro, but rather to make a blanket charge against the race. The syllogism follows: Mr. A. shows a Negro who steals; he means by this that all Negroes steal; all Negroes do not steal; Q.E.D. Mr. A. is a liar, and his book is another libel on the race.

For instance, *Emperor Jones* is considered as sociology rather than drama; as a study of the superstition, and bestiality, and charlatany of the group, rather than as a brilliant study of a hard-boiled pragmatist, far more "American" and "African," and a better man in courage, and resourcefulness than those ranged in opposition to him. To the charge that I have misunderstood the symbolism of Brutus Jones' visions, let me submit that superstition is a human heritage, not peculiar to the Negro, and that the beat of the tom-tom, as heard even in a metropolitan theatre, can be a terrifying experience to many regardless of race, if we are to believe testimonies. But no, O'Neill is "showing us the Negro race," not a shrewd Pullman Porter, who had for a space, a run of luck. By the same token, is Smithers a picture of the white race? If so, O'Neill is definitely propagandizing against the Caucasian. O'Neill must be an East Indian.

All God's Chillun Got Wings is a tract, say critics of this stamp, against intermarriage; a proof of the inferiority of the Negro (why he even uses the word Nigger!!! when he could have said Nubian or Ethiopian!); a libel stating that Negro law students all wish to marry white prostitutes. (The word prostitute by the way, is cast around rather loosely, with a careless respect for the Dictionary, as will be seen later.)

This for as humane an observation of the wreck that prejudice can bring to two poor children, who whatever their frailties, certainly deserve no such disaster!

This is not intended for any defense of O'Neill, who stands in no need of any weak defense I might urge. It is to show to what absurdity we may sink in our determination to consider anything said of Negroes as a wholesale indictment or exaltation of all Negroes. We are as bad as Schuyler says many of "our white folks" are; we can't admit that there are individuals in the group, or at least we can't believe that men of genius whether white or colored can see those individuals.

Of course, one knows the reason for much of this. Books galore have been written, still are written with a definite inclusive thesis, purposing generally to discredit us. We have seen so much of the razor toting, gin guzzling, chicken stealing Negro; or the pompous walking dictionary spouting malapropisms; we have heard so much of "learned" tomes, establishing our characteristics, "appropriateness," short memory for joys and griefs, imitativeness, and general inferiority. We are certainly fed up.

This has been so much our experience that by now it seems we should be able to distinguish between individual and race portraiture, i.e., between literature on the one hand and pseudoscience and propaganda on the other. These last we have with us always. From Dixon's melodramas down to Roark Bradford's funny stories, from Thomas Nelson Page's "Ole Virginny retainers" to Bowyer Campbell's *Black Sadie* the list is long and notorious. One doesn't wish to underestimate this prejudice. It is ubiquitous and dangerous. When it raises its head it is up to us to strike, and strike hard. But when it doesn't exist, there is no need of tilting at windmills.

In some cases the author's design to deal with the entire race is explicit, as in Vachel Lindsay's *The Congo*, subtitled "A Study of the Negro Race"; in other cases, implicit. But an effort at understanding the work should enable us to detect whether his aim is to show one of ours, or all of us (in the latter case, whatever his freedom from bias, doomed to failure). We have

had such practice that we should be rather able at this detection.

We have had so much practice that we are thin-skinned. Anybody would be. And it is natural that when pictures of us were almost entirely concerned with making us out to be either brutes or docile housedogs, i.e., infrahuman, we should have replied by making ourselves out superhuman. It is natural that we should insist that the pendulum be swung back to its other extreme. Life and letters follow the law of the pendulum. Yet, for the lover of the truth, neither extreme is desirable. And now, if we are coming of age, the truth should be our major concern.

This is not a disagreement with the apologetic belief in propaganda. Propaganda must be counter checked by propaganda. But let it be found where it should be found, in books explicitly propagandistic, in our newspapers, which perhaps must balance white playing up of crime with our own playing up of achievement; in the teaching of our youth that there is a great deal in our racial heritage of which we may be justly proud. Even so, it must be artistic, based on truth, not on exaggeration.

Propaganda, however legitimate, can speak no louder than the truth. Such a cause as ours needs no dressing up. The honest, unvarnished truth, presented as it is, is plea enough for us, in the unbiased courts of mankind. But such courts do not exist? Then what avails thumping the tub? Will that call them into being? Let the truth speak. There has never been a better persuader.

Since we need truthful delineation, let us not add every artist whose picture of us may not be flattering to our long list of traducers. We stand in no need today of such a defense mechanism. If a white audience today needs assurance that we are not all thievish or cowardly or vicious, it is composed of half wits, and can never be convinced anyway. Certainly we can never expect to justify ourselves by heated denials of charges which perhaps have not even been suggested in the work we are denouncing.

To take a comparison at random. Ellen Glasgow has two recent novels on the Virginia gentry. In one she shows an aging aristocrat, a

self-appointed lady killer, egocentric, slightly ridiculous. In another she shows three lovely ladies who stooped to "folly." It would be a rash commentator who would say that Ellen Glasgow, unflinching observer though she is, means these pictures to be understood as ensemble pictures of all white Virginians. But the same kind of logic that some of us use on our books would go farther; it would make these books discussions of *all* white Americans.

Such reasoning would be certainly more ingenious than intelligent.

The best rejoinder to the fuming criticism "But all Negroes aren't like that" should be "Well, what of it. Who said so?" or better, "Why bring that up?" . . . But if alas we must go out of our group for authority, let this be said, "All Frenchwomen aren't like Emma Bovary but *Madame Bovary* is a great book; all Russians aren't like Vronsky, but *Anna Karenina* is a great book; all Norwegians aren't like Oswald but *Ghosts* is a great play." Books about us may not be true of all of us; but that has nothing to do with their worth.

As a corollary to the charge that certain books "aiming at representativeness" have missed their mark, comes the demand that our books must show our "best." Those who criticize thus, want literature to be "idealistic"; to show them what we should be like, or more probably, what we should like to be. There's a great difference. It is sadly significant also, that by "best" Negroes, these idealists mean generally the upper reaches of society; i.e., those with money.

Porgy, because it deals with Catfish Row is a poor book for this audience; *Green Thursday*, dealing with cornfield rustics, is a poor book; the *Walls of Jericho* where it deals with a piano mover, is a poor book. In proportion as a book deals with our "better" class it is a better book.

According to this scale of values, a book about a Negro and a mule would be, because of the mule, a better book than one about a muleless Negro; about a Negro and a horse and buggy a better book than about the mule owner; about a Negro and a Ford, better than about the buggy rider; and a book about a Negro and a Rolls Royce better than one about a Negro and a Ford. All that it seems our writers need to do,

to guarantee a perfect book and deathless reputation is to write about a Negro and an aeroplane. Unfortunately, this economic hierarchy does not hold in literature. It would rule out most of the Noble prize winners.

Now Porgy in his goat cart, Kildee at his ploughing, Shine in a Harlem poolroom may not be as valuable members of the body economic and politic as "more financial" brethren. (Of course, the point is debatable.) But that books about them are less interesting, less truthful, and less meritorious as works of art, is an unwarranted assumption.

Some of us look upon this prevailing treatment of the lowly Negro as a concerted attack upon us. But an even cursory examination of modern literature would reveal that the major authors everywhere have dealt and are dealing with the lowly. A random ten, coming to mind, are Masefield, Hardy, Galsworthy in England; Synge and Joyce in Ireland; Hamsun in Norway; O'Neill, Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway in America. Not to go back to Burns, Crabbe, Wordsworth. The dominance of the lowly as subject matter is a natural concomitant to the progress of democracy.

This does not mean that our books must deal with the plantation or lowly Negro. Each artist to his taste. Assuredly let a writer deal with that to which he can best give convincing embodiment and significant interpretation. To insist otherwise is to hamper the artist, and to add to the stereotyping which has unfortunately, been too apparent in books about us. To demand on the other hand that our books exclude treatment of any character other than the "successful" Negro is a death warrant to literature.

Linked with this is the distaste for dialect. This was manifested in our much earlier thrice told denial of the spirituals. James Weldon Johnson aptly calls this "Second Generation Respectability."

Mr. Johnson is likewise responsible for a very acute criticism of dialect, from a literary point of view, rather than from that of "respectability." Now much of what he said was deserved. From Lowell's *Bigelow Papers* through the local colorists, dialect, for all of its rather eminent

practitioners, has been a bit too consciously "*quaint*" too *condescending*. Even in Maristan Chapman's studies in Tennessee mountaineers there is a hint of "outlandishness" being shown for its novelty, not for its universality.

Negro dialect, however, as recorded by the most talented of our observers today, such as Julia Peterkin, Howard Odum, and Langston Hughes, has shown itself capable of much more than the "limited two stops, pathos and humor." Of course, Akers and Octavus Roy Cohen still clown, and show us Negroes who never were, on land or sea, and unreconstructed Southrons show us the pathetic old mammy weeping over vanished antebellum glories. But when we attack these, we do not attack the medium of expression. The fault is not with the material. If Daniel Webster Davis can see in the Negro "peasant" only a comic feeder on hog meat and greens, the fault is in Davis' vision, not in his subject.

Lines like these transcend humor and pathos:

"I told dem people if you was to come home cold an' stiff in a box, I could look at you same as a stranger an' not a water wouldn' drean out my eye."

Or this:

"Death, ain't yuh got no shame?"

Or this:

"Life for me ain't been no crystal stair."

Or:

"She walked down the track, an' she never looked back."

I'm goin' whah John Henry fell dead."

Julia Peterkin, Heyward, the many other honest artists have shown us what is to be seen, if we have eyes and can use them.

There is nothing "degraded" about dialect. Dialectical peculiarities are universal. There is something about Negro dialect, in the idiom, the turn of the phrase, the music of the vowels and consonants that is worth treasuring.

Are we to descend to the level of the lady who wanted "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" metamorphosed into "Descend, welcome vehicle,

approaching for the purpose of conveying me to my residence?"

Those who are used only to the evasions and reticences of Victorian books, or of Hollywood(!) (i.e., the products of Hollywood, not the city as it actually is) are or pretend to be shocked by the frankness of modern books on the Negro. That the "low" rather than the "lowly" may often be shown; that there is pornography I do not doubt. But that every book showing frankly aspects of life is thereby salacious, I do stoutly deny. More than this, the notions that white authors show only the worst in Negro life and the best in theirs; that Negro authors show the worst to sell out to whites, are silly, and reveal woeful ignorance about modern literature.

Mamba and Hagar are libellous portraits say some; *Scarlet Sister Mary* is a showing up of a "prostitute" say others. "Our womanhood is defamed." Nay, rather, our intelligence is defamed, by urging such nonsense. For these who must have glittering falsifications of life, the movie houses exist in great plenty.

The moving picture, with its enforced happy ending, may account for our distaste for tragedy; with its idylls of the leisure class, may account for our distaste for Negro portraiture in the theatre. Maybe a shrinking optimism causes this. Whatever the reason, we do not want to see Negro plays. Our youngsters, with some Little Theatre Movements the honorable exceptions, want to be English dukes and duchesses, and wear tuxedos and evening gowns. Our "best" society leaders want to be mannequins.

Especially taboo is tragedy. Into these tragedies, such as *In Abraham's Bosom* we read all kinds of fantastic lessons. "Intended to show that the Negro never wins out, but always loses." "Intended to impress upon us the futility of effort on our part." Some dramatic "critics" say in substance that the only value of plays like *Porgy*, or *In Abraham's Bosom* is that they give our actors parts. "Worthwhile," "elevating" shows do not get a chance. They are pleading, one has reason to suspect, for musical comedy which may have scenes in cabarets, and wouldn't be confined to Catfish Row. With beautiful girls in gorgeous "costumes," rather than Negroes in more but tattered clothing.

"These plays are depressing," say some. Alas, the most depressing thing is such criticism. Should one insist that *In Abraham's Bosom* is invigorating, inspiring; showing a man's heroic struggle against great odds, showing the finest virtue a man can show in the face of harsh realities,—enduring courage; should one insist upon that, he would belong to a very small minority, condemned as treasonous. We seem to forget that for the Negro to be conceived as a tragic figure is a great advance in American Literature. The aristocratic concept of the lowly as clowns is not so far back. That the tragedy of this "clown" meets sympathetic reception is a step forward in race relations.

I sincerely hope that I have not been crashing in open doors. I realize that there are many readers who do not fit into the audience I have attempted to depict. But these exceptions seem to me to fortify the rule. There are wise leaders who are attempting to combat supersensitive criticism. The remarks I have seen so much danger in are not generally written. But they are prevalent and powerful.

One hopes that they come more from a misunderstanding of what literature should be, than from a more harmful source. But from many indications it seems that one very dangerous state of mind produces them. It may be named—lack of mental bravery. It may be considered as a cowardly denial of our own.

It seems to acute observers that many of us, who have leisure for reading are ashamed of being Negroes. This shame makes us harsher to the shortcomings of some perhaps not so fortunate economically. There seems to be among us a more fundamental lack of sympathy with the Negro farthest down, than there is in other groups with the same Negro.

To recapitulate. It is admitted that some books about us are definite propaganda; that in the books about us, the great diversity of our life has not been shown (which should not be surprising when we consider how recent is this movement toward realistic portraiture), that dramas about the Negro character are even yet few and far between. It is insisted that these books should be judged as works of literature; i.e., by their fidelity to the truth of their

particular characters, not as representative pictures of all Negroes; that they should not be judged at all by the level of society shown, not at all as good or bad according to the "morality" of the characters; should not be judged as propaganda when there is no evidence, explicit or implicit, that propaganda was intended. Furthermore those who go to literature as an entertaining building up of dream worlds, purely for idle amusement, should not pass judgment at all on books which aim at fidelity to truth.

One doesn't wish to be pontifical about this matter of truth. "What is truth, asked Pontius Pilate, and would not stay for an answer." The answer would have been difficult. But it surely is not presumptuous for a Negro, in twentieth century America, to say that showing the world in idealistic rose colors is not fidelity to truth. We have got to look at our times and at ourselves searchingly and honestly; surely there is nothing of the farfetched in that injunction.

But we are reluctant about heeding this injunction. We resent what doesn't flatter us. One young man, Allison Davis, who spoke courageously and capably his honest observation about our life has been the target of second rate attacks ever since. George Schuyler's letter bag seems to fill up whenever he states that even the slightest something may be rotten on Beale Street or Seventh Avenue. Because of their candor, Langston Hughes and Jean Toomer, humane, fine grained artists both of them, have been received in a manner that should shame us. This is natural, perhaps, but unfortunate. Says J. S. Collis in a book about Bernard Shaw, "The Irish cannot bear criticism; for like all races who have been oppressed they are still *without mental bravery*. They are afraid to see themselves exposed to what they imagine to be adverse criticism. . . . But the future of Ireland largely depends upon *how much she is prepared to listen to criticism* and how far she is capable of preserving peace between able men." These last words are worthy of our deepest attention.

We are cowed. We have become typically bourgeois. Natural though such an evolution is, if we are *all* content with evasion of life, with personal complacency, we as a group are doomed. If we pass by on the other side, despising our

brothers, we have no right to call ourselves men.

Crime, squalor, ugliness there are in abundance in our Catfish Rows, in our Memphis dives, in our Southwest Washington. But rushing away from them surely isn't the way to change them. And if we refuse to pay them any attention, through unwillingness to be depressed, we shall eventually, be dragged down to their level. We, or our children. And that is true "depression."

But there is more to lowness than "lowness." If we have eyes to see, and willingness to see, we might be able to find in Mamba, an astute heroism, in Hagar a heartbreakin courage, in Porgy, a nobility, and in E.C.L. Adams' Scrip and Tad, a shrewd, philosophical irony. And all of these qualities we need, just now, to see in our group.

Because perhaps we are not so far from these characters, being identified racially with them, at least, we are revolted by Porgy's crapshooting, by Hagar's drinking, by Scarlet Sister Mary's scarletness. We want to get as far away as the end of the world. We do not see that Porgy's crapshooting is of the same fabric, fundamentally, psychologically, as a society lady's bridge playing. And upon honest investigation it conceivably might be found that it is not moral lapses that offend, so much as the showing of them, and most of all, the fact that the characters belong to a low stratum of society. Economically low, that is. No stratum has monopoly on other "lowness."

If one is concerned only with the matter of morality he could possibly remember that there is no literature which is not proud of books that treat of characters no better "morally" than Crown's Bess and Scarlet Sister Mary. But what mature audience would judge a book by the morality of its protagonist? Is *Rollo* a greater book than *Tom Jones* or even than *Tom Sawyer*?

Negro artists have enough to contend with in getting a hearing, in isolation, in the peculiar problems that beset all artists, in the mastery of form and in the understanding of life. It would be no less disastrous to demand of them that they shall evade truth, that they shall present us a Pollyanna philosophy of life, that, to suit our

prejudices, they shall lie. It would mean that as self-respecting artists they could no longer exist.

The question might be asked, why should they exist? Such a question deserves no reply. It

merely serves to bring us, alas, to the point at which I started.

Without great audiences we cannot have great literature.

CLAUDE McKAY

A Negro Writer to His Critics (1932)

When the work of a Negro writer wins recognition it creates two widely separate bodies of opinion, one easily recognizable by the average reader as general and the other limited to Negroes and therefore racial.

Although this racial opinion may seem negligible to the general reader, it is a formidable thing to the Negro writer. He may pretend to ignore it without really succeeding or being able to escape its influence, for very likely he has his social contacts with the class of Negroes who create and express this opinion in their conversation and through the hundreds of weekly Negro newspapers and the monthly magazines.

This peculiar racial opinion constitutes a kind of censorship of what is printed about the Negro. No doubt it had its origin in the laudable efforts of intelligent Negro groups to protect their race from the slander of its detractors after Emancipation, and grew until it crystallized into racial consciousness. The pity is that these leaders of racial opinion should also be in the position of sole arbiters of intellectual and artistic things within the Negro world. For although they may be excellent persons worthy of all respect and eminently right in their purpose, they often do not distinguish between the task of propaganda and the work of art.

I myself have lived a great deal in the atmosphere of this opinion in America, in sympathy with and in contact with leaders and groups expressing it and am aware of their limitations.

A Negro writer feeling the urge to write faithfully about the people he knows from real experience and impartial observation is caught in a dilemma (unless he possesses a very strong sense of aesthetic values) between the opinion

of this group and his own artistic conscientiousness. I have read pages upon pages of denunciation of young Negro poets and storytellers who were trying to grasp and render the significance of the background, the fundamental rhythm of Aframerican life. But not a line of critical encouragement for the artistic exploitation of the homely things—of Maundy's wash tub, Aunt Jemima's white folks, Miss Ann's old clothes for work-and-wages, George's Yessah-boss, dining car and Pullman services, barber and shoe shine shop, chittling and corn pone joints—all the lowly, things that go to the formation of the Aframerican soil in which the best, the most pretentious of Aframerican society still has its roots.

My own experience has been amazing. Before I published "Home to Harlem" I was known to the Negro public as the writer of the hortatory poem, "If We Must Die." This poem was written during the time of the Chicago race riots. I was then a train waiter in the service of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Our dining car was running between New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Harrisburg and Washington, and I remember we waiters and cooks carried revolvers in secret and always kept together, going from our quarters to the railroad yards, as a precaution against a sudden attack.

The poem was an outgrowth of the intense emotional experience I was living through (no doubt with thousands of other Negroes) in those days. It appeared in the radical magazine *The Liberator*, and was widely reprinted in the Negro press. Later it was included in my book of poetry, *Harlem Shadows*. At the time I was writing a great deal of lyric poetry and none of

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I myself have lived a great deal in the atmosphere of this opinion in America, in sympathy with and in contact with leaders and groups expressing it and am aware of their limitations.

A Negro writer feeling the urge to write faithfully about the people he knows from real experience and impartial observation is caught in a dilemma (unless he possesses a very strong sense of aesthetic values) between the opinion

of this group and his own artistic conscientiousness. I have read pages upon pages of denunciation of young Negro poets and storytellers who were trying to grasp and render the significance of the background, the fundamental rhythm of Aframerican life. But not a line of critical encouragement for the artistic exploitation of the homely things—of Maundy's wash tub, Aunt Jemima's white folks, Miss Ann's old clothes for work-and-wages, George's Yessah-boss, dining car and Pullman services, barber and shoe shine shop, chittling and corn pone joints—all the lowly, things that go to the formation of the Aframerican soil in which the best, the most pretentious of Aframerican society still has its roots.

My own experience has been amazing. Before I published "Home to Harlem" I was known to the Negro public as the writer of the hortatory poem, "If We Must Die." This poem was written during the time of the Chicago race riots. I was then a train waiter in the service of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Our dining car was running between New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Harrisburg and Washington, and I remember we waiters and cooks carried revolvers in secret and always kept together, going from our quarters to the railroad yards, as a precaution against a sudden attack.

The poem was an outgrowth of the intense emotional experience I was living through (no doubt with thousands of other Negroes) in those days. It appeared in the radical magazine *The Liberator*, and was widely reprinted in the Negro press. Later it was included in my book of poetry, *Harlem Shadows*. At the time I was writing a great deal of lyric poetry and none of

my colleagues on *The Liberator* considered me a propaganda poet who could reel off revolutionary poetry like an automatic machine cutting fixed patterns. If we were a rebel group because we had faith that human life might be richer, by the same token we believed in the highest standards of creative work.

"If We Must Die" immediately won popularity among Aframericanics, but the tone of the Negro critics was apologetic. To them a poem that voiced the deep-rooted instinct of self-preservation seemed merely a daring piece of impertinence. The dean of Negro critics denounced me as a "violent and angry propagandist, using his natural poetic gifts to clothe angry and defiant thoughts." A young disciple characterized me as "rebellious and vituperative."

Thus it seems that respectable Negro opinion and criticism are not ready for artistic or other iconoclasm in Negroes. Between them they would emasculate the colored literary aspirant. Because Aframerican group life is possible only on a neutral and negative level our critics are apparently under the delusion that an Aframerican literature and art may be created out of evasion and insincerity.

They seem afraid of the revelation of bitterness in Negro life. But it may as well be owned, and frankly by those who know the inside and heart of Negro life, that the Negro, and especially the American, has bitterness in him in spite of his joyous exterior. And the more educated he is in these times the more he is likely to have.

The spirituals and the blues were not created out of sweet deceit. There is so much sublimated bitterness in them as there is humility, pathos and bewilderment. And if the Negro is a little bitter, the white man should be the last person in the world to accuse him of bitterness. For the feeling of bitterness is a natural part of the black man's birthright as the feeling of superiority is of the white man's. It matters not so much that one has had an experience of bitterness but rather how one has developed out of it. To ask the Negro to render up his bitterness is asking him to part with his soul. For out of his bitterness he has bloomed and created his spirituals and blues and conserved his racial

attributes—his humor and ripe laughter and particular rhythm of life.

However, with the publication of *Home to Harlem* the Aframerican elite realized that there was another side to me and changed their tune accordingly. If my poetry had been too daring, my prose was too dirty. The first had alarmed, the second had gassed them. And as soon as they recovered from the last shock, they did not bite their tongues in damning me as a hog rooting in Harlem, a buzzard hovering over the Black Belt scouting for carcasses and altogether a filthy beast.

If my brethren had taken the trouble to look a little into my obscure life they would have discovered that years before I had captured the spirit of the Jamaica peasants in verse, rendering their primitive joys, their loves and hates, their work and play, their dialect. And what I did in prose for Harlem was very similar to what I had done for Jamaica in verse.

The colored elite thought that if animal joy and sin and sorrow and dirt existed in the Belt as they did in ghettos, slums, tenderloins and such like places all over the world, they had no place in literature, and therefore my book was a deliberate slander against Aframerica. From being too much of a rebel I was now a traitor who should be suppressed . . .

Here I may well protest publicly that my affection for Aframerica is profound. During my first couple of years in the states as a student I had a real admiration for the many colored students I came to know and the refined colored society I was introduced into at Tuskegee, Manhattan (Kansas), Kansas City, Wichits, Denver, and later for the smart set of musicians and theatrical persons I met in New York.

But it was not until I was forced down among the rough body of the great serving class of Negroes that I got to know my Aframerica. I was perhaps then at the most impressionable adult age and the warm contact with my workmates, boys and girls, their spontaneous ways of acting on and living for the moment, the physical and sensuous delights, the loose freedom in contrast to the definite peasant pattern by which I had been raised—all served to feed the riotous sentiments smoldering in me and cut me finally

adrift from the fixed moorings my mind had been led to respect, but to which my heart had never held. During the first years among these Negroes my only object in working was to possess the means to live as they did. I forgot poetry.

I did not grow up in the fear of skeletons in the closet whether they were family, national or racial, sacred cows and the washing of dirty clothes in public. And I have often wondered why many subjects that seemed to me most beautiful and suitable for literature and by which art might have done better than society—subjects that intellectual persons of both sexes discuss over the dinner table and in the salon and that people in the street gossip about, should be publicly shocking in print and taboo in art.

What does it matter that the superior class of Negroes are all aware of the existence of the Jakes and Strawberry Lips and Billy Blasses, the Congo Roses, Susies, and Madam Lauras of the race; that they sometimes get up round robins for the white landlord to put them out of the nice Black Belt streets when they flaunt themselves too boldly in the face of Colored Respectability. The best Negroes will gossip and joke about such people in their drawing rooms, but as soon as they are captured as characters between the covers of a book and made to live in black and white, these same people set up a howl of protest, and all their organs from the littlest newspaper in Alabama to the heaviest magazine in New York burst forth in denunciation of the writer as a traitor to his race.

Their idea is that Negroes in literature and art should be decorous and decorative. These nice Negroes think that the white public, reading about the doings of the common Negroes, will judge them by the same standards. I should be the last person to defend the intelligence of any public simply because it reads. However, the whites may know more about the blacks on the inside than the blacks think. Who knows that there may not be a potential writer among the young men of the vice squads doing the Belts who is making careful use of his eyes and ears while chasing a job? Or that there may not be an intellectual among the white bohemians

who are privileged guests at exclusive Negro speakeasies and in the homes of the colored smart sets? . . . Negro apprentices to the craft of writing may be quite raw in dealing with the material to their hand, but their work will have that authentic ring of one who has lived familiarly and freely in the atmosphere of his creation. And if they sin a little on the side of crude realism—why, no people more than a suppressed minority needs self-criticism to save itself from the miserable soul-stifling pit of self-pity. If aspiring Negro writers are made afraid and artistically inarticulate from fear and pressure within their own circles, the truth may come from without, perhaps in unpleasant and inartistic form.

On the “broader” side (literally at least) my work has been approached by some discriminating critics as if I were a primitive savage and altogether a stranger to civilization. Perhaps I myself unconsciously gave that impression. However, I should not think it was unnatural for a man to have a predilection for a civilization or culture other than that he was born unto. Whatever may be the criticism implied in my writing of Western civilization I do not regard myself as a stranger but as a child of it, even though I may have become so by the comparatively recent process of grafting. I am as conscious of my new-world birthright as of my African origin, being aware of the one and its significance in my development as much as I feel the other emotionally.

One of my most considerate critics suggested that I might make a trip to Africa and there write about Negro life in its pure state. But I don’t believe that any such place exists anywhere upon the earth today, since modern civilization has touched and stirred the remotest corners. I cherish no Utopian Illusions about any state of human society. Poets may dream, but dreams are ferment of the stuff of experience. The poet of a subject people may sing for the day of deliverance without being afflicted by fanciful visions of any society of people in which the eternal problems of existence would not still exist. A Negro poet living in a purely Negro community would automatically become free of the special problems of race

and color, of foreign arrogance insisting upon an aristocracy of color or stock and that a man of parts was inferior because the group of people he belonged to was suppressed by brute power.

But I can see no reason why an Aframerican intellectual should go to any part of Africa to undertake an experiment in living unless he felt irresistibly forced to do so. Negroland Africa will produce in time its own modern poets and artists peculiar to its soil. The Aframerican may gain spiritual benefits by returning *in spirit* to his African origin, but as an artist he will remain a unique product of Western civilization, with something of himself to give that will be very different from anything that may come out of a purely African community.

I don't know if I ever suggested the superiority of pure-black over pure-white virtues, although I will confess that I do prefer virtues that are colorful to the sepulchral kinds. Some sympathetic critics have rebuked me for making my black drifters finer than the white, when I thought I was being specially impartial. I may have sinned in my book *Banjo* by being too photographic, too much under the fetid atmosphere of the bottoms of Marseffles.

But there was factually a remarkable difference between the attitude of the white and the black drifters. Most of the black, and especially the Aframericans, were virtually taking a holiday away from the United States—a country where they had less freedom of movement and contact with white people than in Europe. They could return when they wanted to but preferred to exist as they could on the beach because Europe was new-found land to them.

But the whites were Europeans who had been rounded up in America to be dumped upon the shores from which they had been trying to escape. Some of them came from unimaginably poor and austere regions, others from countries ruled by dictatorships under which they dreaded to return and had been mercifully set down upon the more hospitable shores of Provence. One sees at once why these men were despondent and lacking in the irresponsible holiday spirit of the blacks.

From all this I should say that we are all floundering in a mass of race, color, national consciousness, and all the correlative consciousness. Besides, many of us who are trying to see and live tolerantly and temperately are worried by a guilty conscience, white and colored. In spite of our professions we become very self-conscious and rather uneasy as soon as we open a book in which there are white and colored characters in action or in conflict. We are prone to put too much stress on the identity of the characters, having an automatic reaction to them not just as people but rather as types representative of our separate divisions. And we are quick to pounce upon exaggerated types that we think were presented with bias, forgetting that bias may be in our own minds. But as one finds this trait even among the great major groups of people who own and inherit the earth—to a despairing extent to any one who puts the artistic record of life above patriotism and prejudice—it may be forgiven among the poor minorities, especially the colored, who often find it rubbed into them that their state is due to their lack of "white" virtues.

In a tale some characters will almost always be finer than others. One may have the highest ideals of human brotherhood, but the fact under our ideals is that humanity is actually divided into races and nations and classes. And individuals do bear the marks of their special group.

A sincere artist can present characters only as they seem to him, and he *will* see characters through his predilections and prejudices, unless he sets himself deliberately to present those cinema-type figures that are produced to offend no unit of persons whose protest may involve financial loss. The time when a writer will stick only to the safe old ground of his own class of people is undoubtedly passing. Especially in America, where all the peoples of the world are scrambling side by side and modern machines and the ramifications of international commerce are steadily breaking down the ethnological barriers that separate the peoples of the world.

EUGENE C. HOLMES

Problems Facing the Negro Writer Today (1937)

The problems of the Negro writer, whether he wills it or no, are bound up with the fight against fascism and the protection of the cultural rights of minority groups. This will be denied in strong terms by those individualistic writers who will proclaim their insulation as well as by those leftist writers whose pleasure it is to yawp that an American fascism and European fascism would never be of anywhere near the same ingredients. There are a few Negro and white writers today who have experienced the nearness of such a menace, those whose imaginations do not stretch in pondering over its eventuality. Langston Hughes, who was chased out of Carmel and forbidden to read his poems in Los Angeles, and Sterling Brown, who knows the terror of the lynch-ridden South, would not be sanguine about the exemption of the Negro writer under an American fascism. There should not be much necessity for an answer to those who refuse to admit the nearness of this menace. The evidence is so alarmingly omnipresent. But there is a necessity in making the Negro writer see that his place is on the side of those who are in the anti-fascist struggle. That is why Negro writers do have obligations, along with white writers, not only for the protection of their craft, but also in defense of the culture fascism will seek to destroy.

There has been a scarcity of literary output by Negro writers in the last year or two. This is true of those whose fiction and verse has pursued a militant and class conscious position, and as one would expect it to be, of the world-weary, our-burden-is-hard school. The reasons for this scarcity are hard to find. There have been only three novels by Negroes of any scope, Arna Bontemps' *Black Thunder*, George Lee's *River George*, and O'Wendell Shaw's *Greater Need Below*. The verse of Richard Wright, Sterling Brown, Frank Davis, Owen Dodson, and Langston Hughes has appeared only sporadically.

Claude McKay has rewarded us with his autobiography, *A Long Way From Home*. There have been a few plays produced by the Federal Theatre Project in New York. A number of novels by white writers have appeared which have Negro themes, but only four of them would be worth considering: James Saxon Childer's *A Novel about a Black Man and a White Man in the Deep South*, Hamilton Basso's *Courthouse Square*, Lyle Saxon's *Children of Strangers*, and America's favorite, *Gone With the Wind*. It is not our specific intention to make any critical analysis of all of these works. Our purpose will be to show by examples what part this literature has played and can play in the struggle going around us.

Gone With the Wind, for example, illustrates a lesson which should have significance. In this poorly constructed novel there is the nostalgic yearning for the days of the old South. There is the parading of all of the old stereotypes, the portraiture of the Negro as rapist and thief, as contented and loyal, all of which endeared the book to a certain section of the American reading public. Childers' novel, if anything, is intensely and sincerely written. In this novel he describes the dangerous friendship which existed between an educated white man and an educated black man who had been in the same university in the North. But when the author allows himself a sociological chapter on Harlem, he delivers himself of the following:

Harlem was neither handmade nor born of a military domination inspired by commercial need; instead Harlem is a longing, a craving, a part answer and a prophecy . . . Harlem is very incidentally a place where black orchestras drain white pocketbooks at a cover charge of two dollars and a half a person, where tan and sinuous hips writhe for white excitation . . . (it is) a unique

racial verve born of the individual and fostered by the group which disappears at the approach of a white man and remains in hiding behind the most punctilious courtesy, or, among the lower social and intellectual classes, parades its racial distrusts and animosities in scowls and mutterings . . . until today Harlem is owned by Negroes, property valued at one hundred million dollars is today owned by Negroes in Harlem.

Now most of this is hasty generalization and faulty reasoning, while the last sentence has almost no truth. It is this sort of thing which brings sharp criticism, for it is this setting forth of harmful generalizations which foster the stereotyping so characteristic of American literature.

Bontemps has done an extremely valuable and pioneering job in his historical novel, *Black Thunder*. He has delved into the revolutionary traditions of the Negro people, extracted from them the story of the heroic struggles of Gabriel, and limned this glowing tale into an unforgettable account of folk courage. In doing this he has not only enriched the field of the Negro novel, but he has shown Negroes themselves that they were worthy subjects for depiction rather than for the purply romancing which has been their literary lot for so long. In this true story of one of the major slave insurrections, Bontemps has added to the contemporary historical novel. He might have painted Gabriel more convincingly, as a product of the forces of the time rather than in terms of only personal action. The essential thing is that the story has been told. A new field has been opened and it is writing of this kind which will reflect the true traditions of an oppressed people, give that people a more correct view of itself as a folk, and add to that culture writers should be called upon to defend.

In both Shaw's and Lee's novels, there are sincere attempts to get away from the conventional themes and to expose in their pages other serried sides of Negro life. Shaw is successful in drawing away the veils that have enshrouded

the average Negro college community in the South. He shows the close connection between the business and local interests and the State control, the inordinate power of the financial administrators, the Uncle Tomism of certain types, the reasons for the sectional prejudices among Negroes, the almost hopeless terror that exists, and many other hitherto undisclosed characteristics of the southern Negro college community. But Shaw goes completely haywire in his solutions. A gamut of crackpot and utopian schemes are suggested. And in the end the heroine's mother becomes extremely wealthy from the manufacture of hair preparations and endows a school of Negro business for the hero. Lee, whose *Beale Street* attracted a deal of attention last year, knows his South. Had Lee stuck to portraying one locale, say the sharecropping country he seems to know so well, he might have been more successful. Describing, rather, college life, sharecroppers' huts, Beale Street, the waterfront, and a half dozen other locales, in this case makes too complicated a melange and lessens the novel's effectiveness. His depiction of the sharecroppers' and waterfront workers' struggles is realistic enough, but the characters never seem to be real. The picture is too many-sided. Lee defeats his purpose in employing too many pencils at one time. Much in both novels can and will serve socially valuable purposes. Their drawbacks serve as lessons, the results of which supply a needed clarification of the American scene.

Now the poetry, though not as fulsome or prolific, has become more mature and less anaemic. Cliches and archaisms are rapidly disappearing. The work of Brown, Wright, Dodson, and Davis, gains in stature as it does in content. These poets seem to be imbued with the notion that they are creating for something, for the literature of a people. When Brown writes of sharecroppers, and Dodson of Negro history in sonnet sequences, and Hughes of steelworkers, and Wright of we of the streets, and Davis of Ethiopia, there is noticeable a consciousness and aim that is an advance over the ideological content of these poets two years ago. It is specially noteworthy that the poets who have

something to say have found it necessary to forego the old themes if they are going to write of Negro life in newer terms. This does not mean that Negro poets must write only about Negro themes. They will write what they please and about what they know best. But it does mean that if the field of Negro poetry is to be oriented and revitalized, and if it is to keep pace with the progressive currents in American literature, it must gear its sails accordingly. No one has prescribed what these poets write. They are writing what they feel and know about people and the life around them, and that is the essence of great literature.

One might think that the Negro writer, with his special problems as a member of the most exploited of minority groups, and knowing what has been the tragic fate of minority groups under fascism, would be among the first to take up the cudgels in the defense of the rights of the exploited minorities. His problems as a writer are really special. The Negro writer is always running into the wall of American prejudice and discrimination, into the obsequiousness of publishers' offices, into social ostracism when he kicks over the hurdles of his community, and into the glaring problem of making a living as a writer. But the problems of Negro writers and their seeming apathy and slow awakening to the realities of decadent capitalism and war-mad imperialism has a deeper basis.

This basis is founded upon the class origins and background of these Negro writers, who, strangely enough, are among the least class conscious of minority groups. The most important reason for this is their too recent emergence as a class into the arena of a middle-class civilization. It was not a new class, it was hybrid, for it was swathed in the economics of the proletariat, but imbued, naturally enough, with the American-dream desires of the middle classes. That is why so many of them, who thought they were graduated from the class they had learned to despise, found it so easy to don the garb of the dominant culture and imitate its tinsel patterns. This has been true of most of our writers who succumbed too easily into the slough and glitter of prevailing convention.

Fortunately, the scene is changing. And not only because there are a few more writers who do have working class backgrounds, but also because others have been made cryingly aware of the emptiness of bourgeois shibboleths. They have witnessed the rape of Ethiopia and the destruction of Guernica. They have been made increasingly aware of the degradation and anarchy in capitalist culture. It is to these writers and their friends that additional appeals are made. We cannot prescribe what it is that these writers can do. One thing, however, is certain. They can be conscious of the different ways in which they can translate the dangers we have been mentioning to the Negro people. One thing they can guard against: they must not write of their locality, of Reeltown or of State Street, as Childers writes of Harlem. They can apply their scalpels to the obscure class alignments and class divisions of these sections, for by doing this they will help a great deal in rescuing those living human forces, so potential as reservoirs for actions.

I think that it is logically inescapable, from all that we have said here, that it is never possible for us to separate the creative work of an artist from his philosophy or his consciousness. It is equally obvious that the economic basis of society is reflected in artistic creation through the political views of the artist and the class to which he belongs, and through the morals and conceptions of justice the writer holds. That is why the consciousness is active in the material production he undertakes. And because it is active, the work of art he produces should reflect the epoch, the movement of social forces, the struggle of classes, the political motives, the hopes and fears of his own people. There should be no objections from sincere writers who are anti-fascist, and who are anxious to defend culture, to wanting to see their work considered as products of the social, intellectual and emotional activity of man. Such writers will possess more of a resolve and desire to respect historical truth and detail. They will realize that they are playing an active part in the world in which they live, and above all they will be contributing to that very culture which

they should pledge themselves to defend. These, then, are minimal obligations and tasks which face the Negro writer. They prove, I think, that there are some things in this world which require not only dogmatic assertion, but also categorical imperatives. If these writers want

to live in a favorable climate, if they want to breathe air in a free and democratic society, if they want to preserve the amenities of their craft, there is only one path open for them, and that is enlistment in the fight against war and fascism.

WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE

Some Contemporary Poets of the Negro Race (1919)

The present revival of poetry in America could scarcely advance without carrying in its wake the impulse and practice of a poetic consciousness in the Negro race.

While we have no traditions in the art, we have a rich and precious tradition in the substance of poetry: vision, intense emotionalism, spiritual and mystical affinities, with both abstract and concrete experience, and a subtle natural sense of rhythmic values. All these are essential folk-qualities, primal virtues in the expression of impassioned experience, whether festive or ceremonial, in all the indigenous folk-literatures of the world. But when a race advances from primitive life and customs, or when the divisions of a particular race become sharply differentiated by learning and culture, and intercourse with other peoples with modes of culture more perfect in certain respects affects them, there is produced a standard of form in written and oral speech that becomes a characteristic of class co-racial consciousness. This standard becomes the medium of literary expression in which taste is the vital essence, and is opposed by the "vulgar tongue" of the "people" in which the vigorous and imaginative folk-ballads are recited, the communal chants of traditional custom and ritual dramatized, and national songs sung.

The survival of the vulgar tongue in modern times, where the influence of formal and conventional civilization has penetrated among primitive communities, is in dialect, the attempt of the invaded, enslaved, and suppressed peoples to imitate phonetically the speech of the dominant class or race. Dialect is, thus, not the corruption of the folk or tribal language, of the Frankish invaders of Gaul, of the Anglo-Saxon conquest of ancient Britain, of the absorption of the African savages—who may be likened in every tribal respect to the Franks, Angles, and Saxons—by America, but of the language of the Latins, the Britons, and the English.

Dialect may be employed as the *langue d'oc* of Frédéric Mistral's Provençal poems, as a preserved tongue, the only adequate medium of rendering the psychology of character, and of describing the background of the people whose lives and experience are kept within the environment where the dialect survives as the universal speech; or it may be employed as a special mark of emphasis upon the peculiar characteristic and temperamental traits of a people whose action and experiences are given in contact and relationship with a dominant language, and are set in a literary fabric of which they are but one strand of many in the weaving.

I have gone to some length in the foregoing because the matter is of vital importance to those who regard the future of the Negro in American literature. It holds, too, I think, the explanation of that gap which exists between the mysterious and anonymous period of the "Sorrow Songs"—vivid, intense poetry of a suffering, but eternally confident folk—and the advent of Paul Laurence Dunbar. The Negro poet, as such, can be said to have inherited no poetic traditions which would make him a binational artist: that is to say, he had no precursors sufficient in numbers and of decided genius, the substance of whose song was racial, while the expression was national—the glorious and perfect instrument of English poetic art, which we know as the common possession of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Swinburne, Browning, Longfellow, Poe, and Lowell.

This gap I postulate as a silent transition to a new order of imaginative and emotional racial utterance. Remember that here was a race of many tribes, members of which amounting to hundreds of thousands were stolen from their native homes, from their immemorial customs and traditions, which in many instances have been proven to be the traits of a highly organized primitive culture and social code, and forcibly

held in a captivity that suppressed every virtue but work and every ideal but obedience. The struggle through two centuries under this unchristian suppression was toward the acquisition of a new language which in all its unfamiliar and tortuous meanings had to be learned through the auditory sense, as the invaluable aids of reading and writing were denied; and it is little wonder that the earliest and latest folk utterance of these people was the collective yearning of sorrow, impassioned and symbolic, addressed to the one benign spirit their masters taught them from whom to seek love and mercy in a mystical hereafter as a compensation for their miserable existence on earth. It was the poetry of an ancient race passing through the throes of an enforced re-birth into the epoch of an alien and dominating civilization.

When it sought voice in Paul Laurence Dunbar, it did so with old memories and impulses; it was the finale, in a rather conscious manner, of centuries of spiritual isolation, of a detached brooding and yearning for self-realization in the universal human scale, and in a childish gaiety in eating the fruits of a freedom so suddenly possessed and difficult to realize. Dunbar was the end of a régime, and not the beginning of a tradition, as most careless critics, both white and colored, seem to think. But his niche is secure because he made the effort to express himself, and clothe his material artistically; though he never ventured into the abstract intricacies and wrung from the elements of rhythmic principles the subtle and most haunting forms of expression. His work reflected chiefly the life of the Negro during the era of Reconstruction and just a little beyond, when the race was emerging from the illusion of freedom to the hard and bitter reality of how much ground still remained to be dishearteningly but persistently fought for before a moral and spiritual liberty, as well as a complete political freedom and social fraternity, was attained. When Mr. Howells said that Dunbar was the first poet of his race to express and interpret the life of his people lyrically, he told only a half-truth; what survives and attracts us in the poetry of Dunbar is the life of the Negro in the limited experience of a

transitional period, the rather helpless and still subservient era of testing freedom and adjusting in the mass a new condition of relationship to the social, economic, civil and spiritual fabric of American civilization. Behind all this was an awakening impulse, a burning and brooding aspiration, creeping like a smothered fire through the consciousness of the race, which broke occasionally in Dunbar as through the crevices of his spirit—notably the sonnet “Robert Gould Shaw,” the “Ode to Ethiopia,” and a few other poems—but which he did not have the deep and indignant and impassioned vision, or the subtle and enchanting art to sustain.

Such a poet we did have in substance, though he chose to express himself in the rhythms of impassioned prose rather than the more restricted and formal rhythm of verse. But the fact is as solid as the earth itself, that Dr. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* began a poetic tradition. This book has more profoundly affected the spiritual nature of the race than any other ever written in this country; and has more clearly revealed to the nation at large the true idealism and high aspiration of the American Negro; and the intellectual mind of the country accepted it as the humanistic doctrine by which on terms of equal economic, political and social endeavor the Negro was to work out his destiny as an American citizen—sharing pound for pound the weight of responsibility, enjoying the same indivisible measure of privilege in the American democracy.

It is only through the intense, passionate, spiritual idealism of such substance as makes *The Souls of Black Folk* such a quivering rhapsody of wrongs endured and hopes to be fulfilled that the poets of the race with compelling artistry can lift the Negro into the only full and complete nationalism he knows—that of the American democracy. “There is no difference between men,” declared G. Lowes Dickinson, the English Platonist; “wealth, position, race or nationality, make no difference between men: it is only the growth of the soul.” And the poets of a race give expression and reality to the soul of a people through whose eternal laws no unnatural impediments of injustices or wrongs can keep from ascendancy to the highest fulfillment

and the fullest participation in ideal and eternal privileges of life.

I am not one who believes that a Negro writer of verse—or of fiction, for that matter—must think, feel, or write racially to be a great artist; nor can he be distinctively labeled by the material he uses. This is a fallacy too often expressed by critics to confirm the desired hypothesis that the Negro is humanly different in the scale of mankind, that even after some centuries of civilizing process in America he is still nearer in his most cultivated class to the instincts of his ancestral forebears than any other of the conglomerate races who compose the citizenry of the Republic. In every race and nation there are primitives who retain the impulses of barbarism, more evident and prevalent among peoples of the Teutonic stock than among those of the Latin stock. But the Negro has absorbed in his advanced class, just as in the advanced class of any other people, the culture of the best civilizations in the world today, and in his imaginative and artistic expression he is universal. What I said about embodying racial aspirations and material does not alter this fact. All great artists are interracial and international in rendering in the medium of any particular art the fundamental passions and the primary instincts of humanity.

The promise of this I seem to detect in the spiritual voice of the Negro becoming articulate in the poets who are beginning to emerge from the background of the people. They are springing up around us everywhere, and it is the profound duty of the race to encourage and support them. There is power and beauty in this pristine utterance—wood notes wild that have scarcely yet been heard beyond the forest of their own dreams. But if we will cherish these with a responsive audience, one day, and not very long hence, we shall have a great chorus of these singers to glorify our souls and the soul of America.

These notes do not include all the poets who have published books within recent years; they are intended rather to indicate tendencies, which I regard as more important for the moment, and illustrated by the examples of representative work printed during the past year.

Thus, such writers as the late James D. Corruthers, Edward Smyth Jones, George Reginald Margetson, and others, do not fall within the scope of this paper. Nor do these writers quite reach the artistic development of those I deal with: neither does Mr. Fenton Johnson, a young man already the author of three volumes, and whose recent work shows a rapid and steady progress. This question of equipment, of a thorough grounding in the technical elements of the science of versification, is the greatest handicap to the progress of many contemporary writers of verse. It is the hard and laborious task of mastering the subtle and fluctuating rhythms of verse that the average individual tries to escape which produces such a mass of mediocre work, often choking and wasting the substance of a passionate and imaginative poetic spirit. It is difficult to impress upon such individuals that they must serve a jealous and consecrated apprenticeship to this divine mistress, and that ambition is but a humble offering upon the altar of her sacred mystical religion.

There are, however, three books recently published, which show not only a distinctive poetic quality, but also an artistic adequacy of expression and which promise the fulfillment of the Negro in poetry I have so confidently predicted for the future. Besides these books, I have in the past year come across single poems in the magazines by unknown writers confirming more specifically the rapid development of the higher poetic qualities that are manifesting themselves in the Negro. These latter I will deal with first, because they represent what I hope most to see accomplished; because they are the proofs of my contention that poets of the race may deal with a rich and original vein of racial material and give it the highest forms of creative literary expression, which neither differentiates the author from the artist in general nor tolerates for a moment the false psychology of that gratuitous, separate standard by which white critics are prone to judge the works of Negro authors.

The most significant accomplishments among these recent poems are two sonnets signed by "Eli Edwards" which appeared in *The Seven Arts* for last October. "Eli Edwards,"

I understand, is the pseudonym of Claude McKay, who lives in New York City, choosing to conceal his identity as a poet from the associates among whom he works for his daily bread. His story as it is, which I had from Mr. Oppenheim, who accepted his poems when editor of *The Seven Arts*, is full of alluring interest, and may one day be vividly featured as a topic of historic literary importance. For he may well be the keystone of the new movement in racial poetic achievement. Let me quote one of the sonnets:

The Harlem Dancer

Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes
 And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
 Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
 Blown by black players upon a picnic day.
 She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,
 The light gauze hanging loose about her form;
 To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm
 Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
 Upon her swarthy neck black, shiny curls Profusely fell; and, tossing coins in praise,
 The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls,
 Devoured her with their eager, passionate gaze;
 But, looking at her falsely-smiling face I knew her self was not in that strange place.

Here, indeed, is the genuine gift—a vision that evokes from the confusing details of experience and brings into the picture the image in all its completeness of outline and its gradation of color, and rendered with that precise surety of form possessed by the resourceful artist. The power in this poet is, I think, his ability to reproduce a hectic scene of reality with all the solid accessories, as in "The Harlem Dancer," and yet make it float as it were upon a background of

illusion through which comes piercing the glowing sense of a spiritual mystery. Note the exalted close of Mr. Edwards's riotous picture of the dancer when

... looking at her falsely-smiling face,
 I knew her self was not in that strange place—

he translates the significance of the intoxicated figure with its sensuous contagion into something ultimate behind the "falsely-smiling face," where "her self"—be it the innocent memory of childhood, perhaps of some pursuing dream of a brief happiness in love, or a far-away country home which her corybantic earnings secure in peace and comfort for the aged days of her parents—is inviolably wrapped in the innocence and beauty of her dreams. This sonnet differs in both visionary and artistic power from anything so far produced by the poets of the race. The visual quality here possessed is extraordinary; not only does Mr. Edwards evoke his images with a clear and decisive imagination, but he throws at the same time upon the object the rich and warm colors of his emotional sympathies.

Another poem of last year is by a young man, Roscoe C. Jamison. His "Negro Soldiers," first published in *The Crisis* for September 1917, is undeniably the finest contribution in verse to the Negro's participation in the war. In such a brief compass the poet has focused the heart-burning predicament of a many-millioned people, and yet unfalteringly he points the inevitable self-sacrificing way, fervently believing that it will not be in vain. And underneath it all is a current of exaltation in that allusion to the crucified Christ which makes these people the victors in the anguish of their treatment. Though it was first printed in this magazine, and many times reprinted since, I shall quote it here, because it cannot be too often read and cherished:

These truly are the Brave,
 These men who cast aside
 Old memories, to walk the blood-stained
 pave
 Of Sacrifice, joining the solemn tide

That moves away, to suffer and to die
 For Freedom—when their own is yet
 denied!

O Pride! O Prejudice! When they pass by,
 Hail them, the Brave, for you now crucified!
 These truly are the Free,
 These souls that grandly rise
 Above base dreams of vengeance for their
 wrongs,
 Who march to war with visions in their eyes
 Of Peace through Brotherhood, lifting glad
 songs
 Aforetime, while they front the firing-line.
 Stand and behold! They take the field today,
 Shedding their blood like Him now held
 divine,
 That those who mock might find a better
 way!

Need a race despair which possesses a voice
 of flame and dew like that—a voice, too, that
 has in it the solacing and uplifting strains of
 confident tomorrows?

This young man had a future of immense
 possibilities. Unfortunately he has died since
 this appreciation was written.

In Georgia Douglas Johnson we have the
 foremost woman poet of the race, a writer whose
 lyrics have some of that flame-like intensity and
 delicate music which makes Christina Rossetti
 the foremost woman poet of England. But I do
 not mean, and I do not wish it to be under-
 stood, that I limit her horizons when I charac-
 terize her as the foremost woman poet of the
 race. She expands beyond into the universal,
 and as the title of her volume, "The Heart of a
 Woman," indicates, she renders and interprets
 the mysterious and inexplicable secrets of fem-
 ininity. The key that unlocks her dreams, her
 unique sensibility, to revealing those shadowy
 and passionate depths which lie in a woman's
 heart, seems to mould itself out of the abstrac-
 tion of this mood in "Contemplation":

We stand mute!
 No words can paint such fragile imagery,
 Those prismatic gossamers that roll
 Beyond the sky-line of the soul;
 We stand mute!

The soul of this sex, playing for so many cen-
 turies the role of Lady Shalott, has at last re-
 fused to take the world reflected through a mir-
 ror; she will look with her own eyes through the
 window of experience down upon the many-
 towered Camelot; the shattered mirror has
 brought her face to face with reality. That is
 why, perhaps, that women—before they gained
 the defiant courage of the new art with the
 Freudian psychology of erotic motorism—made
 most of the frail, pensive songs of the world.
 Whether in religion or love, or in the descrip-
 tive rendering of nature, they always extracted
 the substance to which clung the mist of tears.
 Not always the tears of despair, but tears of joy
 and exultation as well. This exquisite quality
 gives a charming atmosphere to Mrs. Johnson's
 lyrics.

There is in Mrs. Johnson the pure poetic
 temperament, burning, quivering, thrilling,
 through the subjective lyric emotion into deli-
 cately textured and colored speech. Through
 these lyrics the whole scale of a woman's heart
 is sounded, and as if a little tired with so much
 giving, and so much like a woman, too, when
 she has lavished her soul upon life, she folds in
 the end her little dreams up in her heart:

I'm folding up my little dreams
 Within my heart to-night,
 And praying I may soon forget
 The torture of their sight.

For Time's deft fingers scroll my brow
 With fell relentless art—
 I'm folding up my little dreams
 To-night, within my heart!

In Mr. Waverley Turner Carmichael's "The
 Heart of a Folk" we have a spontaneous singer
 who has written the raciest and most indige-
 nous dialect verse since Dunbar. His gift is nat-
 ural and unforced; humor and pathos blend-
 ing with instinctive utterance throughout his
 work. His volume contains a number of pieces
 that can come under no other classification than
 that of the "Spirituals" of the ante-bellum
 Negro; he has accomplished the rare thing of
 reproducing both the haunting rhythm and
 the fervid imagery of the "Sorrow Songs," to a

degree I did not think possible today. They are not exactly the same, but they come so close to the original impulse and expression that they might easily deceive one unacquainted with the inexplicable modulations of the genuine product. Here is a sample:

Keep me, Jesus, keep me;
Keep me 'neath Thy Mighty Wing,
Keep me, Jesus, keep me;
Help me praise Thy Holy Name,
Keep me, Jesus, keep me.
O my Lamb, come my Lamb,
O my good Lamb,
Save me, Jesus, save me.

Here is a poet who might restore something of that peculiar artlessness of praise and longing of the ante-bellum Negro and thus preserve a lingering echo of that tradition—if he returns from the furnace of war whither he has gone to help make safe his country for the democracy that wrung such bitter anguish out of his forebears.

Looked at in every way the foremost poet of the race today is Mr. James Weldon Johnson, whose *Fifty Years and Other Poems* has recently been published. Certainly Mr. Johnson has proven himself more versatile than his brother-poets, and he has been able to define certain characteristics in his verse more broadly based upon experience. He is also more ably equipped to bend his material to the specific purpose in hand, so that there is no indefinite vagueness in his work. He has rather a full-bodied instead of a subtle music, and his emotions, enraptured as they are, never wander incoherently out of control. He brings, too, a wealth of ideas into his poems, and presents them with that finality which sometimes makes you gasp at their audacity, and at others submit to the chastisements of truth. As Professor Brander Matthews remarks

in his Introduction to Mr. Johnson's poems, he shows himself a

pioneer in the half-dozen larger and bolder poems, of a loftier strain, in which he has been nobly successful in expressing the higher aspirations of his own people. It is in uttering this cry for recognition, for sympathy, for understanding, and above all for justice, that Mr. Johnson is most original and most powerful. In the superb and soaring stanzas of *Fifty Years* (published exactly half a century after the signing of the Emancipation proclamation) he has given us one of the noblest commemorative poems yet written by any American—a poem sonorous in its diction, vigorous in its workmanship, elevated in its imagination and sincere in its emotion. In it speaks the voice of his race; and the race is fortunate in its spokesman. In it a fine theme has been finely treated. In it we are made to see something of the soul of the people who are our fellow-citizens now and forever—even if we do not always so regard them. In it we are glad to acclaim a poem which any living poet might be proud to call his own.

Mr. Johnson's poems are so much better known, most of them having originally appeared in the leading magazines of the country, than those of the other poets treated in this paper, that I shall not lengthen the already overlengthened space allowed me. And I wish, too, I might comment on Mr. Benjamin Brawley's fine ballad, "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus," and the verses of Jessie Fauset, which I have noticed in the magazines from time to time as having a certain wistful note of their own. Both these poets, I trust, will soon give us a collection of their poems, and thus give me the pleasure of writing about them.

CHARLES EATON BURCH

Dunbar's Poetry in Literary English (1921)

If Paul Laurence Dunbar is to continue to have a place in American literature, it seems to be fairly well agreed that it is to be accorded to him largely because of his poetry written in the Negro dialect. While such a statement is true in the main, it does not define the range of his work. His poetry in literary English has sufficient merit to warrant attention and study; and no survey of his poetry can be considered complete which totally ignores his English verse. As a student in the high school he attracted the attention of his teachers, not because of his poems in the Negro dialect, but because he exhibited rare signs of promise in the production of English lyric poetry. The student of his biography will recall that before he made any serious efforts in the Negro dialect, his verse occasioned the favorable comment of such men as James Whitcomb Riley, James Herne, Dr. James Ridpath, and Colonel Robert Ingersoll.

A few admirers of the poet's work have endeavored to establish the fact that his English verse is "pregnant with a depth of thought." To many, however, the application of this view to the greater portion of his poetry is too sweeping. It is only for a very small part of his verse in literary English that such a claim can be made. For Dunbar's lack of broad literary training prevented him from accomplishing any sustained flights in the established media of the language. That he felt the need of a broader training for his life-work, may be seen in his efforts to enter college. There is some "depth of thought" in these lines:—

Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes,
Which all the day with ceaseless care have sought
The magic gold which from the seeker flies;
Ere dreams put on the gown and cap of thought,

And make the waking world a world of lies—
Of lies most palpable, uncouth, forlorn,
That say life's full of aches and tears and sighs—
Oh, how with more than dreams the soul is torn,
Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes. . . .
Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes,
How questioneth the soul that other soul—
The inner sense which neither cheats nor lies,
But self exposes unto self, a scroll Full writ with all life's acts unwise or wise,
In characters indelible and known;
So, trembling with the shock of sad surprise,
The soul doth view its awful self alone,
Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes.

"The Mystery" and "The Dirge" may also be included in this small group of selections. These three or four gems are worthy of the greatest masters. Such is the type of poetry produced on a much larger scale by some of our great literary spirits.

Paul Dunbar was at home in dealing with rollicking humor. His dialect poems show him at his best in this field. However, his English humorous verse is interesting. One might with some justice claim that in dealing with Negro plantation life he was furnished with a wealth of humorous material. But since he had no such help in his English humorous verse, we are forced to conclude that he was of an essentially humorous nature. "At Cheshire Cheese" is indicative of what he was capable of doing at times.

When first of wise old Johnson taught,
My youthful mind its homage brought,

And made the pond'rous, crusty sage
The object of a noble rage.

Nor did I think (How dense we are!)
That any day, however far,
Would find me holding, unrepelled,
The place that Doctor Johnson held!

But change has come and time has moved,
And now, applauded, unreproved,
I hold, with pardonable pride,
The place that Johnson occupied.

Conceit! Presumption! What is this?
You surely read my words amiss;
Like Johnson I—a man of mind!
How could you ever be so blind?

No. At the ancient "Cheshire Cheese,"
Blown hither by some vagrant breeze,
To dignify my shallow wit
In Doctor Johnson's seat I sit.

Our author was on his own ground when he turned to genuine pathos. His way was not strewn with roses. The few years of domestic happiness were soon overshadowed by the loss of companionship of the one who had exerted a real influence on his life and work. And when we add to this misfortune an enfeebled body it is not difficult to account for a portion of this poetry of pathos. However, there is a danger of over-stressing the influence of these circumstances on his poetry. For many poems of this character were written before these forces began to operate in his life. Among the many poems of this character his "Ships That Pass in the Night" is perhaps his best effort. It is truly a modest contribution to the world's literature of pathos.

Out in the sky the great dark clouds are
massing;
I look far out into the pregnant night,
Where I can hear the solemn booming gun
And catch the gleaming of a random light,
That tells me that the ship I seek is passing,
passing.

My tearful eyes, my soul's deep hurt are
glassing;
For I would hail and check that ship of ships.
I stretch my hands imploring, cry aloud,

My voice falls dead a foot from mine own
lips,
And but its ghost doth reach that vessel
passing, passing.

O Earth, O Sky, O Ocean, both surpassing,
O heart of mine, O soul that dreads the dark!
Is there no hope for me? Is there no way
That I may sight and check that speeding
bark
Which out of sight and sound is passing,
passing.

Dunbar had a true appreciation for the beauty of external nature. In our day when the poetry of nature has come into its own and can claim some of the world's greatest poets, there is a tendency to overlook the nature poetry of some of the lesser lights. The critics are perhaps justified in claiming that in many instances modern nature poetry is too often a repetition of what has been so well done by earlier writers. Yet a new note is often heard. And if it cannot be called a new note, there is a freshness in the portrayal of a familiar native scene, a new turn of phrase, a depth of imaginative power displayed, that challenge the attention of the student of poetry. Dunbar, in this English verse, seldom sounded any new notes; his nature poetry generally follows the paths so well begun in the latter half of the eighteenth century. That he was capable of writing the poetry of the commonplace in nature may be determined from his treatment of Southern plantation life in his dialect poetry. Yet a few nature poems in literary English are worth mentioning. There is a touch of nature in "The Poet and His Song."

.....
And when at eve I long for rest;
When cows come home along the bars,
And in the fold I hear the bell,
As Night, the shepherd, herds his stars,
I sing my song, and all is well.

.....
My days are never days of ease;
I till my ground and prune my trees.
When ripened gold is all the plain,
I put my sickle to the grain.
I labor hard, and toil and sweat,

While others dream within the dell;
But even while my brow is wet,
I sing my song, and all is well.

"The Drowsy Day" is full of suggestions of the gloomy mood of nature:—

The air is dark, the sky is gray,
The misty shadows come and go,
And here within my dusky room
Each chair looks ghastly in the gloom,
Outside the rain falls cold and slow—
Half stinging drops, half blinding spray.

The following is an example of more poetical language:—

I look far out across the lawn
Where huddled stand the silly sheep.

"The Sailor's Song" breathes something of the rugged yet fascinating life of the ocean:—

O for the breath of the briny deep,
And the tug of a bellying sail,
With the seagull's cry across the sky
And a passing boatman's hail.
For be she fierce or be she gay
The sea is a famous friend always,
And a fight at night with a wild sea sprite
Ho! for the plains where the dolphins play
And the bend of the masts and spars,
When the foam has drowned the stars.
And, pray, what joy can the landsman feel,
Like the rise and fall of a sliding keel?

To Paul Dunbar is often accorded the title of poet laureate of the Negro race. This high-sounding term is, however, only suggestive. Dunbar was not only the first American Negro to gain a fairly large degree of recognition for his work in creative literature, he was also the first to give a true lyrical expression of the life of the Negro of the plantation. In examining his verse in literary English, one discovers the Dunbar who is proud of the struggles and aspirations of the "New Negro," just as truly as his

dialect poetry reveals his sympathy with the lowly life of his people. He never allows any of the larger happenings of his people to pass unnoticed. Often he is found paying a tribute to the departed Negro who has labored in behalf of his people; at times he exults in the victories of the colored soldiers of America, or proudly raises a song in honor of his race. "The Ode to Ethiopia" is perhaps better known among the masses of the colored people of America than any other one of his English poems. Colored children in many sections of the country often can be heard reciting:—

Oh Mother race! To thee I bring
This pledge of faith unwavering,
This tribute to thy glory.
I know the pangs which thou didst feel,
When Slavery crushed thee with its heel,
With thy dear blood all gory.

.....

On every hand in this fair land,
Proud Ethiope's swarthy children stand
Beside their fairer neighbor;
The forests flee before their stroke,
Their hammers ring, their forges smoke,
They stir in honest labor.

.....

Go on and up! our souls and eyes
Shall follow thy continuous rise;
Our ears shall list thy story
From bards who from thy root shall
spring
And proudly tune their lyres to sing
Of Ethiopia's glory.

Dunbar did not produce any great poems in literary English; however, he did add a few charming poems to the native literature. His was not the role of the great master with the mighty line. But his simple lay is so full of melody, so full of heart, that the lover of literature often leaves the major poet to spend many pleasant moments with him.

JOHN EDWARD BRUCE

The Negro in Poetry (1923)

Cicero relates that the ugliest and most stupid slaves in Rome came from England, and he urges his friend Atticus not to purchase slaves from Britain because of their stupidity and inaptitude to learn music and other accomplishments.

With Caesar's opinion of the ancestors of the race which now dominates a goodly portion of the earth we are—most of us—somewhat familiar. He describes the Briton generally as a nation of very barbarous manners. "Most of the people of the interior," he says, "never sow corn, but live upon milk and flesh and are clothed with skins." In other words, he observes: "In their domestic and social habits the Britons are as degraded as the most savage nations and they are clothed with skins, wear the hair of their heads unshaven and long, but shave the rest of their bodies except the upper lip, and stain themselves a blue color with wood, which gives them a horrible aspect in battle." Yet these barbarous, degraded and repulsive looking people have given to the world some of the most eminent and erudite scholars and poets of which any nation can boast. Indeed there is no department of learning in which Englishmen have not excelled and, in many instances, been the pioneers in all advanced thought. In the drama, in the arts, in science and in poetry English scholarship has kept pace with the onward steady march of civilization, and the genius and profound knowledge of her great scholars have commanded the respect and the admiration of intellectual men the world over. Chaucer, Spenser, John Gower, Minot Caxton, Tom Moore, Tyndale, Thomas Cranmer, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Robert Henryson, George Buchanan, Sir Phillip Sydney, Richard Hooker, Thomas Jacksonville, William Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, Ben Johnson, Lord Byron, Southey, Wordsworth, Locke, Coleridge, and a host of others quite as brilliant and immortal have splendidly vindicated the Britons from the charge of barbarism and stupidity and have immortalized

their names and their country's name and fame for all time to come.

Well, now, if people so degraded, so stupid, so horrible to look upon as were these early Britons could rise superior to their conditions and mount the heights of learning and scholarship, may we not assume that other races, notably the darker races, one of which, the African race, gave to the early Greeks and Romans the arts and sciences, letters, government, and religion, may be born again by scholarship and rise on stepping-stones of its dead self to higher things?

It is my purpose at this time to tell you of some early Negro poets. I shall not class them with the great poets of Europe and America, whose names are household words, for we must remember that while Negroes have written and are still writing some really clever and creditable verse they have not had time to produce, according to modern standards, a really great poet. The signs of promise, however, are encouraging if the few selections I shall presently quote, culled from some of the brightest minds of the past and of the present generation, may be accepted as an augury of the future of the Negro poet.

You are to remember that I am dealing now with the American Negro poet.

It was said of Terence, the African poet, that his dramatic works were much admired by the Romans for their prudential maxims and moral sentences, and compared with his contemporaries he was much in advance of them in point of style. The African, Haitian, Arabian, Brazilian, Puerto Rican, and Cuban poets of Negro stock do not suffer by comparison with those of any other race. No article or essay dealing with Negro poets would be complete without some reference to that dainty little African maiden, Miss Phillis Wheatley, who more than one hundred years ago achieved the great distinction and honor of being the first of her sex in this country to write and publish a book of poems. Equally interesting to some of my readers, perhaps, will

be the statement that the first male in this country to mount Pegasus and ride to lofty heights was a Negro slave, Jupiter Hammon, the property of one Lloyd of Queens Village, L.I., in this state, who made his bow in the local paper at that place in December 1760, in a broadside entitled "An Evening Thought." In 1778 he wrote an address in verse to Miss Wheatley of twenty-one verses, welcoming her to the fold and lauding her gifts in fulsome phrases. Most of my readers are familiar with the poems of Miss Phillis Wheatley, but I will quote a few stanzas from one of them, "The Providence of God," which discovers her remarkable talents, breadth of thought and elegance of diction:

The Providence of God

Arise, my soul! on wings enraptured rise,
To praise the Monarch of the earth and skies,
Whose goodness and beneficence appear
As round its center, moves the rolling year.
Or when the morning glows with rosy
 charms,
Or the sun slumbers in the ocean's arms,
Of light divine, be a rich portion lent
To guide my soul and favor my intent;
Celestial Muse, my arduous flight sustain,
And raise my mind to seraphic strain.

Another of this earlier group of Negro poets to attract the attention of men of letters was George Horton, the black slave poet of Chatham country who first came into public notice through the medium of *The Raleigh Register* in 1829, which published his "Hope of Liberty." Horton could neither read nor write, but dictated to his master, who wrote down his verses. His soul was full of the "divine fire."

At a meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society, Western Reserve (Ohio), in October 1835, Theodore Weld recited this poem, a verse from which I will quote:

Alas! And am I born for this,
To wear this slavish chain?
Deprived of all created bliss,
Through hardship, toil and pain?
How long have I in bondage lain,
And languished to be free?
Alas, and must I still complain,
Deprived of liberty?

For an untutored slave, ignorant of books and the rules of versification, this is not a bad showing of his remarkable gifts. Horton's first published volume of poems appeared in 1829. As I gather from the *Bibliographica Americana*, compiled by A.A. Schomburg, secretary of our Negro Society for Historical Research, a second edition of his poems was published at Philadelphia in 1827 [sic]. Another volume was issued at Hillsboro, N.C., by Dennis Heart, editor, *Hillsboro Recorder*, in 1845. Other volumes, chiefly reprints and verses, hitherto unpublished, appeared in 1854-55. So his heart yearned for freedom. These chains of slavery were galling to him. The insurrection of thought had precipitated open rebellion and his soul in agony cried out against the hated institution in a torrent of words that told what he felt, and how he felt over his condition as a slave. There is a note of despair and despondence in these lines which I now quote. They are really pathetic:

Am I sadly cast aside
On misfortune's rugged tide,
Will the world my plans deride
 Forever?
Worst of all, must hope grow dim
And withhold her cheering beam,
Rather than let me dream
 Forever?

I have said that the race has not yet had time in which to produce a great poet, and it can offer the same explanation for its failure to do so that Jefferson made to the Abbé Raynal, who had somewhere stated in criticism of America that it had not produced a single scholar of note. Mr. Jefferson's plea in extenuation for this shortcoming was the youth of the New Republic. But despite the youth of the Negro race in this country, it has made greater progress intellectually and industrially in the fifty-nine years of its freedom than was made by the colonists in the same period.

There are more educated men and women among 12,000,000 Negroes after fifty-nine years of freedom than there was among the white population in the entire thirteen colonies in the same period. The Negro race can today match the white race with a Negro man or woman who will hardly suffer by comparison with them

in any department of learning or scholarship. I am almost ready to withdraw my statement that we have not yet produced a great poet. If this were a real, not a fictitious democracy in which the worth of a man in any legitimate field of endeavor was measured by his merit and ability and not his color or condition, socially, then J. Madison Bell, James David Corrothers, Daniel Webster Davis, Charlotte Forten, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, J. Willies Menard, Islay Waldon, D.A. Payne, Alberry A. Whitman, George B. Vashon, W.J. Wilson of the earlier group of race poets were, advantage for advantage, as great poets as any group of white men or women of the same period who supported a commerce with the muses. The fact that these men and women belonged to a race which is generally regarded as inferior even to this day, obscured any inherent greatness that they possessed; and those who in our own day have achieved any distinction, owe it to the fact that some white author, more liberal than is usual, has put the seal of his approval upon their work and thus given them prestige and standing, which they could not otherwise have got. Thus Dunbar jumped into fame at almost a single bound. He came to his own, but his own received him not. William Dean Howells recognized his ability and with a stroke of his pen gave him international fame.

The psychology of this sort of recognition of Negro genius conceals more than it reveals. It is at once a reflection upon the ability or willingness of the race in the mass to recognize and appraise at their true value our own men and women who are striving in the higher reaches of thought to attain the goal of their ambition, and it is a tribute to the superior vision and keen judgement of the white man, in these circumstances. Thus he designates our poets, political leaders and moral advisers. We accept the designees and confirm the judgement and wisdom of white men by accepting these fortunate objects of their approval.

When Miss Phillis Wheatley [was] budding forth as the poetess of the Revolution, a galaxy of the most distinguished and celebrated white men, including John Hancock, the first signer of the Declaration of Independence, put the seal of their approval upon her book and her master

took a solemn oath, duly signed and delivered, that she, with her own hand and out of her own African brain, composed and wrote the pieces bearing her name.

If any friends or any well known members of the race here in New York should singly or unitedly join in endorsing the work of some rising poet or story-writer here, it would perhaps appeal only to their immediate circle of acquaintances and friends, and the young author would probably have to hunt a job as elevator man in some public office, or enlist in the army. To me, this denotes an alarming condition, discovering all too plainly, our lack of confidence in each other in matters of this kind. I do not think I know of a white man, in whose judgement as to what is best for my race, I have absolute confidence. I can respect, but I cannot accept it as final, for I have not yet come to regard him as a superman. I think we are capable of deciding for ourselves who is who among us in the literary field and that we ought to encourage morally and substantially, just as our white friends do their own, our own undiscovered geniuses.

Negro poets, story-writers and authors are not going to be as popular with white readers generally as white authors. They are going to be popular only as they are made so by the endorsement of some noted author of the white race, who may be moved to endorse their books, to induce members of their own race to read them in order to find out what is back of the black man's mind.

Recently, a jury in New York City in the case of the United States versus Fredenheim, charged with violating the Espionage Act, could not come to an agreement because one of the jurors said that he could not believe a Negro. There are a great many people in the white race who feel as this man does about the Negro, and especially "us literary Negroes." They do not believe any more than some of us do of them, that we can teach them anything, or that we know anything that they do not know. Of course, they are mistaken, and they would only be convinced of it by a presidential proclamation, supplemented with the endorsement of the white authors' league and a few leading literary journals.

We are not, as a race, doing our honest duty toward our men and women who have hitched

their wagons to a star and are trying to drive along the limitless pathway of the heavens. We do not properly support them with our means, nor encourage them with words of cheer. When we begin to do this we are going to produce some real great poets and authors of the later groups of our poets.

I may mention Paul Laurence Dunbar, George Reginald Margetson, Fenton Johnson, W. Stanley Braithwaite, James Weldon Johnson, Egbert Martin, Edward Smyth Jones, H. Cordellia Ray, George Clinton Rowe, James M. Whitfield, and a score of others of equal merit and ability, all of whom shone brilliantly and wrought wondrously in their day and generation. The Negro race is one of the oldest races and had a civilization thousands of years before Europe emerged from barbarism or America had a place in the social progression. Her scholars,

philosophers, and poets have already written their names on the pages of history and in the next twenty or thirty years there will be an awakening among Negroes throughout the world; a revival of letters such as distinguished the black race in another period when it was the acknowledged school-master of Greece and Rome.

This is not quite the Negro's day in literature. He is dead now but he is soon to arise with healing in his wings. Rejuvenated, disenthralled, redeemed, he will stand forth in the full stature of a man and will ably fulfill the promise that Ethiopia shall suddenly stretch forth her hands unto God and then princes shall come out of Egypt. For out of Egypt have I called my son. We are coming and the Father of us all will bless and prosper the race that gave hospitality and protection to the Son of Righteousness, if it will only believe in itself and be itself.

THOMAS MILLARD HENRY

Old School of Negro "Critics" Hard on Paul Laurence Dunbar (1924)

For years I have searched in vain over the contents of *The Crisis* for words of praise for our beloved poet and short-story writer, Paul Laurence Dunbar. Other Negro publications have given him many sketches of praise; his poetry has been favorably quoted in *The Outlook*, and in *The Christian Science Monitor*; there is an upstanding, if brief, review of his merits in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*; but, *The Crisis* (also the *New Encyclopedia*) has disparaged him, on divers occasions, and in two considerable articles has endeavored to strip him of that glory which the remainder of the world accords to him.

It is true that some of his work was slovenly done; but what worthwhile poet has done all perfect work? Homer is said to have nodded, and Shakespeare's fire sometimes waned. Many are of the opinion that clever verse makers have kept the law more strictly than the great poets did. These are times when polished numbers must come home though all else fails. One

bearing the infirmity as deep-set as Keats did is hard pushed nowadays. Dunbar knew what many have failed to recognize when he wrote about "The Man Who Fails."

This land is as far from being a friend to poets as it is to being a friend to grace. White America has not produced a single first rate poet. The clouds look more discouraging than ever for them now. Poerizing has become a mere chasing on verbal wings of phantasmagoria. The magical whirling of realities that used to constitute great poetry is now considered by poetic "fans" to belong to the province of prose.

Few men have lived on earth with a finer poetic genius than that which burned in Paul Laurence Dunbar. The best articles that I ever read about him were eulogies that he more than deserved. Mr. William Dean Howells wrote the most substantial review that I have found on his poetry; but, it was not good enough. Although used for an "Introduction" to "*Lyrics of Lowly*

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Life,” Mr. Howells admitted that it was written before the poems therein had been read. Consequently, “Ione,” the masterpiece; “Ere Sleep Comes Down to Soothe the Weary Eyes,” one of the rarest odes in the English tongue; and many quatrains and short poems universally quoted and appreciated, have never received noteworthy attention, at least, not from the American press.

The three gentlemen who sit in the judgment seats for *The Crisis* at present are Dr. Du Bois, Mr. Braithwaite, and Mr. James Weldon Johnson. Each of them have interesting parts. Dr. Du Bois has enough of the sociologist in him to mar the poet that his disciples see in him, and too much of the singer in him for a good scientist. Mr. Braithwaite has written some very pretty dreams; but, they interest no one but a few bookworms. And Mr. Johnson, by the help of the race question has put thoughts in his verse that appeal to present day antagonists. Any polished student might gain that kind of eminence. None of these gentlemen have that irresistible pulsating vitality in their works which the bard of Dayton shows, and with which song can move mountains. On the other hand, Dunbar in the forenoon of his short days, has done a work that is comparable in no little respect with that of Omar Khayyam’s, or with Shakespeare’s, or with Homer’s. The sweet compelling music of his lyre captivated all America in the dark days that trailed after the reconstruction period; yet, like the mythical bards of Greece, he made the crude masses laugh and dance and aspire. The shadows of the wilderness were oriented by his fire. His objective singing, too, was in line with that African, smiling, good humor which passes understanding. His fine humor wrought miracles and caused the most supercilious white folk on earth to treat him to their good offices and white service. Meanwhile, some envious authors on his side of the color line seized and made capital from unlogical rumors that associated his fine works with the fierce travesties on Negroes so popular on the American stage. Perhaps these attacks deceived many credulous minds, and increased the book sales of these satellites. Mr. James Weldon Johnson caught the idea and left such a masterpiece as “Ione” out of his anthology. And

Mr. Johnson is a Southerner, too, even though he may secretly credit his little bloom to his West Indian lineage. The two other gentlemen on the judgment seat hail from unsympathetic New England. None of these minds contained the warm Southern sympathies of Dunbar or Booker Washington.

Our critical ability is now beginning to show marked progress. Southern Negroes of the literary mould have recently compelled not only local, but even universal attention. What is quite new about them is that sagacity which can recognize worth quite independent of creeds, politics, or sheepskins. When the flaming pens of Messrs. Randolph, Owen, Pickens, Schuyler, Lewis, and others, raised their sweet chant in behalf of the black South, the world paused, observed, and decided that the dark veil over the American Negroes’ soul was again to be rent in twain.

When those poets whose centenaries were celebrated here during the first decade of the twentieth century got reviewed, their best works were invariably examined to make their individual achievements interesting. Not so with this school of critics now in control of *The Crisis*. We find even the noted anthologist squatting behind such sweeping statements as follows: “No agitated vision of prophecy burn and surge in his poems.” It offends us when we find him dismissing the poetry of Dunbar with such generalizations as this. If the disparagements of this pseudo-critic of poetry were accompanied by selections from the poet’s best poems he might not have been in such jeopardy under scrutiny. Negro writers are so slightly advanced as a moral force that all such ignominious attacks on noble characters have been to a sad degree unchallenged. It has up to now danced on as easily as “rolling off of a log.” And yet the country is peppered with Negroes who hold degrees for their classical attainments.

Were we to read Dunbar more and discuss him less, we should find ourselves pausing over some of his lines in spite of his tender years. In “The Right to Die,” for instance, we read:

Men court not death
When there are still some sweets in life to taste.

Our souls would feed on the epigrammatic quality in "Right's Security":

Right arms and armors, too, that man
Who will not compromise with wrong;
Though single, he must face the throng,
And wage the battle hard and long.

I should like to select, some day his poems like "Love's Draft." Love, rather than political economy, is the foundation of great poetry:

The draft of love was cool and sweet
You gave me in the cup,
But, ah, love's fire is keen and fleet,
And I am burning up.
Unless the tears I shed for you
Shall quench this burning flame,
It will consume me through and through,
And leave but ash—a name.

Dunbar has written over fifty poems of the same mood, and in similar diction, and yet when Negroes pride themselves in quoting or alluding to the poets, they build bridges across his mighty nose.

On the other hand what intelligent people should be ashamed of Dunbar's dialect poems. Here is "The Delinquent":

Goo-by, Jinks, I got to hump,
Got to mek dis pony jump;
See dat sun a-goin' down
'N me a-foolin' hyeah in town!
Git up, Suke—go long!

Guess Mirandy'll think I's tight,
Me not home an' comin' on night.

What's dat stan' in' by de fence?
Pshaw! Why don't I learn some sense?
Git up Suke—go long!

Guess I spent down dah at Jinks'
Mos' a dollah fur de drinks.
Bless yo'r soul, you see dat star?
Lawd, but won't Mirandy rar?

Git up Suke—go long!

Got de close-stick in huh han'
Dar look funny, goodness lan'
Sakes alibe, but she look glum!
Hyeah, Mirandy, hyeah I come!

Git up Suke—go long!

We were about to close our protest without mentioning the comparison made between Dunbar and Claude McKay. In Mr. Braithwaite's article mentioned above, it was further started that Mr. Claude McKay was potentially superior to Dunbar. Mr. McKay's work stands far above the work done by other poets, of this republic in our day. In this golden period of new poetry, men and women become experts in the saddle of Pegasus as rapidly as house painters are produced. Mr. McKay's poems have more blood and thunder in them than any other Negro's verse, and it is rather natural for a Jamaica poet to have that turn of mind, but the anathema in his lines will not get him further than humor and satire have taken the Ohjoan up towards the sun. I do not doubt, however, that by enjoying a longer poetic career than Dunbar did, the West Indian will reach him in some particular.

WALLACE THURMAN

Negro Poets and Their Poetry (1928)

Jupiter Hammon, the first Negro in this country to write and publish poetry, was a slave owned by a Mr. Joseph Lloyd of Queens Village, Long Island. Hammon had been converted to the religion of Jesus Christ and all of his poems are religious exhortations, incoherent in

thought and crudely excepted. His first poem was published in 1761, his second, entitled "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley, Ethiopian Poetess in Boston, who came from Africa at eight years of age and soon became acquainted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ," in 1768.

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This Miss Phillis Wheatley, who had been bought from a slaveship by a family named Wheatley in Boston Harbor and educated by them, wrote better doggerel than her older contemporary Hammon. She knew Alexander Pope and she knew Ovid—Hammon only knew the Bible—and she knew Pope so well that she could write like a third-rate imitator of him. Phillis in her day was a museum figure who would have caused more of a sensation if some contemporary Barnum had exploited her. As it was, she attracted so much attention that many soft-hearted (and, in some cases, soft-headed) whites and blacks have been led to believe that her poetry deserves to be considered as something more than a mere historical relic. This is an excerpt from her best poem:

Imagination! who can sing thy force?
Or who describe the swiftness of thy course?
Soaring through the air to find the bright
abode,
The empyreal palace of the thundering God,
We on thy pinions can surpass the wind,
And leave the rolling universe behind,
From star to star the mental optics rove,
Measure the skies, and range the realms
above,
There is one view we grasp the mighty
whole,
Or with new worlds amaze the unbounded
soul.

She never again equalled the above, far less surpassed it. And most of the time she wrote as in the following excerpt from "On Major General Lee." (This poem would warm the heart of "Big Bill" Thompson of Chicago; he really should know about it.) A captured colonial soldier is addressing a British general:

O Arrogance of tongue!
And wild ambition, ever prone to wrong!
Believ'st thou, chief, that armies such as thine
Can stretch in dust that heaven defended
line?
In vain allies may swarm from distant lands,
And demons aid in formidable bands,
Great as thou art, thou shun'st the field of
fame,

Disgrace to Britain and the British name.

She continues in this vein, damning the British and enshrining the Americans until she reaches a climax in the following priceless lines:

Find in your train of boasted heroes, one
To match the praise of Godlike Washington.
Thrice happy chief in whom the virtues join,
And heaven taught prudence speaks the
man divine.

Thomas Jefferson is quoted as saying that "Religion has produced a Phillis Wheatley, but it could not produce a poet. Her poems are beneath contempt." Nevertheless, Phillis had an interesting and exciting career. The Wheatleys carried her to London, where her first volume was published in 1773. She was exhibited at the Court of George III, and in the homes of the nobility much as the Negro poets of today are exhibited in New York drawing rooms. She wrote little about slavery, which is not surprising considering that save for her epic trip across the Atlantic in a slave-ship, she had never known slavery in any form. She often mentioned her homeland and once spoke of herself as "Afric's muse," but she was more interested in the religion of Jesus Christ and in the spreading of piety than in any more worldly items, save perhaps in her patriotic interest for the cause of the American colonists.

Heretofore every commentator, whether white or black, when speaking of Phillis Wheatley, has sought to make excuses for her bad poetry. They have all pointed out that Phillis lived and wrote during the eighteenth century, when, to quote from the introduction to White and Jackson's *Poetry of American Negro Poets*, "the great body of contemporary poetry was turgid in the style of debased Pope." It would be too much, they continue, to expect "a poet of Phillis Wheatley's rather conventional personality to rise above this influence. In his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, James Weldon Johnson contends that "had she come under the influence of Wordsworth, Byron, Keats or Shelley, she would have done greater work." Does it smack too much of less majesty to suggest that perhaps Phillis wrote the best poetry

she could have written under any influence, and that a mediocre imitation of Shelly would have been none the less mediocre than a mediocre imitation of Pope? Phillis was also influenced by the Bible, but her paraphrases of the Scripture are just as poor as her paraphrases of "debased Pope."

Phillis died in 1784 and until Paul Laurence Dunbar published his *Oak and Ivy* in 1892, American Negro poetry stayed at the level at which she had left it, although there must have been over one hundred Negroes who wrote and published poetry during this period. Most of them came into prominence during and after the Civil War, and were encouraged by abolitionists to write of their race and their race's trials. Frances Ellen Harper is probably the best of this period. One volume, *On Miscellaneous Subjects*, was published with an introduction by William Lloyd Garrison. Over ten thousand copies were circulated. Mrs. Harper also wrote and published *Moses, a Story of the Nile*, in verse covering fifty-two closely printed pages. Many of her contemporaries were equally ambitious. Length was a major poetic virtue to them.

It seems highly probable that these people wrote in verse because neither their minds nor their literary tools and backgrounds were adequate for the task of writing readable and intelligent prose. They could be verbose and emotional in verse, and yet attain a degree of coherence not attainable when they wrote in prose. George M. Horton is a good illustration. He was born a slave in Chatham County, North Carolina, in 1797. It is said that he "was not a good farm worker on account of devoting too much time to fishing, hunting and attending religious meetings." He taught himself to read with the aid of a Methodist hymn-book and a red-backed speller. In 1830 he secured work as a janitor at Chapel Hill, the seat of the University of South Carolina. Here he made extra money writing love poems for amorous students. Desiring to obtain his freedom and migrate to Liberia, Horton, aided by some of his white friends, published a volume of verse entitled *The Hope of Liberty*, but the returns from the sale of this volume were not sufficient for his purpose. But he remained more or less a free agent, and was

allowed to hire himself out instead of having to remain on his master's plantation. In 1865, a troop of Federal soldiers, who had been quartered in Chapel Hill, were ordered north. Horton left with them and went to Philadelphia where he eventually died.

Here is a sample of his prose: "By close application to my book and at night my visage became considerably emaciated by extreme perspiration, having no lucubratory apparatus, no candle, no lamp, not even lightweed, being chiefly raised in oaky woods." And here is a sample of his verse:

Come liberty. Thou cheerful sound
Roll through my ravished ears;
Come, let my griefs in joy be drowned
And drive away my fears.

Further comment would be superfluous.

After the Civil War, the Negro found himself in a dilemma. He was supposed to be free, yet his condition was little changed. He was worse off in some respects than he had been before. It can be understood, then, that the more articulate Negroes of the day spent most of their time speculating upon this thing called freedom, both as it had been imagined and as it was in actuality.

However, none of the poetry written at this time is worthy of serious critical consideration. It was not even a poetry of protest. Although Negro poets objected to the mistreatment of their people, they did not formulate these objections in strong, biting language, but rather sought sympathy and pled for pity. They wept copiously but seldom manifested a fighting spirit. The truth is, only one American Negro poet has been a fighting poet, only one has really written revolutionary protest poetry, and that is Claude McKay, who will be considered later.

Paul Laurence Dunbar was the first American Negro poet whose work really merited critical attention. Dunbar was the son of two ex-slaves, but supposedly full-blooded Negroes, a fact flagrantly paraded by race purists, to controvert the prevalent Nordic theory that only Negroes with Caucasian blood in their veins ever accomplish anything. He was born in Dayton, Ohio, June 27, 1872. His father had escaped from his master and fled to Canada, but later

returned to the States and enlisted for military service during the Civil War in a Massachusetts regiment. Dunbar may have inherited his love for letters and writing from his mother, whose master had often read aloud in her presence.

Dunbar attended the public school in his home town, and was graduated from the local high-school, where he had edited the school paper. Then he found employment as an elevator operator. In 1892 he delivered an address in verse to the Western Association of Writers, and shortly afterwards he published his first volume, *Oak and Ivy*. In 1896, through the subscription method, he was able to publish another volume entitled, *Majors and Minors*. William Dean Howells wrote a most favorable review of this volume and later paved the way for Dodd, Mead and Company to publish *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, for which he wrote an introduction. Meanwhile Dunbar had visited England, and had become a great friend with Coleridge Taylor, the Negro composer, with whom he collaborated on many songs. On his return to the United States, another friend, Robert G. Ingersoll, helped him to get a position in the Library of Congress. He was only able to keep this job two years, for meanwhile he had developed pulmonary tuberculosis, and despite pilgrimages to such lung-soothing climates as the Adirondacks, the Rockies, and Florida, he finally succumbed to the disease and died in Dayton, Ohio, on February 9, 1908.

From 1892 until the time of his death, Dunbar published five volumes of verse, four volumes of collected short stories, and four novels. Not only was he the first Negro to write poetry which had real merit and could be considered as having more than merely sentimental or historical value, but he was also the first Negro poet to be emancipated from Methodism, the first American Negro poet who did not depend on a Wesleyan hymn-book for inspiration and vocabulary. Most of the poets preceding him were paragons of piety. They had all been seized upon by assiduous missionaries and put through the paces of Christianity, and their verses were full of puerile apostrophizing of the Almighty, and leaden allusions to scriptural passages.

Yet Dunbar was far from being a great poet. First of all, he was a rank sentimental, and was content to let surface values hold his interest. He attempted to interpret the soul of his people, but as William Stanley Braithwaite has said, he succeeded "only in interpreting a folk temperament." And although he was, as William Dean Howells affirmed, the first "man of pure African blood of American civilization to feel Negro life aesthetically and express it lyrically," neither his aesthetic feeling nor his expression ever attained enough depth to be of permanent value.

Dunbar is famous chiefly for his dialect poetry. Yet he often regretted that the world turned to praise "a jingle in a broken tongue." He was ambitious to experiment in more classical forms, and to deal with something less concrete than the "smile through your tears" plantation larky of reconstruction times. Here perhaps was his greatest limitation. Being anxious to explore the skies, he merely skimmed over the surface of the earth.

After Dunbar, there was a whole horde of Negro poets who, like him, wrote in dialect. The sum total of their achievement is zero, but happily, in addition to these parasitic tyros there were also two new poets who had more originality and more talent than their contemporaries. And though neither of these men produced anything out of the ordinary, they did go beyond the minstrel humor and peasant pathos of Dunbar, and beyond the religious cant and doggerel jeremiads of Dunbar's predecessors. One of these men, William Stanley Braithwaite, is best known as a student and friend of poets and poetry rather than as a poet. He has yearly, since 1913, issued an anthology of American magazine verse, and has also published some academic studies of English literature.

The second, James Weldon Johnson, achieved little as a poet until recently, when he published *God's Trombones*, a volume of Negro sermons done in verse. His first volume, *Fifty Years and Other Poems*, contains little of merit. The title poem, which recounts in verse the progress of the race from 1863 to 1913, has, because of its propagandist content, been acclaimed as a great poem. No comment or criticism is necessary of

this opinion when part of the poem itself can be quoted:

Far, far, the way that we have trod
From heathen trails and jungle dens
To freedmen, freedmen, sons of God,
Americans and citizens.

Mr. Johnson, it seems, has also been fairly intimate with Methodist hymnbooks.

His sermon poems, while at times awkward and faulty in technique, have an ecstatic eloquence and an individual rhythm which immediately place them among the best things any Negro has ever done in poetry. Although this may not be saying much, and although, as a poet Mr. Johnson may not be adequate to the task of fully realizing the promise of these sermon poems, he has at least laid a foundation upon which a new generation of Negro poets can build. He will have to be remembered as something more than just a historical or sentimental figure. He, like Dunbar, is an important, if a minor bard; and if the Negro poet of the future is to make any individual contribution to American literature he must derive almost as much from the former's *God's Trombones* as from the latter's *Lyrics of Lowly Life*.

To consider all the Negro poets who since 1913 have lifted up their voices in song would necessitate using an entire issue of any journal. It is not only an impossible task but one not worth the time and space it would require. For our present study we will touch only the high spots, passing over such people as Fenton Johnson, whose early promise has never been fulfilled; Joseph Cotter, Jr., who, it is alleged by most critics in this field, would have been a great poet had he lived but whose extant work belies this judgment; Georgia Douglas Johnson, whose highly sentimental and feminine lyrics have found favor; Arna Bontemps, who specializes in monotonous and wordy mystic evocations which lack fire and conviction, and Hélène Johnson, who alone of all the younger group seems to have the "makings" of a poet.

But taking up the contemporary triumvirate—McKay, Cullen, and Hughes—all of whom have had volumes published by reputable houses and are fairly well known to the poetry-reading

public, we have poets of another type. Each one of them represents a different trend in Negro literature and life.

Claude McKay was born in Jamaica, British West Indies, where he received his elementary education, served a while in the constabulary, and wrote his first poems. A friend financed his journey to America to finish his scholastic work, but McKay found himself at odds with the second-rate schools he attended here and finally fled to New York City where he became a member of the old *Masses*, *Seven Arts*, *Liberator* group of radicals and artists. During this period he received a legacy which, he tells us, was spent in riotous living. Broke, he attempted to make a living by washing dishes, operating elevators, doing porter work—the usual occupations engaged in by Negro artists and intellectuals.

McKay's first volume was published while he was still in Jamaica, a compilation of folk-verse done in the native dialect. The Institute of Arts and Sciences of Jamaica gave him a medal in recognition of this first book. It is in many ways remarkable, and in it the poet gives us a more substantial portrait and delves far deeper into the soul of the Jamaican than Dunbar was ever able to in the soul of the southern Negro in America.

McKay's latter poetry is often marred by bombast. He is such an intense person that one can often hear the furnace-like fire within him roaring in his poems. He seems to have more emotional depth and spiritual fire than any of his forerunners or contemporaries. It might be added that he also seems to have considerably more mental depth too. His love poems are not as musical or as haunting as Mr. Cullen's, but neither are they as stereotyped. His sonnet to a Harlem dancer may not be as deft or as free from sentiment as "Midnight Man" by Langston Hughes, but it is far more mature and moving. All of which leads us to say that a study of Claude McKay's and of the other better Negro poetry convinces us that he, more than the rest, has really had something to say. It is his tragedy that his message was too alive and too big for the form he chose. His poems are for the most part either stilted, choked, or over-zealous. He could never shape the flames from the fire

that blazed within him. But he is the only Negro poet who ever wrote revolutionary or protest poetry. Hence:

If we must die, let it be not like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
.....
Oh, Kinsman! We must meet the common
foe;
Though far outnumbered let us still be
brave,
And for their thousand blows, deal one
death blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying—but fighting
back.

There is no impotent whining here, no mercy-seeking prayer to the white man's God, no mournful jeremiad, no "ain't it hard to be a nigger," no lamenting of or apologizing for the fact that he is a member of a dark-skinned minority group. Rather he boasts:

Be not deceived, for every deed you do,
I could match—out match; Am I not
Africa's son,
Black of that black land where black deeds
are done?

This is propaganda poetry of the highest order although it is crude and inexpert. Contrast it with these lines from Countee Cullen's sonnet "From The Dark Tower":

We shall not always plant while others reap
The golden increment of bursting fruit,
Nor always countenance abject and mute
That lesser men should hold their brothers
cheap.

Countee Cullen is the symbol of a fast disappearing generation of Negro writers. In him it reaches its literary apogee. On the other hand, Langston Hughes announces the entrance of a new generation, while Claude McKay, glorious revolutionary that he is, remains uncatalogued. For two generations Negro poets have been trying to do what Mr. Cullen has succeeded in doing. First, trying to translate into lyric form

the highly poetic urge to escape from the blatant realities of life in America into a vivid past, and, second, fleeing from the stigma of being called a *Negro* poet, by, as Dunbar so desired to do, ignoring folk-material and writing of such abstractions as love and death.

There is hardly anyone writing poetry in America today who can make the banal sound as beautiful as does Mr. Cullen. He has an extraordinary ear for music, a most extensive and dexterous knowledge of words and their values, and an enviable understanding of conventional poetic forms. Technically, he is almost precocious, and never, it may be added, far from the academic; but he is also too steeped in tradition, too influenced mentally by certain conventions and taboos. When he does forget these things as in his greatest poem, "Heritage":

What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?

and the unforgettable:

All day long and all night through,
One thing only must I do:
Quench my pride and cool my blood,
Lest I perish in the flood,
Lest a hidden ember set
Timber that I thought was wet
Burning like the dryest flax,
Melting like the merest wax,
Lest the grave restore its dead,
Not yet has my heart and head
In the least way realized
They and I are civilized

or his (to illustrate another tendency):

I climb, but time's
Abreast with me;
I sing, but he climbs
With my highest C.

and in other far too few instances, he reaches heights no other Negro poet has ever reached, placing himself high among his contemporaries, both black or white. But he has not gone far enough. His second volume is not as lush with promise or as spontaneously moving as his first. There has been a marking time or side-stepping rather than a marching forward. If it seems we expect too much from this poet, we can only defend ourselves by saying that we expect no more than the poet's earlier work promises.

Mr. Cullen's love poems are too much made to order. His race poems, when he attempts to paint a moral, are inclined to be sentimental and stereotyped. It is when he gives vent to the pagan spirit and lets it inspire and dominate a poem's form and context that he does his most impressive work. His cleverly turned rebellious poems are also above the ordinary. But there are not enough of these in comparison to those poems which are banal, though beautiful.

Langston Hughes has often been compared to Dunbar. At first this comparison seems far-fetched and foolish, but on closer examination one finds that the two have much in common, only that where Dunbar failed, Langston Hughes succeeds. Both set out to interpret "the soul of his race"; one failed, the other, just at the beginning of his career, has in some measure already succeeded.

The younger man has not been content to assemble a supply of stock types who give expression to stock emotions which may be either slightly amusing or slightly tragic, but which are never either movingly tragic or convincingly comic. When Langston Hughes writes of specific Negro types he manages to make them more than just ordinary Negro types. They are actually dark-skinned symbols of universal characters. One never feels this way about the people in Dunbar's poetry. For he never heightens them above their own particular sphere. There is never anything of the universal element in his poems that motivates Mr. Hughes.

Moreover, Langston Hughes has gone much farther in another direction than any other Negro poet, much farther even than James Weldon Johnson went along the same road in *God's Trombones*. He has appropriated certain dialects

and rhythms characteristically Negroid as his poetic properties. He has borrowed the lingo and locutions of migratory workers, chambermaids, porters, bootblacks, and others, and woven them into rhythmic schemes borrowed from the blues songs, spirituals, and jazz and with them created a poetic diction and a poetic form all his own. There is danger in this, of course, for the poet may and often does consider these things as an end in themselves rather than as a means to an end. A blues poem such as:

I'm a bad, bad man
'Cause everybody tells me so.
I'm a bad, bad man,
Everybody tells me so.
I takes ma meanness and ma licker
Everywhere I go.

or:

Ma sweet good man has
Packed his trunk and left.
Ma sweet good man has
Packed his trunk and left.
Nobody to love me:
I'm gonna kill ma self.

may be poignant and colorful but the form is too strait-laced to allow much variety of emotion or context. The poems produced are apt to prove modish and ephemeral. But when this blues form is expanded, as in:

Drowning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
I heard a Negro play.
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
He did a lazy sway
He did a lazy sway
To the tune o' those Weary Blues.
With his ebony hands on each ivory key
He made that poor piano mean with
melody.
O Blues!
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical
fool.
Sweet Blues!
Coming from a black man's soul.

the poet justifies his experiment, and ends at the same time the most felicitous and fruitful outlet for his talent.

Mr. Hughes, where his race is concerned, is perfectly objective. He is one of them so completely that he, more than any other Negro poet, realizes that after all they are human beings; usually the articulate Negro either regards them as sociological problems or as debased monstrosities. To Mr. Hughes, certain types of Negroes and their experiences are of permanent value. He is not afraid of, nor does he ignore, them. He can calmly say:

Put on yo' red silk stockings
Black gal.
Go an' let de white boys
Look at yo' legs.
.....
An' tomorrow's chile'll
Be a high yaller.

or:

My old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black

.....
My old man died in fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I'm gonna die,
Being neither white nor black?

and reach the heights of his achievement in "Mulatto," one of the finest and most vivid poems written in the past few years. But Mr. Hughes has also written some of the most banal poetry of the age, which has not, as in the case of Mr. Cullen, even sounded beautiful.

The future of Negro poetry is an unknown quantity, principally because those on whom its future depends are also unknown quantities. There is nothing in the past to crow about, and we are too close to the present to judge it more than tentatively. McKay is called in France an alien and a communist, barred from returning to this country. Once in a while a poem of his appears, but the period of his best work in this field seems to be at an end. Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen are both quite young, as poets and as individuals. Neither can be placed yet, nor can their contributions be any more than just intelligently commented upon. Whether they are going or will continue to go in the right direction is no more than a matter of individual opinion. All of us do know that as yet the American Negro has not produced a great poet. Whether he will or not is really not at all important. What does matter is that those who are now trying to be great should get intelligent guidance and appreciation. They seem to have everything else except perhaps the necessary genius.

ALAIN LOCKE

The Negro Poets of the United States (1926)

Negro poets and Negro poetry are two quite different things. Of the one, since Phillis Wheatley, we have had a century and a half; of the other, since Dunbar, scarcely a generation. But the significance of the work of Negro poets will more and more be seen and valued retrospectively as the medium through which a poetry of Negro life and experience has gradually become possible. Just such retrospective value and importance mainly has the entire earlier period of American literature itself, which for so considerable a

time even after 1776, remained a provincial body of tradition and culture. America's cultural autonomy can as yet claim no sesqui-centennial,—the ink is still damp on our spiritual Declaration of Independence. By still slower but not unrelated processes have the various secondary bodies of the American tradition and experience come to cultural maturity and representative expression; but as they do, it becomes all the more apparent that the scheme of our culture is a confederation of minority traditions, a

the poet justifies his experiment, and ends at the same time the most felicitous and fruitful outlet for his talent.

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time even after 1776, remained a provincial body of tradition and culture. America's cultural autonomy can as yet claim no sesqui-centennial,—the ink is still damp on our spiritual Declaration of Independence. By still slower but not unrelated processes have the various secondary bodies of the American tradition and experience come to cultural maturity and representative expression; but as they do, it becomes all the more apparent that the scheme of our culture is a confederation of minority traditions, a

constellation of provinces, and not a national sun concentrated in one blazing, focal position. And among these, inevitably distinct by virtue of its peculiar social and cultural focus, whirls the gradually incandescent orb of the Negro's group thought and experience.

In the context of an established literature of New England and a metropolitan East, of a semi-established literature of the South and Middle West, and of an insurgent poetry of the Far West, and the Southwest, a Negro poetry and literature is no anomaly or exception. Even more distinctly (and in time we hope as proudly exclusive) of this area has American life been set apart and intensified as a group experience; social isolations and pressure have welded it into more than a local or sectional unity, and a cultural focus of peculiar range and dignity has thus been generated. It is out of the peculiarity of the experience rather than any uniqueness of inherent nature that this world of Negro thought and emotion has been created, but it needs only the glowing combustion of genius moving through it to reveal a new star in the American firmament,—a body of the first cultural magnitude.

Therefore I maintain that the work of Negro poets in the past has its chief significance in what it has led up to; through work of admittedly minor and secondary significance and power a folk-consciousness has slowly come into being and a folk-tradition has been started on the way to independent expression and development. Phillis Wheatley chirping however significantly in the dawn of the American Revolution about

The muse inspire each future song!
Still, with the sweets of contemplation
 bless'd,
May peace with balmy wings your soul
 invest!
But when these shadows of time are
 chas'd away,
And darkness ends in everlasting day,
On what seraphic pinions shall we move,
And view the landscapes in the realms above?
There shall thy tongue in heav'nly
 murmur flow,
And there my muse with heav'nly
 transports glow—

has only a distant promise. She was race-conscious but not race-minded. And later when for two generations or more Negro poets rhymed out their "moral numbers" and pleaded for freedom, sometimes in creditable, sometimes in puerile quatrains that echoed Whittier and Mrs. Hemans, although the acceptance of race was passionate, it was abstract and rhetorical. Theirs was the opposite excess of being so race-minded that they were race-bound. That verse of any treasurable value at all was produced under these conditions is an evidence of a musical and imaginative endowment beyond the ordinary. George Horton, Albery Whitman, Frances Watkins Harper at least established our poetic literacy, and nourished the ambition of a singing people to master the provinces of language. They were well-recognized in their day, perhaps as exceptions, but at least not as Phillis Wheatley was, as a controversial prodigy. Further they compared not unfavorably with all but their greatest contemporaries, in outlook, theme, and diction so similar as to have incurred from many quarters the charge of "sheer unoriginal imitativeness." Be that as it may, except for their preoccupation with the topic of freedom and the notes of sentimental appeal and moral protest,—both popular enough in American poetry at large in their day, one cannot say that there was anything inherently racial about their poetry either in the derogatory or the favorable sense. The second step up Parnassus had simply been from the foothold by Negroes to the half-way lodging of a poetry about the Negro cause and question.

Poetry of Negro life itself, poetry that was in any true sense racially expressive, was still unattained at the time of emancipation and for at least three decades after. Later the causes of this may stand out more clearly. But this much is certainly clear;—no such social satisfaction and stimulus came into Negro life with emancipation as accompanies normal political freedom; the concrete realities of reconstruction could by no means fill in and vivify the abstract abolitionist hopes or realize the roseate anti-slavery dream. The poetic impulse was checked by steep social disillusionment, by the dint of moral momentum it plodded on in hortatory moods

and accents, fifing platitudes "to cheer the weary traveller." Tracts in verse and sermons in couplets were the typical result. Then eventually came the time when the hectic rhetoric and dogged moralism had to fall back in sheer exhaustion on the original basis of cultural supply. Through Dunbar,—part of whose poetry nevertheless, reflects the last stand of this rhetorical advance, Negro poetry came penitently back to the folk-tradition, and humbled itself to dialect for fresh spiritual food and raiment. It is for this reason, as Stanley Braithwaite has so discerningly put it, that Dunbar's poetry closes one age and begins another. Paul Laurence Dunbar definitely accomplished three significant things. The first was to have brought the work of a Negro in poetry to general public attention and acceptance; and thus to have emancipated the Negro artist from his special reading clientele of pet friends and sympathizers. His second was to have established the idea of folk-expression; a priceless boon even at the great cost of having shackled Negro poets for over a generation to the limitations and handicaps of dialect. The third accomplishment was to have given fresh impetus to lyric expression; free singing from a free heart. This makes Dunbar the Robert Burns of our race tradition.

Dunbar had scores of imitators, some of them like Holloway, Carmichael, Daniel Webster Davis, and Ernest Shackleford, poets of some real talent and inspiration. But they were as handicapped as their predecessors, though in a different way. They plead in dialect; the peasant became a moral stalking-horse for their generation just as for the previous generation the ideals of freedom and humanity had been. They were thus hopelessly minor and secondary in outlook and accomplishment, befogged again by the mists of the Negro problem. Almost contemporaneously however, isolated individuals were manoeuvring towards the main roads of poetry: Carruthers, McClellan, Joseph Cotter, Sr., held back somewhat by the dilemma of dialect,—wishing not to desert the race spiritually but at the same time not to be hampered by the Dunbar tradition, which was gradually deteriorating from minstrelsy, to buffoonery. Significant in title and accomplishment, there

came, in 1917, James Weldon Johnson's *Fifty Years and Other Poems*. Cultural perspective had come, and with it the depth and articulateness of major poetry; Negro poetry in the year of America's entry into the Great War, through the work of Roscoe Jameson, Claude McKay, and James Weldon Johnson was linked up with the main stream and tradition of English poetry, and on an aesthetic rather than a moral basis began to attain universality and by right to claim general attention.

In the very act of discarding dialect and the hectic rhetorical assertion of race, Negro poetry became at one and the same time more universal and more racial, finding a strange peace and ease in what had given it most inquietude. For in becoming less self-conscious, it became more naïvely and beautifully expressive, like music.

Blown by black players on a picnic day.

The poetry of protest and social analysis still continued, as the vibrant verses of the same poet, Claude McKay, so often attest, but even in this vein contemporary Negro poetry has achieved the dignity of self-esteem and the poise of self-confidence. Of the race spirit, as of McKay's dancer, it can be said—

To me she seemed a proudly swaying palm
Grown lovelier through passing through a
storm—

To the freedom of heart, freedom of mind and spirit had to be joined before conditions conducive to great poetry were achieved. Negro poets now began to accept race not as a duty but a privilege, and to find joy and inspiration not in the escape from handicaps, but in the mastery of experience. McKay can sing of America,

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness
I love this cultured hell that tests my
youth,—

and Cullen, reaching out through the race experience to the sense of a group heritage and tradition, expresses this growing spiritual conquest still more positively:—

Lord, not for what I saw in flesh or bone
Of fairer men; not raised on faith alone;

Lord, I will live persuaded by mine own.
 I cannot play the recreant to these:
 My spirit has come home,—that sailed the
 doubtful seas.

In the work of the younger Negro poets since 1918, though there is no unity of style or a school, there is this ever-increasing unity of spirit and sense of tradition. It has come about in spite of a startling increase in the numbers of our poets, and their varied affiliations with the richly differentiated technique of the modern schools of poetry. More than this, a comparable gain in technical competence and distinctive excellence of performance has come about in recent years. Readers of this *Anthology* and of the general and special magazines, familiar already with the names of McKay, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Anne Spencer, Angelina Grimké, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, and Countée Cullen, will know and concede that Negro genius has shared liberally in the renaissance of American poetry and made a substantial and distinctive contribution to it. Indeed, contemporary American poets, engaged in spite of all their diversities of outlook and technique in a fundamentally common effort to discover and release the national spirit in poetry, have sensed a kindred aim and motive in Negro poetry, and have turned with deep and unbiassed interest to Negro materials as themes and Negro idioms of speech and emotion as artistic inspiration. While not limiting themselves to the special province, which is peculiarly and intimately their own, the young Negro poets have become quite unanimous in spirit and purpose to develop this folk tradition into full artistic expression and cultural recognition. This gives their work the significance and impetus of a definite artistic movement. Special organs of journalistic and literary expression, specific prize-awards and contests as those now conducted annually under the auspices of the Negro journals, *Opportunity* and *The Crisis*, feed the movement and to some extent give it critical direction. Of late a new crop of poets is hatched annually, and names of fresh promise constantly appear,—Gwendolyn Bennett, Arna Bontemps, Frank Horne, Helene Johnson,—to mention only a few. But the

significance of this is not so much in the fact that more poetry has been produced in less than a decade than the yield of over a century and a half, but that better poetry and a philosophy of art have also come. From the bathos of sentimental appeal and the postures of moralizing protest, Negro poets have risen to the dignity and poise of self-expression. Freed from the limitations of dialect that made the technique of the nursery rhyme tolerable, they have not only achieved a modernism of expression, but are attempting to develop new characteristic idioms of style. In place of the persistent and oppressive race consciousness, they have in part acquired the dignity of race spokesmanship and in part re-achieved the enviable naïveté of the slave-singers. More than all else, especially in its promise for the future, they have won that artistic acceptance of life which makes great art possible.

Can it be doubted? At least the contemporary Negro poets have no hawk shadow of doubt over their attempts to sing and soar; they are writing today poetry of national distinction and value, but poetry none the less full of a vitally characteristic racial flow and feeling, inspired by the belief that a people that can give its sorrow enduring musical expression can make its soul powerfully articulate. There is more than subjective ecstasy in Cullen's,

This is my hour
 To wax and climb,
 Flaunt a red flower
 In the face of time.

And the lyric sincerity and insight of her generation are in Helene Johnson's

Ah, little road all whirry in the breeze,
 A leaping clay hill lost among the trees,
 The bleeding note of rapture streaming
 thrush
 Caught in a drowsy hush
 And stretched out in a single singing line of
 dusky song.
 Ah little road, brown as my race is brown,
 Your trodden beauty like our trodden pride,
 Dust of the dust, they must not bruise you
 down.
 Rise to one brimming, golden, spilling cry!

T.THOMAS FORTUNE

Mr. Garvey as a Poet (1927)

A great many people have been surprised and pleased at discovering that Honorable Marcus Garvey, President-General of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, is a poet of a high order; that is, that he possesses in large measure the divine power of expressing himself in the language of poetry, which a distinguished authority has declared to be the sublimest expression of the human soul after perfection. Only those who have suffered greatly or felt the ecstacies of joy in its highest and purest form, are capable of reaching the depths in poetic expression which affect and move great masses of people.

Lord Byron says, in effect, "Many are poets who have never penned a thought, and perhaps the best." The poets who have sung spontaneously, as it were, without suffering much, as Homer, David, Milton, and Dante suffered, or loved deeply, as Petrarch, Shakespeare, Lord Byron, and Edgar Allan Poe loved, only skim the surface of human sorrow and joy. They do not fathom the depths of human hope and aspiration. They please and charm but do not transport us.

Mr. Garvey has loved deeply and suffered deeply. In the few years he has lived he has experienced the extremes of human joy and agony. If he did not possess a poetic consciousness he would be mute, or express himself in common phrase, as the average person does; but, having

the poetic consciousness, he not only writes poetry that moves the reader but he writes and speaks the prose which reaches and moves the masses. In the *Negro World* of September 17, we published a poem by Mr. Garvey, under the heading, "God in Man," in which the image of God in the image of man, as stated in the first chapter of Genesis, twenty-seventh verse, as follows: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them," is very poetically brought out, as the following three concluding stanzas will disclose:

Thou art the living force in part,
The Spirit of the Mighty I;
The God of Heaven and your heart
Is Spirit that can never die.

You're what you are in heart and mind,
Because you will it so to be;
The man who tries himself to find,
Is light to all, and great is he.

In each and every one is God,
In everything atomic life;
There is no death beneath the sod,
This fact, not knowing, brings us strife.

But man has wandered far from the image and spirit of his creator and by the eating of flesh and crossing of breeds made something that does not resemble the original man.

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

Preface (from *The Book of American Negro Poetry*) (1922)

There is, perhaps, a better excuse for giving an anthology of American Negro poetry to the public than can be offered for many of the anthologies that have recently been issued. The

public, generally speaking, does not know that there are American Negro poets—to supply this lack of information is, alone, a work worthy of somebody's effort.

Moreover, the matter of Negro poets and the production of literature by the colored people in this country involves more than supplying information that is lacking. It is a matter which has a direct bearing on the most vital of American problems.

A people may become great through many means, but there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior.

The status of the Negro in the United States is more a question of national mental attitude toward the race than of actual conditions. And nothing will do more to change that mental attitude and raise his status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through the production of literature and art.

Is there likelihood that the American Negro will be able to do this? There is, for the good reason that he possesses the innate powers. He has the emotional endowment, the originality and artistic conception, and what is more important, the power of creating that which has universal appeal and influence.

I make here what may appear to be a more startling statement by saying that the Negro has already proved the possession of these powers by being the creator of the only things artistic that have yet sprung from American soil and been universally acknowledged as distinctive American products.

These creations by the American Negro may be summed up under four heads. The first two are the Uncle Remus stories, which were collected by Joel Chandler Harris, and the "spirituals" or slave songs, to which the Fisk Jubilee Singers made the public and the musicians of both the United States and Europe listen. The Uncle Remus stories constitute the greatest body of folklore that America has produced, and the "spirituals" the greatest body of folksongs. I shall speak of the "spirituals" later because they

are more than folksongs, for in them the Negro sounded the depths, if he did not scale the heights, of music.

The other two creations are the cakewalk and ragtime. We do not need to go very far back to remember when cakewalking was the rage in the United States, Europe and South America. Society in this country and royalty abroad spent time in practicing the intricate steps. Paris pronounced it the "poetry of motion." The popularity of the cakewalk passed away but its influence remained. The influence can be seen today on any American stage where there is dancing.

The influence which the Negro has exercised on the art of dancing in this country has been almost absolute. For generations the "buck and wing" and the "stop-time" dances, which are strictly Negro, have been familiar to American theater audiences. A few years ago the public discovered the "turkey trot," the "eagle rock," "ballin' the jack," and several other varieties that started the modern dance craze. These dances were quickly followed by the "tango," a dance originated by the Negroes of Cuba and later transplanted to South America. (This fact is attested by no less authority than Vicente Blasco Ibañez in his *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*.) Half the floor space in the country was then turned over to dancing, and highly paid exponents sprang up everywhere. The most noted, Mr. Vernon Castle, and, by the way, an Englishman, never danced except to the music of a colored band, and he never failed to state to his audiences that most of his dances had long been done by "your colored people," as he put it.

Any one who witnesses a musical production in which there is dancing cannot fail to notice the Negro stamp on all the movements; a stamp which even the great vogue of Russian dances that swept the country about the time of the popular dance craze could not affect. That peculiar swaying of the shoulders which you see done everywhere by the blond girls of the chorus is nothing more than a movement from the Negro dance referred to above, the "eagle rock." Occasionally the movement takes on a suggestion of the now outlawed "shimmy."

As for Ragtime, I go straight to the statement that it is the one artistic production by which

America is known the world over. It has been all-conquering. Everywhere it is hailed as "American music."

For a dozen years or so there has been a steady tendency to divorce Ragtime from the Negro; in fact, to take from him the credit of having originated it. Probably the younger people of the present generation do not know that Ragtime is of Negro origin. The change wrought in Ragtime and the way in which it is accepted by the country have been brought about chiefly through the change which has gradually been made in the words and stories accompanying the music. Once the text of all Ragtime songs was written in Negro dialect, and was about Negroes in the cabin or in the cotton field or on the levee or at a jubilee or on Sixth Avenue or at a ball, and about their love affairs. Today, only a small proportion of Ragtime songs relate at all to the Negro. The truth is, Ragtime is now national rather than racial. But that does not abolish in any way the claim of the American Negro as its originator.

Ragtime music was originated by colored piano players in the questionable resorts of St. Louis, Memphis, and other Mississippi River towns. These men did not know any more about the theory of music than they did about the theory of the universe. They were guided by their natural musical instinct and talent, but above all by the Negro's extraordinary sense of rhythm. Any one who is familiar with Ragtime may note that its chief charm is not in melody, but in rhythms. These players often improvised crude and, at times, vulgar words to fit the music. This was the beginning of the Ragtime song.

Ragtime music got its first popular hearing at Chicago during the World's Fair in that city. From Chicago it made its way to New York, and then started on its universal triumph.

The earliest Ragtime songs, like Topsy, "jes' grew." Some of these earliest songs were taken down by white men, the words slightly altered or changed, and published under the names of the arrangers. They sprang into immediate popularity and earned small fortunes. The first to become widely known was "The Bully," a levee song which had been long used by roustabouts

along the Mississippi. It was introduced in New York by Miss May Irwin, and gained instant popularity. Another one of these "jes' grew" songs was one which for a while disputed for place with Yankee Doodle, perhaps, disputes it even today. That song was "A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight"; introduced and made popular by the colored regimental bands during the Spanish-American War.

Later there came along a number of colored men who were able to transcribe the old songs and write original ones. I was, about that time, writing words to music for the music show stage in New York. I was collaborating with my brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, and the late Bob Cole. I remember that we appropriated about the last one of the old "jes' grew" songs. It was a song which had been sung for years all through the South. The words were unprintable, but the tune was irresistible, and belonged to nobody. We took it, re-wrote the verses, telling an entirely different story from the original, left the chorus as it was, and published the song, at first under the name of "Will Handy." It became very popular with college boys, especially at football games, and perhaps still is. The song was "Oh, Didn't He Ramble!"

In the beginning, and for quite a while, almost all of the Ragtime songs that were deliberately composed were the work of colored writers. Now, the colored composers, even in this particular field, are greatly outnumbered by the white.

The reader might be curious to know if the "jes' grew" songs have ceased to grow. No, they have not; they are growing all the time. The country has lately been flooded with several varieties of "The Blues." These "Blues," too, had their origin in Memphis, and the towns along the Mississippi. They are a sort of lament of a lover who is feeling "blue" over the loss of his sweetheart. The "Blues" of Memphis have been adulterated so much on Broadway that they have lost their pristine hue. But whenever you hear a piece of music which has a strain like this in it [fig. 1]. you will know you are listening to something which belonged originally to Beale Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee. The original "Memphis Blues," so far as it can be credited



FIGURE 1

to a composer, must be credited to Mr. W. C. Handy, a colored musician of Memphis.

As illustrations of the genuine Ragtime song in the making, I quote the words of two that were popular with the Southern colored soldiers in France. Here is the first:

Mah mammy's lyin' in her grave,
 Mah daddy done run away,
 Mah sister's married a gamblin' man,
 An' I've done gone astray.
 Yes, I've done gone astray, po' boy,
 An' I've done gone astray,
 Mah sister's married a gamblin' man,
 An' I've done gone astray, po' boy.

These lines are crude, but they contain something of real poetry, of that elusive thing which nobody can define and that you can only tell is there when you feel it. You cannot read these lines without becoming reflective and feeling sorry for "Po' Boy."

Now, take in this word picture of utter dejection:

I'm jes' as misabul as I can be,
 I'm unhappy even if I am free,
 I'm feelin' down, I'm feelin' blue;
 I wander 'round, don't know what to do.
 I'm go'n lay mah haid on de railroad line,
 Let de B. & O. come and pacify mah min'.

These lines are, no doubt, one of the many versions of the famous "Blues." They are also

crude, but they go straight to the mark. The last two lines move with the swiftness of all great tragedy.

In spite of the bans which musicians and music teachers have placed on it, the people still demand and enjoy Ragtime. In fact, there is not a corner of the civilized world in which it is not known and liked. And this proves its originality, for if it were an imitation, the people of Europe, at least, would not have found it a novelty. And it is proof of a more important thing, it is proof that Ragtime possesses the vital spark, the power to appeal universally, without which any artistic production, no matter how approved its form may be, is dead.

Of course, there are those who will deny that Ragtime is an artistic production. American musicians, especially, instead of investigating Ragtime, dismiss it with a contemptuous word. But this has been the course of scholasticism in every branch of art. Whatever new thing the people like is pooh-poohed; whatever is popular is regarded as not worthwhile. The fact is, nothing great or enduring in music has ever sprung full-fledged from the brain of any master; the best he gives the world he gathers from the hearts of the people, and runs it through the alembic of his genius.

Ragtime deserves serious attention. There is a lot of colorless and vicious imitation, but there is enough that is genuine. In one composition alone, "The Memphis Blues," the musician will

find not only great melodic beauty, but a polyphonic structure that is amazing.

It is obvious that Ragtime has influenced and, in a large measure, become our popular music; but not many would know that it has influenced even our religious music. Those who are familiar with gospel hymns can at once see this influence if they will compare the songs of thirty years ago, such as "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," "The Ninety and Nine," etc., with the up-to-date, syncopated tunes that are sung in Sunday Schools, Christian Endeavor Societies Y.M.C.A.'s and like gatherings today.

Ragtime has not only influenced American music, it has influenced American life; indeed, it has saturated American life. It has become the popular medium for our national expression musically. And who can say that it does not express the blare and jangle and the surge, too, of our national spirit?

Any one who doubts that there is a peculiar heel-tickling, smile-provoking, joy-awakening, response-compelling charm in Ragtime needs only to hear a skillful performer play the genuine article, needs only to listen to its bizarre harmonies, its audacious resolutions often consisting of an abrupt jump from one key to another, its intricate rhythms in which the accents fall in the most unexpected places but in which the fundamental beat is never lost, in order

to be convinced. I believe it has its place as well as the music which draws from us sighs and tears.

Now, these dances which I have referred to and Ragtime music may be lower forms of art, but they are evidence of a power that will some day be applied to the higher forms. And even now we need not stop at the Negro's accomplishment through these lower forms. In the "spirituals," or slave songs, the Negro has given America not only its only folk songs, but a mass of noble music. I never think of this music but that I am struck by the wonder, the miracle of its production. How did the men who originated these songs manage to do it? The sentiments are easily accounted for; they are, for the most part, taken from the Bible. But the melodies, where did they come from? Some of them so weirdly sweet, and others so wonderfully strong. Take, for instance, "Go Down, Moses"; I doubt that there is a stronger theme in the whole musical literature of the world [fig. 2].

It is to be noted that whereas the chief characteristic of Ragtime is rhythm, the chief characteristic of the "spirituals" is melody. The melodies of "Steal Away to Jesus," "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "Nobody Knows de Trouble I See," "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray," "Deep River," "O, Freedom Over Me," and many others of these songs possess a beauty that is—what

Op - pressed so hard they could not stand, Let my peo-ple go. Go down,

Mo-ses, way down in E-gyp tland, Tell _ole Pha-roah, Let my peo-ple go.

FIGURE 2

shall I say?, poignant. In the riotous rhythms of Ragtime the Negro expressed his irrepressible buoyancy, his keen response to the sheer joy of living; in the "spirituals" he voiced his sense of beauty and his deep religious feeling.

Naturally, not as much can be said for the words of these songs as for the music. Most of the songs are religious. Some of them are songs expressing faith and endurance and a longing for freedom. In the religious songs, the sentiments and often the entire lines are taken bodily from the Bible. However, there is no doubt that some of these religious songs have a meaning apart from the Biblical text. It is evident that the opening lines of "Go Down, Moses,"

Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land;
Tell old Pharaoh,
Let my people go.

have a significance beyond the bondage of Israel in Egypt.

The bulk of the lines to these songs, as is the case in all communal music, is made up of choral iteration and incremental repetition of the leader's lines. If the words are read, this constant iteration and repetition are found to be tiresome; and it must be admitted that the lines themselves are often very trite. And, yet, there is frequently revealed a flash of real primitive poetry. I give the following examples;

Sometimes I feel like an eagle in de air.

You may bury me in de East,
You may bury me in de West,
But I'll hear de trumpet sound
In-a dat mornin'.

I know de moonlight, I know de starlight;
I lay dis body down.

I walk in de moonlight, I walk in de starlight;
I lay dis body down.

I walk in de graveyard, I know de graveyard,
When I lay dis body down.

I walk in de graveyard, I walk troo de
graveyard
To lay dis body down.

I lay in de grave an' stretch out my arms;
I lay dis body down.

I go to de judgment in de evenin' of de day
When I lay dis body down.
An' my soul an' yo soul will meet in de day
When I lay dis body down.

Regarding the line, "I lay in de grave an' stretch out my arms," Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson of Boston, one of the first to give these slave songs serious study, said: "Never, it seems to me, since man first lived and suffered, was his infinite longing for peace uttered more plaintively than in that line."

These Negro folk-songs constitute a vast mine of material that has been neglected almost absolutely. The only white writers who have in recent years given adequate attention and study to this music, that I know of, are Mr. H. E. Krehbiel and Mrs. Natalie Curtis Burlin. We have our native composers denying the worth and importance of this music, and trying to manufacture grand opera out of so-called Indian themes.

But there is a great hope for the development of this music, and that hope is the Negro himself. A worthy beginning has already been made by Burleigh, Cook, Johnson, and Dett. And there will yet come great Negro composers who will take this music and voice through it not only the soul of their race, but the soul of America.

And does it not seem odd that this greatest gift of the Negro has been the most neglected of all he possesses? Money and effort have been expended upon his development in every direction except this. This gift has been regarded as a kind of side show, something for occasional exhibition, wherein it is the touchstone, it is the magic thing, it is that by which the Negro can bridge all chasms. No persons, however hostile, can listen to Negroes singing this wonderful music without having their hostility melted down.

This power of the Negro to suck up the national spirit from the soil and create something artistic and original, which, at the same time, possesses the note of universal appeal, is due to a remarkable racial gift of adaptability; it is more than adaptability, it is a transmissive quality. And the Negro has exercised this transmissive

quality not only here in America, where the race lives in large numbers, but in European countries, where the number has been almost infinitesimal.

Is it not curious to know that the greatest poet of Russia is Alexander Pushkin, a man of African descent; that the greatest romancer of France is Alexandre Dumas, a man of African descent; and that one of the greatest musicians of England is Coleridge-Taylor, a man of African descent?

The fact is fairly well known that the father of Dumas was a Negro of the French West Indies, and that the father of Coleridge-Taylor was a native-born African; but the facts concerning Pushkin's African ancestry are not so familiar.

When Peter the Great was Czar of Russia, some potentate presented him with a full-blooded Negro of gigantic size. Peter, the most eccentric ruler of modern times, dressed this Negro up in soldier clothes, christened him Hannibal, and made him a special body-guard.

But Hannibal had more than size, he had brain and ability. He not only looked picturesque and imposing in soldier clothes, he showed that he had in him the making of a real soldier. Peter recognized this, and eventually made him a general. He afterwards ennobled him, and Hannibal, later, married one of the ladies of the Russian court. This same Hannibal was great-grandfather of Pushkin, the national poet of Russia, the man who bears the same relation to Russian literature that Shakespeare bears to English literature.

I know the question naturally arises: If out of the few Negroes who have lived in France there came a Dumas; and out of the few Negroes who have lived in England there came a Coleridge-Taylor; and if from the man who was at the time, probably, the only Negro in Russia there sprang that country's national poet, why have not the millions of Negroes in the United States with all the emotional and artistic endowment claimed for them produced a Dumas, or a Coleridge-Taylor, or a Pushkin?

The question seems difficult, but there is an answer. The Negro in the United States is

consuming all of his intellectual energy in this grueling race-struggle. And the same statement may be made in a general way about the white South. Why does not the white South produce literature and art? The white South, too, is consuming all of its intellectual energy in this lamentable conflict. Nearly all of the mental efforts of the white South run through one narrow channel. The life of every Southern white man and all of his activities are impassably limited by the ever present Negro problem. And that is why, as Mr. H. L. Mencken puts it, in all that vast region, with its thirty or forty million people and its territory as large as a half dozen Frances or Germanys, there is not a single poet, not a serious historian, not a creditable composer, not a critic good or bad, not a dramatist dead or alive.

But, even so, the American Negro has accomplished something in pure literature. The list of those who have done so would be surprising both by its length and the excellence of the achievements. One of the great books written in this country since the Civil War is the work of a colored man, *The Souls of Black Folk*, by W. E. B. Du Bois.

Such a list begins with Phillis Wheatley. In 1761 a slave ship landed a cargo of slaves in Boston. Among them was a little girl seven or eight years of age. She attracted the attention of John Wheatley, a wealthy gentleman of Boston, who purchased her as a servant for his wife. Mrs. Wheatley was a benevolent woman. She noticed the girl's quick mind and determined to give her opportunity for its development. Twelve years later Phillis published a volume of poems. The book was brought out in London, where Phillis was for several months an object of great curiosity and attention.

Phillis Wheatley has never been given her rightful place in American literature. By some sort of conspiracy she is kept out of most of the books especially the text-books on literature used in the schools. Of course, she is not a *great* American poet—and in her day there were no *great* American poets—but she is an important American poet. Her importance, if for no other reason, rests on the fact that, save one, she is the

first in order of time of all the women poets of America. And she is among the first of all American poets to issue a volume.

It seems strange that the books generally give space to a mention of Urian Oakes, President of Harvard College, and to quotations from the crude and lengthy elegy which he published in 1667; and print examples from the execrable versified version of the Psalms made by the New England divines, and yet deny a place to Phillis Wheatley.

Here are the opening lines from the elegy by Oakes, which is quoted from in most of the books on American literature:

Reader, I am no poet, but I grieve.
Behold here what that passion can do,
That forced a verse without Apollo's leave,
And whether the learned sisters would
or no.

There was no need for Urian to admit what his handiwork declared. But this from the versified Psalms is still worse, yet it is found in the books:

The Lord's song sing can we? being
in stranger's land, then let
lose her skill my right hand if I
Jerusalem forget.

Anne Bradstreet preceded Phillis Wheatley by a little over one hundred and twenty years. She published her volume of poems, *The Tenth Muse*, in 1650. Let us strike a comparison between the two. Anne Bradstreet was a wealthy, cultivated Puritan girl, the daughter of Thomas Dudley, Governor of Bay Colony. Phillis, as we know, was a Negro slave girl born in Africa. Let us take them both at their best and in the same vein. The following stanza is from Anne's poem entitled "Contemplation":

While musing thus with contemplation
fed,
And thousand fancies buzzing in my brain,
The sweet tongued Philomel percht o'er my
head,
And chanted forth a most melodious
strain,

Which rapt me so with wonder and delight,
I judged my hearing better than my sight,
And wisht me wings with her awhile to take
my flight.

And the following is from Phillis' poem entitled "Imagination":

Imagination! who can sing thy force?
Or who describe the swiftness of thy course?
Soaring through air to find the bright
abode,
Th' empyreal palace of the thundering God,
We on thy pinions can surpass the wind,
And leave the rolling universe behind.
From star to star the mental optics rove,
Measure the skies, and range the realms
above;
There in one view we grasp the mighty
whole,
Or with new worlds amaze th' unbounded
soul.

We do not think the black woman suffers much by comparison with the white. Thomas Jefferson said of Phillis: "Religion has produced a Phillis Wheatley, but it could not produce a poet; her poems are beneath contempt." It is quite likely that Jefferson's criticism was directed more against religion than against Phillis' poetry. On the other hand, General George Washington wrote her with his own hand a letter in which he thanked her for a poem which she had dedicated to him. He later received her with marked courtesy at his camp at Cambridge.

It appears certain that Phillis was the first person to apply to George Washington the phrase, "First in peace." The phrase occurs in her poem addressed to "His Excellency, General George Washington," written in 1775. The encomium, "First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen," was originally used in the resolutions presented to Congress on the death of Washington, December 1799.

Phillis Wheatley's poetry is the poetry of the Eighteenth Century. She wrote when Pope and Gray were supreme, it is easy to see that Pope was her model. Had she come under the influence of Wordsworth, Byron or Keats or Shelley

she would have done greater work. As it is, her work must not be judged by the work and standards of a later day, but by the work and standards of her own day and her own contemporaries. By this method of criticism she stands out as one of the important characters in the making of American literature, without any allowances for her sex or her antecedents.

According to *A Bibliographical Checklist of American Negro Poetry*, compiled by Mr. Arthur A. Schomburg, more than one hundred Negroes in the United States have published volumes of poetry ranging in size from pamphlets to books of from one hundred to three hundred pages. About thirty of these writers fill in the gap between Phillis Wheatley and Paul Laurence Dunbar: Just here it is of interest to note that a Negro wrote and published a poem before Phillis Wheatley arrived in this country from Africa. He was Jupiter Hammon, a slave belonging to a Mr. Lloyd of Queens Village, Long Island. In 1760 Hammon published a poem, eighty-eight lines in length, entitled "An Evening Thought, Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries." In 1788 he published "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley, Ethiopian Poetess in Boston, who came from Africa at eight years of age, and soon became acquainted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ." These two poems do not include all that Hammon wrote.

The poets between Phillis Wheatley and Dunbar must be considered more in the light of what they attempted than of what they accomplished. Many of them showed marked talent, but barely a half dozen of them demonstrated even mediocre mastery of technique in the use of poetic material and forms. And yet there are several names that deserve mention. George M. Horton, Frances E. Harper, James M. Bell, and Alberry A. Whitman, all merit consideration when due allowances are made for their limitations in education, training and general culture. The limitations of Horton were greater than those of either of the others; he was born a slave in North Carolina in 1797, and as a young man began to compose poetry without being able to write it down. Later he received some instruction from professors of the University of North

Carolina, at which institution he was employed as a janitor. He published a volume of poems, *The Hope of Liberty*, in 1829.

Mrs. Harper, Bell, and Whitman would stand out if only for the reason that each of them attempted sustained work. Mrs. Harper published her first volume of poems in 1854, but later she published "Moses, a Story of the Nile," a poem which ran to fifty-two closely printed pages. Bell in 1864 published a poem of 28 pages in celebration of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. In 1870 he published a poem of 32 pages in celebration of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Whitman published his first volume of poems, a book of 253 pages, in 1877; but in 1884 he published "The Rape of Florida," an epic poem written in four cantos and done in the Spenserian stanza, and which ran to ninety-seven closely printed pages. The poetry of both Mrs. Harper and of Whitman had a large degree of popularity; one of Mrs. Harper's books went through more than twenty editions.

Of these four poets, it is Whitman who reveals not only the greatest imagination but also the more skillful workmanship. His lyric power at its best may be judged from the following stanza from the "Rape of Florida":

"Come now, my love, the moon is on the
lake;
Upon the waters is my light canoe;
Come with me, love, and gladsome oars
shall make
A music on the parting wave for you.
Come o'er the waters deep and dark and
blue;
Come where the lilies in the marge have
sprung,
Come with me, love, for Oh, my love is
true!"
This is the song that on the lake was
sung,
The boatman sang it when his heart was
young.

Some idea of Whitman's capacity for dramatic narration may be gained from the following lines taken from "Not a Man, and Yet a

Man," a poem of even greater length than "The Rape of Florida."

A flash of steely lightning from his hand,
Strikes down the groaning leader of the
band;
Divides his startled comrades, and again
Descending, leaves fair Dora's captors slain.
Her, seizing then within a strong embrace,
Out in the dark he wheels his flying pace;

He speaks not, but with stalwart tenderness
Her swelling bosom firm to his doth press;
Springs like a stag that flees the eager
hound,
And like a whirlwind rustles o'er the
ground.
Her locks swim in disheveled wildness o'er
His shoulders, streaming to his waist and
more;
While on and on, strong as a rolling flood,
His sweeping footsteps part the silent wood.

It is curious and interesting to trace the growth of individuality and race consciousness in this group of poets. Jupiter Hammon's verses were almost entirely religious exhortations. Only very seldom does Phillis Wheatley sound a native note. Four times in single lines she refers to herself as "Afric's muse." In a poem of admonition addressed to the students at the "University of Cambridge in New England" she refers to herself as follows:

Ye blooming plants of human race divine,
An Ethiop tells you 'tis your greatest foe.

But one looks in vain for some outburst or even complaint against the bondage of her people, for some agonizing cry about her native land. In two poems she refers definitely to Africa as her home, but in each instance there seems to be under the sentiment of the lines a feeling of almost smug contentment at her own escape therefrom. In the poem, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," she says:

'Twas mercy brought me from my pagan
land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God and there's a Saviour too;

Once I redemption neither sought nor knew
Some view our sable race with scornful
eye—
"Their color is a diabolic dye."
Remember, Christians, Negroes black as
Cain,
May be refined, and join th' angelic train.

In the poem addressed to the Earl of Dartmouth, she speaks of freedom and makes a reference to the parents from whom she was taken as a child, a reference which cannot but strike the reader as rather unimpassioned:

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my
song,
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom
sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common
good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood;
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat;
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labor in my parents' breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery
mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd;
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

The bulk of Phillis Wheatley's work consists of poems addressed to people of prominence. Her book was dedicated to the Countess of Huntington, at whose house she spent the greater part of her time while in England. On his repeal of the Stamp Act, she wrote a poem to King George III, whom she saw later; another poem she wrote to the Earl of Dartmouth, whom she knew. A number of her verses were addressed to other persons of distinction. Indeed, it is apparent that Phillis was far from being a democrat. She was far from being a democrat not only in her social ideas but also in her political ideas; unless a religious meaning is given to the closing lines of her ode to General Washington, she was a decided royalist:

A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine
With gold unfading, Washington! be thine.

Nevertheless, she was an ardent patriot. Her ode to General Washington (1775), her spirited poem, "On Major General Lee" (1776), and her poem, "Liberty and Peace," written in celebration of the close of the war, reveal not only strong patriotic feeling but an understanding of the issues at stake. In her poem, "On Major General Lee," she makes her hero reply thus to the taunts of the British commander into whose hands he has been delivered through treachery:

O arrogance of tongue!
And wild ambition, ever prone to wrong!
Believ'st thou, chief, that armies such as
thine
Can stretch in dust that heaven-defended
line?
In vain allies may swarm from distant
lands,
And demons aid in formidable bands.
Great as thou art, thou shun'st the field of
fame,
Disgrace to Britain and the British name!
When offer'd combat by the noble foe
(Foe to misrule) why did the sword forego
The easy conquest of the rebel-land?
Perhaps too easy for thy martial hand.
What various causes to the field invite!
For plunder you, and we for freedom fight;
Her cause divine with generous ardor fires,
And every bosom glows as she inspires!
Already thousands of your troops have fled
To the drear mansions of the silent dead:
Columbia, too, beholds with streaming eyes
Her heroes fall—'tis freedom's sacrifice!
So wills the power who with convulsive
storms
Shakes impious realms, and nature's face
deforms;
Yet those brave troops, innum'rous as the
sands,
One soul inspires, one General Chief
commands;
Find in your train of boasted heroes, one
To match the praise of Godlike Washington.
Thrice happy Chief in whom the virtues
join,
And heaven taught prudence speaks the
man divine.

What Phillis Wheatley failed to achieve is due in no small degree to her education and environment. Her mind was steeped in the classics; her verses are filled with classical and mythological allusions. She knew Ovid thoroughly and was familiar with other Latin authors. She must have known Alexander Pope by heart. And, too, she was reared and sheltered in a wealthy and cultured family,—a wealthy and cultured Boston family; she never had the opportunity to learn life; she never found out her own true relation to life and to her surroundings. And it should not be forgotten that she was only about thirty years old when she died. The impulsion or the compulsion that might have driven her genius off the worn paths, out on a journey of exploration, Phillis Wheatley never received. But, whatever her limitations, she merits more than America has accorded her.

Horton, who was born three years after Phillis Wheatley's death, expressed in all of his poetry strong complaint at his condition of slavery and a deep longing for freedom. The following verses are typical of his style and his ability:

Alas! and am I born for this,
To wear this slavish chain?
Deprived of all created bliss,
Through hardship, toil, and pain?

Come, Liberty! thou cheerful sound,
Roll through my ravished ears;
Come, let my grief in joys be drowned,
And drive away my fears.

In Mrs. Harper we find something more than the complaint and the longing of Horton. We find an expression of a sense of wrong and injustice. The following stanzas are from a poem addressed to the white women of America:

You can sigh o'er the sad-eyed Armenian
Who weeps in her desolate home.
You can mourn o'er the exile of Russia
From kindred and friends doomed to
roam.

But hark! from our Southland are floating
Sobs of anguish, murmurs of pain;
And women heart-stricken are weeping
O'er their tortured and slain.

Have ye not, oh, my favored sisters,
Just a plea, a prayer or a tear
For mothers who dwell 'neath the shadows
Of agony, hatred and fear?

Weep not, oh, my well sheltered sisters,
Weep not for the Negro alone,
But weep for your sons who must gather
The crops which their fathers have sown.

Whitman, in the midst of "The Rape of Florida," a poem in which he related the taking of the State of Florida from the Seminoles, stops and discusses the race question. He discusses it in many other poems; and he discusses it from many different angles. In Whitman we find not only an expression of a sense of wrong and injustice, but we hear a note of faith and a note also of defiance. For example, in the opening to Canto II of "The Rape of Florida":

Greatness by nature cannot be entailed;
It is an office ending with the man,—
Sage, hero, Saviour, tho' the Sire be hailed,
The son may reach obscurity in the van:
Sublime achievements know no patent plan,
Man's immortality's a book with seals,
And none but God shall open—none
else can—

But opened, it the mystery reveals,—
Manhood's conquest of man to heaven's
respect appeals.

Is manhood less because man's face is
black?
Let thunders of the loosened seals reply!
Who shall the rider's restive steed turn
back?
Or who withstand the arrows he lets fly
Between the mountains of eternity?
Genius ride forth! Thou gift and torch of
heav'n!
The mastery is kindled in thine eye;
To conquest ride! thy bow of strength is
giv'n—
The trampled hordes of caste before thee
shall be driv'n

'Tis hard to judge if hatred of one's race,
By those who deem themselves
superior-born,

Be worse than that quiescence in disgrace,
Which only merits—and should
only—scorn.

Oh, let me see the Negro night and morn,
Pressing and fighting in, for place and
power!
All earth is place—all time th' auspicious
hour,
While heaven leans forth to look, oh,
will he quail or cower?

Ah! I abhor his protest and complaint!
His pious looks and patience I despise!
He can't evade the test, disguised as saint;
The manly voice of freedom bids him rise,
And shake himself before Philistine eyes!
And, like a lion roused, no sooner than
A foe dare come, play all his energies,
And court the fray with fury if he can;
For hell itself respects a fearless, manly man.

It may be said that none of these poets strike a deep native strain or sound a distinctly original note, either in matter or form. That is true; but the same thing may be said of all the American poets down to the writers of the present generation, with the exception of Poe and Walt Whitman. The thing in which these black poets are mostly excelled by their contemporaries is mere technique.

Paul Laurence Dunbar stands out as the first poet from the Negro race in the United States to show a combined mastery over poetic material and poetic technique, to reveal innate literary distinction in what he wrote, and to maintain a high level of performance. He was the first to rise to a height from which he could take a perspective view of his own race. He was the first to see objectively its humor, its superstitions, its shortcomings; the first to feel sympathetically its heart-wounds, its yearnings, its aspirations, and to voice them all in a purely literary form.

Dunbar's fame rests chiefly on his poems in Negro dialect. This appraisal of him is, no doubt, fair; for in these dialect poems he not only carried his art to the highest point of perfection, but he made a contribution to American literature unlike what any one else had made, a contribution which, perhaps, no one else could have made. Of course, Negro dialect poetry was

written before Dunbar wrote, most of it by white writers; but the fact stands out that Dunbar was the first to use it as a medium for the true interpretation of Negro character and psychology. And yet, dialect poetry does not constitute the whole or even the bulk of Dunbar's work. In addition to a large number of poems of a very high order done in literary English, he was the author of four novels and several volumes of short stories.

Indeed, Dunbar did not begin his career as a writer of dialect. I may be pardoned for introducing here a bit of reminiscence. My personal friendship with Paul Dunbar began before he had achieved recognition, and continued to be close until his death. When I first met him he had published a thin volume, *Oak and Ivy*, which was being sold chiefly through his own efforts. *Oak and Ivy* showed no distinctive Negro influence, but rather the influence of James Whitcomb Riley. At this time Paul and I were together every day for several months. He talked to me a great deal about his hopes and ambitions. In these talks he revealed that he had reached a realization of the possibilities of poetry in the dialect, together with a recognition of the fact that it offered the surest way by which he could get a hearing. Often he said to me: "I've got to write dialect poetry; it's the only way I can get them to listen to me." I was with Dunbar at the beginning of what proved to be his last illness. He said to me then: "I have not grown. I am writing the same things I wrote ten years ago, and am writing them no better." His self-accusation was not fully true; he had grown, and he had gained a surer control of his art, but he had not accomplished the greater things of which he was constantly dreaming; the public had held him to the things for which it had accorded him recognition. If Dunbar had lived he would have achieved some of those dreams, but even while he talked so dejectedly to me he seemed to feel that he was not to live. He died when he was only thirty-three.

It has a bearing on this entire subject to note that Dunbar was of unmixed Negro blood; so, as the greatest figure in literature which the colored race in the United States has produced, he stands as an example at once refuting and

confounding those who wish to believe that whatever extraordinary ability an Aframerican shows is due to an admixture of white blood.

As a man, Dunbar was kind and tender. In conversation he was brilliant and polished. His voice was his chief charm, and was a great element in his success as a reader of his own works. In his actions he was impulsive as a child, sometimes even erratic; indeed, his intimate friends almost looked upon him as a spoiled boy. He was always delicate in health. Temperamentally, he belonged to that class of poets who Taine says are vessels too weak to contain the spirit of poetry, the poets whom poetry kills, the Byrons, the Burnses, the De Mussets the Poes.

To whom may he be compared, this boy who scribbled his early verses while he ran an elevator, whose youth was a battle against poverty, and who, in spite of almost insurmountable obstacles, rose to success? A comparison between him and Burns is not unfitting. The similarity between many phases of their lives is remarkable, and their works are not incommensurable. Burns took the strong dialect of his people and made it classic; Dunbar took the humble speech of his people and in it wrought music.

Mention of Dunbar brings up for consideration the fact that, although he is the most outstanding figure in literature among the Aframericans of the United States, he does not stand alone among the Aframericans of the whole Western world. There are Plácido and Manzano in Cuba; Vieux and Durand in Haiti; Machado de Assis in Brazil, and others still that might be mentioned, who stand on a plane with or even above Dunbar. Plácido and Machado de Assis rank as great in the literatures of their respective countries without any qualifications whatever. They are world figures in the literature of the Latin languages. Machado de Assis is somewhat handicapped in this respect by having as his tongue and medium the lesser known Portuguese, but Plácido, writing in the language of Spain, Mexico, Cuba and of almost the whole of South America, is universally known. His works have been republished in the original in Spain, Mexico and in most of the Latin-American countries; several editions have been published in the United States; translations

of his works have been made into French and German.

Plácido is in some respects the greatest of all the Cuban poets. In sheer genius and the fire of inspiration he surpasses his famous compatriot, Heredia. Then, too, his birth, his life and his death ideally contained the tragic elements that go into the making of a halo about a poet's head. Plácido was born in Habana in 1809. The first months of his life were passed in a foundling asylum; indeed, his real name, Gabriel de la Concepcion Valdés, was in honor of its founder. His father took him out of the asylum, but shortly afterwards went to Mexico and died there. His early life was a struggle against poverty; his youth and manhood was a struggle for Cuban independence. His death placed him in the list of Cuban martyrs. On the twenty-seventh of June, 1844, he was lined up against a wall with ten others and shot by order of the Spanish authorities on a charge of conspiracy. In his short but eventful life he turned out work which bulks more than six hundred pages. During the few hours preceding his execution he wrote three of his best-known poems, among them his famous sonnet, "Mother, Farewell!"

Plácido's sonnet to his mother has been translated into every important language; William Cullen Bryant did it in English; but in spite of its wide popularity, it is, perhaps, outside of Cuba the least understood of all Plácido's poems. It is curious to note how Bryant's translation totally misses the intimate sense of the delicate subtlety of the poem. The American poet makes it a tender and loving farewell of a son who is about to die to a heart-broken mother; but that is not the kind of a farewell that Plácido intended to write or did write.

The key to the poem is in the first word, and the first word is the Spanish conjunction *Si* (if). The central idea, then, of the sonnet is, "If the sad fate which now overwhelms me should bring a pang to your heart, do not weep, for I die a glorious death and sound the last note of my lyre to you." Bryant either failed to understand or ignored the opening word, "If," because he was not familiar with the poet's history.

While Plácido's father was a Negro, his mother was a Spanish white woman, a dancer

in one of the Habana theaters. At his birth she abandoned him to a foundling asylum, and perhaps never saw him again, although it is known that she outlived her son. When the poet came down to his last hours he remembered that somewhere there lived a woman who was his mother; that although she had heartlessly abandoned him; that although he owed her no filial duty, still she might, perhaps, on hearing of his sad end feel some pang of grief or sadness; so he tells her in his last words that he dies happy and bids her not to weep. This he does with nobility and dignity, but absolutely without affection. Taking into account these facts, and especially their humiliating and embittering effect upon a soul so sensitive as Plácido's, this sonnet, in spite of the obvious weakness of the sestet as compared with the octave, is a remarkable piece of work.

In considering the Aframerican poets of the Latin languages I am impelled to think that, as up to this time the colored poets of greater university have come out of the Latin-American countries rather than out of the United States, they will continue to do so for a good many years. The reason for this I hinted at in the first part of this preface. The colored poet in the United States labors within limitations which he cannot easily pass over. He is always on the defensive or the offensive. The pressure upon him to be propagandic is well nigh irresistible. These conditions are suffocating to breadth and to real art in poetry. In addition he labors under the handicap of finding culture not entirely colorless in the United States. On the other hand, the colored poet of Latin America can voice the national spirit without any reservations. And he will be rewarded without any reservations, whether it be to place him among the great or declare him the greatest.

So I think it probable that the first world-acknowledged Aframerican poet will come out of Latin America. Over against this probability, of course, is the great advantage possessed by the colored poet in the United States of writing in the world-conquering English language.

This preface has gone far beyond what I had in mind when I started. It was my intention to gather together the best verses I could find by

Negro poets and present them with a bare word of introduction. It was not my plan to make this collection inclusive nor to make the book in any sense a book of criticism. I planned to present only verses by contemporary writers; but, perhaps, because this is the first collection of its kind, I realized the absence of a starting-point and was led to provide one and to fill in with historical data what I felt to be a gap.

It may be surprising to many to see how little of the poetry being written by Negro poets today is being written in Negro dialect. The newer Negro poets show a tendency to discard dialect; much of the subject-matter which went into the making of traditional dialect poetry, 'possums, watermelons, etc., they have discarded altogether, at least, as poetic material. This tendency will, no doubt, be regretted by the majority of white readers; and, indeed, it would be a distinct loss if the American Negro poets threw away this quaint and musical folk speech as a medium of expression. And yet, after all, these poets are working through a problem not realized by the reader, and, perhaps, by many of these poets themselves not realized consciously. They are trying to break away from, not Negro dialect itself, but the limitations on Negro dialect imposed by the fixing effects of long convention.

The Negro in the United States has achieved or been placed in a certain artistic niche. When he is thought of artistically, it is as a happy-go-lucky, singing, shuffling, banjo-picking being or as a more or less pathetic figure. The picture of him is in a log cabin amid fields of cotton or along the levees. Negro dialect is naturally and by long association the exact instrument for voicing this phase of Negro life; and by that very exactness it is an instrument with but two full stops, humor and pathos. So even when he confines himself to purely racial themes, the Aframerican poet realizes that there are phases of Negro life in the United States which cannot be treated in the dialect either adequately or artistically. Take, for example, the phases rising out of life in Harlem, that most wonderful Negro city in the world. I do not deny that a Negro in a log cabin is more picturesque than a Negro in a Harlem flat, but the

Negro in the Harlem flat is here, and he is but part of a group growing everywhere in the country, a group whose ideals are becoming increasingly more vital than those of the traditionally artistic group, even if its members are less picturesque.

What the colored poet in the United States needs to do is something like what Synge did for the Irish, he needs to find a form that will express the racial spirit by symbols from within rather than by symbols from without, such as the mere mutilation of English spelling and pronunciation. He needs a form that is freer and larger than dialect, but which will still hold the racial flavor; a form expressing the imagery, the idioms, the peculiar turns of thought, and the distinctive humor and pathos, too, of the Negro, but which will also be capable of voicing the deepest and highest emotions and aspirations, and allow of the widest range of subjects and the widest scope of treatment.

Negro dialect is at present a medium that is not capable of giving expression to the varied conditions of Negro life in America, and much less is it capable of giving the fullest interpretation of Negro character and psychology. This is no indictment against the dialect as dialect, but against the mold of convention in which Negro dialect in the United States has been set. In time these conventions may become lost, and the colored poet in the United States may sit down to write in dialect without feeling that his first line will put the general reader in a frame of mind which demands that the poem be humorous or pathetic. In the meantime, there is no reason why these poets should not continue to do the beautiful things that can be done, and done best, in the dialect.

In stating the need for Aframerican poets in the United States to work out a new and distinctive form of expression I do not wish to be understood to hold any theory that they should limit themselves to Negro poetry, to racial themes; the sooner they are able to write *American* poetry spontaneously, the better. Nevertheless, I believe that the richest contribution the Negro poet can make to the American literature of the future will be the fusion into it of his own individual artistic gifts.

Not many of the writers here included, except Dunbar, are known at all to the general reading public; and there is only one of these who has a widely recognized position in the American literary world, William Stanley Braithwaite. Mr. Braithwaite is not only unique in this respect, but he stands unique among all the Aframerican writers the United States has yet produced. He has gained his place, taking as the standard and measure for his work the identical standard and measure applied to American writers and American literature. He has asked for no allowances or rewards, either directly or indirectly, on account of his race.

Mr. Braithwaite is the author of two volumes of verses, lyrics of delicate and tenuous beauty. In his more recent and uncollected poems he shows himself more and more decidedly the mystic. But his place in American literature is due more to his work as a critic and anthologist than to his work as a poet. There is still another rôle he has played, that of friend of poetry and poets. It is a recognized fact that in the work which preceded the present revival of poetry in the United States, no one rendered more unremitting and valuable service than Mr. Braithwaite. And it can be said that no future study of American poetry of this age can be made without reference to Braithwaite.

Two authors included in the book are better known for their work in prose than in poetry: W.E.B. Du Bois whose well-known prose at its best is, however, impassioned and rhythmical; and Benjamin Brawley who is the author among other works, of one of the best handbooks on the English drama that has yet appeared in America.

But the group of the new Negro poets, whose work makes up the bulk of this anthology, contains names destined to be known. Claude McKay although still quite a young man, has already demonstrated his power, breadth and skill as a poet. Mr. McKay's breadth is as essential a part of his equipment as his power and skill. He demonstrates mastery of the three when as a Negro poet he pours out the bitterness and rebellion in his heart in those two sonnet-tragedies, "If We Must Die" and "To the White Fiends," in a manner that strikes terror; and

when as a cosmic poet he creates the atmosphere and mood of poetic beauty in the absolute, as he does in "Spring in New Hampshire" and "The Harlem Dancer." Mr. McKay gives evidence that he has passed beyond the danger which threatens many of the new Negro poets—the danger of allowing the purely polemical phases of the race problem to choke their sense of artistry.

Mr. McKay's earliest work is unknown in this country. It consists of poems written and published in his native Jamaica. I was fortunate enough to run across this first volume, and I could not refrain from reproducing here one of the poems written in the West Indian Negro dialect. I have done this not only to illustrate the widest range of the poet's talent and to offer a comparison between the American and the West Indian dialects, but on account of the intrinsic worth of the poem itself. I was much tempted to introduce several more, in spite of the fact that they might require a glossary, because however greater work Mr. McKay may do he can never do anything more touching and charming than these poems in the Jamaica dialect.

Fenton Johnson is a young poet of the ultra-modern school who gives promise of greater work than he has yet done. Jessie Fauset shows that she possesses the lyric gift, and she works with care and finish. Miss Fauset is especially adept in her translations from the French. Georgia Douglas Johnson is a poet neither afraid nor ashamed of her emotions. She limits herself to the purely conventional forms, rhythms and rhymes, but through them she achieves striking effects. The principal theme of Mrs. Johnson's poems is the secret dread down in every woman's heart, the dread of the passing of youth and beauty, and with them love. An old theme, one which poets themselves have often wearied of, but which, like death, remains one of the imperishable themes on which is made the poetry that has moved men's hearts through all ages. In her ingenuously wrought verses, through sheer simplicity and spontaneity, Mrs. Johnson often sounds a note of pathos or passion that will not fail to waken a response, except in those too sophisticated or cynical to respond to

natural impulses. Of the half dozen or so colored women writing creditable verse, Anne Spencer is the most modern and least obvious in her methods. Her lines are at times involved and turgid and almost cryptic, but she shows an originality which does not depend upon eccentricities. In her "Before the Feast of Shushan" she displays an opulence, the love of which has long been charged against the Negro as one of his naïve and childish traits, but which in art may infuse a much needed color, warmth and spirit of abandon into American poetry.

John W. Holloway, more than any Negro poet writing in the dialect today, summons to his work the lilt, the spontaneity and charm of which Dunbar was the supreme master whenever he employed that medium. It is well to say a word here about the dialect poems of James Edwin Campbell. In dialect, Campbell was a precursor of Dunbar. A comparison of his idioms and phonetics with those of Dunbar reveals great differences. Dunbar is a shade or two more sophisticated and his phonetics approach nearer to a mean standard of the dialects spoken in the different sections. Campbell is more primitive and his phonetics are those of the dialect as spoken by the Negroes of the sea islands off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia, which to this day remains comparatively close to its African roots, and is strikingly similar to the speech of the uneducated Negroes of the West Indies. An error that confuses many persons in reading or understanding Negro dialect is the idea that it is uniform. An ignorant Negro of the uplands of Georgia would have almost as much difficulty in understanding an ignorant sea island Negro as an Englishman would have. Not even in the dialect of any particular section is a given word always pronounced in precisely the same way. Its pronunciation depends upon the preceding and following sounds. Sometimes the combination permits of a liaison so close that to the uninitiated the sound of the word is almost completely lost.

The constant effort in Negro dialect is to elide all troublesome consonants and sounds. This negative effort may be after all only positive

laziness of the vocal organs, but the result is a softening and smoothing which makes Negro dialect so delightfully easy for singers.

Daniel Webster Davis wrote dialect poetry at the time when Dunbar was writing. He gained great popularity, but it did not spread beyond his own race. Davis had unctuous humor, but he was crude. For illustration, note the vast stretch between his "Hog Meat" and Dunbar's "When de Co'n Pone's Hot," both of them poems on the traditional ecstasy of the Negro in contemplation of "good things" to eat.

It is regrettable that two of the most gifted writers included were cut off so early in life. R. C. Jamison and Joseph S. Cotter, Jr., died several years ago, both of them in their youth. Jamison was barely thirty at the time of his death, but among his poems there is one, at least, which stamps him as a poet of superior talent and lofty inspiration. "The Negro Soldiers" is a poem with the race problem as its theme, yet it transcends the limits of race and rises to a spiritual height that makes it one of the noblest poems of the Great War. Cotter died a mere boy of twenty, and the latter part of that brief period he passed in an invalid state. Some months before his death he published a thin volume of verses which were for the most part written on a sick bed. In this little volume Cotter showed fine poetic sense and a free and bold mastery over his material. A reading of Cotter's poems is certain to induce that mood in which one will regretfully speculate on what the young poet might have accomplished had he not been cut off so soon.

As intimated above, my original idea for this book underwent a change in the writing of the introduction. I first planned to select twenty-five to thirty poems which I judged to be up to a certain standard, and offer them with a few words of introduction and without comment. In the collection, as it grew to be, that "certain standard" has been broadened if not lowered; but I believe that this is offset by the advantage of the wider range given the reader and the student of the subject.

I offer this collection without making apology or asking allowance. I feel confident that

the reader will find not only an earnest for the future, but actual achievement. The reader cannot but be impressed by the distance already covered. It is a long way from the plaints of George Horton to the invectives of Claude McKay, from the obviousness of Frances Harper

to the complexity of Anne Spencer. Much ground has been covered, but more will yet be covered. It is this side of prophecy to declare that the undeniable creative genius of the Negro is destined to make a distinctive and valuable contribution to American poetry.

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

Negro Music (1899)

The strange, fantastic melody of the old plantation music has always possessed a deep fascination for me. There is an indescribable charm in it—a certain poetic sadness that appeals strongly to the artistic in one's nature.

The idea that art really had anything to do with this quality of Negro music I never for a moment entertained. But, question as I might, I could never find out its source until passing through Midway Plaisance some weeks ago I heard the Dahomeyans singing. Instantly the idea flashed into my mind: "It is a heritage."

Perhaps this thought has already struck many others, but I must confess that it has just dawned upon me, and I am startled at its suddenness and evident plausibility.

I heard in the Dahomeyans' singing the same rich melody, the same mournful minor cadences, that have touched the heart of the world through Negro music. It is the unknown something in the voice that so many people have tried to define and failed.

The Dahomeyan sings the music of his native Africa; the American Negro spends this silver heritage of melody, but adds to it the bitter ring of grief for wrongs and adversities which only he has known. The Dahomeyan startles us; the Negro American thrills us. The Dahomeyan makes us smile; the Negro American makes us weep and smile to weep again.

If my hypothesis be correct, the man who asks where the Negro got all those strange tunes of his songs is answered. They have been handed down to him from the matted jungles and sunburned deserts of Africa, from the reed huts of the Nile.

When F. J. Loudin of the Fisk Jubilee Singers told me how the people flocked to hear his troupe sing their simple old plantation songs I wondered. When I heard a college glee club or a white male quartet sing those same songs, with strict attention to every minute detail of time,

attack the harmony, I no longer wondered. It is only the Negro who can sing these songs with effect. The white professional acts; the negro feels. Here lies the difference. With the black man's heritage of song has come the heritage of sorrow, giving to his song the expression of a sorrowful sweetness which the mere imitator can never attain.

Many of the old plantation hymns, rude and uncouth as they were, improvised by the Negroes themselves under the influence of strong religious zeal, are models of melodic beauty. Underlined almost invariably by a strain of sadness, they sometimes burst out into rays of hope, rising above the commonplace and reaching up to the sublime.

Through them all can be traced the effect of the condition of the people. The years of depression and fear, with their intermittent moments of flickering hope, going out again in despair, and then again brightening into a hope that is almost a surety.

Even at the present day go into some of the small churches of the South and listen to their hymns. The voice of the singers assume a tone that one cannot describe. There is still that wavering minor cadence that cannot be imitated. It is that heritage of expression still there, and through it all one can hear the strain running like the theme of a symphony—the strain a supplication to God for deliverance.

It is said, and generally conceded to be true, that the Negro is ashamed of his music. If it be so, it is a shame to be rebuked and one which he must overcome, for he has the most beautiful melodies of any in the world. They are his by inheritance and it is for him to make the best use of his rich legacy. Let black composers—and there are such—weave those melodies into their compositions, and to him who laughs and says that they are only fit to be played upon the banjo let them say that

the banjo makes quite as sweet music as the bagpipe.

Foreign critics have said that these plantation songs were the only original music that America has produced. This is a mis-statement, for America has not produced even these; she has only taken what Africa has given her.

If the American Negro consults his best interest, he will seize upon these songs, preserve them, and make them distinctively his own. It has been recently demonstrated that what he refuses to accept as a gift others will steal. Let him out with false pride and come into the heritage which is his own.

W. E. B. DU BOIS

The Sorrow Songs (1903)

*I walk through the churchyard
To lay this body down;
I know moon-rise, I know star-rise;
I walk in the moonlight, I walk in the
starlight;
I'll lie in the grave and stretch out my arms,
I'll go to judgment in the evening of the day,
And my soul and thy soul shall meet that day.
When I lay this body down.*

—Negro song.



They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days—Sorrow Songs—for they were weary at heart. And so before each thought that I have written in this book I have set a phrase, a haunting echo of these weird old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men. Ever since I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine. Then in after years when I came to Nashville I saw the great temple builded of these songs towering over the pale city. To me Jubilee Hall seemed ever made of the songs themselves, and its bricks were red with the blood and dust of toil. Out of

them rose for me morning, noon, and night, bursts of wonderful melody, full of the voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past.

Little of beauty has America given the world save the rude grandeur God himself stamped on her bosom; the human spirit in this new world has expressed itself in vigor and ingenuity rather than in beauty. And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song—the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands to-day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.

Away back in the thirties the melody of these slave songs stirred the nation, but the songs were soon half forgotten. Some, like "Near the lake where drooped the willow," passed into current airs and their source was forgotten; others were caricatured on the "minstrel" stage and their memory died away. Then in war-time came the singular Port Royal experiment after the capture of Hilton Head, and perhaps for the first time the North met the Southern slave face to face and heart to heart with no third witness. The Sea Islands of the Carolinas, where they met, were filled with a black folk of primitive type, touched and moulded less by the world about them than any others outside the Black

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Away back in the thirties the melody of these slave songs stirred the nation, but the songs were soon half forgotten. Some, like "Near the lake where drooped the willow," passed into current airs and their source was forgotten; others were caricatured on the "minstrel" stage and their memory died away. Then in war-time came the singular Port Royal experiment after the capture of Hilton Head, and perhaps for the first time the North met the Southern slave face to face and heart to heart with no third witness. The Sea Islands of the Carolinas, where they met, were filled with a black folk of primitive type, touched and moulded less by the world about them than any others outside the Black

Belt. Their appearance was uncouth, their language funny, but their hearts were human and their singing stirred men with a mighty power. Thomas Wentworth Higginson hastened to tell of these songs, and Miss McKim and others urged upon the world their rare beauty. But the world listened only half credulously until the Fisk Jubilee Singers sang the slave songs so deeply into the world's heart that it can never wholly forget them again.

There was once a blacksmith's son born at Cadiz, New York, who in the changes of time taught school in Ohio and helped defend Cincinnati from Kirby Smith. Then he fought at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg and finally served in the Freedman's Bureau at Nashville. Here he formed a Sunday-school class of black children in 1866, and sang with them and taught them to sing. And then they taught him to sing, and when once the glory of the Jubilee songs passed into the soul of George L. White, he knew his life-work was to let those Negroes sing to the world as they had sung to him. So in 1871 the pilgrimage of the Fisk Jubilee Singers began. North to Cincinnati they rode,—four half-clothed black boys and five girl-women,—led by a man with a cause and a purpose. They stopped at Wilberforce, the oldest of Negro schools, where a black bishop blessed them. Then they went, fighting cold and starvation, shut out of hotels, and cheerfully sneered at, ever northward; and ever the magic of their song kept thrilling hearts, until a burst of applause in the Congregational Council at Oberlin revealed them to the world. They came to New York and Henry Ward Beecher dared to welcome them, even though the metropolitan dailies sneered at his "Nigger Minstrels." So their songs conquered till they sang across the land and across the sea, before Queen and Kaiser, in Scotland and Ireland, Holland and Switzerland. Seven years they sang, and brought back a hundred and fifty thousand dollars to found Fisk University.

Since their day they have been imitated—sometimes well, by the singers of Hampton and Atlanta, sometimes ill, by straggling quartettes. Caricature has sought again to spoil the quaint beauty of the music, and has filled the air with many debased melodies which vulgar ears

scarce know from the real. But the true Negro folk-song still lives in the hearts of those who have heard them truly sung and in the hearts of the Negro people.

What are these songs, and what do they mean? I know little of music and can say nothing in technical phrase, but I know something of men, and knowing them, I know that these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world. They tell us in these eager days that life was joyous to the black slave, careless and happy. I can easily believe this of some, of many. But not all the past South, though it rose from the dead, can gainsay the heart-touching witness of these songs. They are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways.

The songs are indeed the siftings of centuries; the music is far more ancient than the words, and in it we can trace here and there signs of development. My grandfather's grandmother was seized by an evil Dutch trader two centuries ago; and coming to the valleys of the Hudson and Housatonic, black, little, and lithe, she shivered and shrank in the harsh north winds, looked longingly at the hills, and often crooned a heathen melody to the child between her knees, thus:

Do ba-na co-ba, ge-ne me, ge-ne me!

Do ba-na co-ba, ge-ne me, ge-ne me!

Ben d'nu-li, nu-li, nu-li, nu-li, ben d' le.

The child sang it to his children and they to their children's children, and so two hundred years it has travelled down to us and we sing it to our children, knowing as little as our fathers what its words may mean, but knowing well the meaning of its music.

This was primitive African music; it may be seen in larger form in the strange chant which heralds "The Coming of John":

You may bury me in the East,
You may bury me in the West,
But I'll hear the trumpet sound in that
morning,

—the voice of exile.

Ten master songs, more or less, one may pluck from this forest of melody—songs of undoubted Negro origin and wide popular currency, and songs peculiarly characteristic of the slave. One of these I have just mentioned. Another whose strains begin this book is "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen." When, struck with a sudden poverty, the United States refused to fulfil its promises of land to the freedmen, a brigadier-general went down to the Sea Islands to carry the news. An old woman on the outskirts of the throng began singing this song; all the mass joined with her, swaying. And the soldier wept.

The third song is the cradle-song of death which all men know,—"Swing low, sweet chariot,"—whose bars begin the life story of "Alexander Crummell." Then there is the song of many waters, "Roll, Jordan, roll," a mighty chorus with minor cadences. There were many songs of the fugitive like that which opens "The Wings of Atalanta," and the more familiar "Been a-listening." The seventh is the song of the End and the Beginning—"My Lord, what a mourning! when the stars begin to fall"; a strain of this is placed before "The Dawn of Freedom." The song of groping—"My way's cloudy"—begins "The Meaning of Progress"; the ninth is the song of this chapter—"Wrestlin' Jacob, the day is a-breaking,"—a pæan of hopeful strife. The last master song is the song of songs—"Steal away,"—sprung from "The Faith of the Fathers."

There are many others of the Negro folksongs as striking and characteristic as these, as, for instance, the three strains in the third, eighth, and ninth chapters; and others I am sure could easily make a selection on more scientific principles. There are, too, songs that seem to me a step removed from the more primitive types:

there is the maze-like medley, "Bright sparkles," one phrase of which heads "The Black Belt"; the Easter carol, "Dust, dust and ashes"; the dirge, "My mother's took her flight and gone home"; and that burst of melody hovering over "The Passing of the First-Born"—"I hope my mother will be there in that beautiful world on high."

These represent a third step in the development of the slave song, of which "You may bury me in the East" is the first, and songs like "March on" and "Steal away" are the second. The first is African music, the second Afro-American, while the third is a blending of Negro music with the music heard in the foster land. The result is still distinctively Negro and the method of blending original, but the elements are both Negro and Caucasian. One might go further and find a fourth step in this development, where the songs of white America have been distinctively influenced by the slave songs or have incorporated whole phrases of Negro melody, as "Swanee River" and "Old Black Joe." Side by side, too, with the growth has gone the debasements and imitations—the Negro "minstrel" songs, many of the "gospel" hymns, and some of the contemporary "coon" songs,—a mass of music in which the novice may easily lose himself and never find the real Negro melodies.

In these songs, I have said, the slave spoke to the world. Such a message is naturally veiled and half articulate. Words and music have lost each other and new and cant phrases of a dimly understood theology have displaced the older sentiment. Once in a while we catch a strange word of an unknown tongue, as the "Mighty Myo," which figures as a river of death; more often slight words or mere doggerel are joined to music of singular sweetness. Purely secular songs are few in number, partly because many of them were turned into hymns by a change of words, partly because the frolics were seldom heard by the stranger, and the music less often caught. Of nearly all the songs, however, the music is distinctly sorrowful. The ten master songs I have mentioned tell in word and music of trouble and exile, of strife and hiding; they

grope toward some unseen power and sigh for rest in the End.

The words that are left to us are not without interest, and, cleared of evident dross, they conceal much of real poetry and meaning beneath conventional theology and unmeaning rhapsody. Like all primitive folk, the slave stood near to Nature's heart. Life was a "rough and rolling sea" like the brown Atlantic of the Sea Islands; the "Wilderness" was the home of God, and the "lonesome valley" led to the way of life. "Winter 'll soon be over," was the picture of life and death to a tropical imagination. The sudden wild thunderstorms of the South awed and impressed the Negroes,—at times the rumbling seemed to them "mournful," at times imperious:

My Lord calls me,
He calls me by the thunder,
The trumpet sounds it in my soul.

The monotonous toil and exposure is painted in many words. One sees the ploughmen in the hot, moist furrow, singing:

Dere's no rain to wet you,
Dere's no sun to burn you,
Oh, push along, believer,
I want to go home.

The bowed and bent old man cries, with thrice-repeated wail:

O Lord, keep me from sinking down,
and he rebukes the devil of doubt who can whisper:

Jesus is dead and God's gone away.

Yet the soul-hunger is there, the restlessness of the savage, the wail of the wanderer, and the plaint is put in one little phrase:

Mysoul wants some thing that's new, that's new

Over the inner thoughts of the slaves and their relations one with another the shadow of fear ever hung, so that we get but glimpses here

and there, and also with them, eloquent omissions and silences. Mother and child are sung, but seldom father; fugitive and weary wanderer call for pity and affection, but there is little of wooing and wedding; the rocks and the mountains are well known, but home is unknown. Strange blending of love and helplessness sings through the refrain:

Yonder's my ole mudder,
Been waggin' at de hill so long;
'Bout time she cross over,
Git home bime-by.

Elsewhere comes the cry of the "motherless" and the "Farewell, farewell, my only child."

Love-songs are scarce and fall into two categories—the frivolous and light, and the sad. Of deep successful love there is ominous silence, and in one of the oldest of these songs there is a depth of history and meaning.

Poor Rosy, poor gal; Poor Rosy, poor gal;
poor gal; Rosy break my poor heart.
Heav'n shall a-be my home.

A black woman said of the song, "It can't be sung without a full heart and a troubled spirit." The same voice sings here that sings in the German folk-song:

Jetz Geh i an's brunele, trink' aber net.

Of death the Negro showed little fear, but talked of it familiarly and even fondly as simply a crossing of the waters, perhaps—who knows?—back to his ancient forests again. Later days transfigured his fatalism, and amid the dust and dirt the toiler sang:

Dust, dust and ashes, fly over my grave,
But the Lord shall bear my spirit home.

The things evidently borrowed from the surrounding world undergo characteristic change when they enter the mouth of the slave. Especially is this true of Bible phrases. "Weep, O captive daughter of Zion," is quaintly turned into "Zion, weep-a-low," and the wheels of Ezekiel are turned every way in the mystic dreaming of the slave, till he says:

There's a little wheel a-turnin' in-a-my heart.

As in olden time, the words of these hymns were improvised by some leading minstrel of the religious band. The circumstances of the gathering, however, the rhythm of the songs, and the limitations of allowable thought, confined the poetry for the most part to single or double lines, and they seldom were expanded to quatrains or longer tales, although there are some few examples of sustained efforts, chiefly paraphrases of the Bible. Three short series of verses have always attracted me,—the one that heads this chapter, of one line of which Thomas Wentworth Higginson has fittingly said, "Never, it seems to me, since man first lived and suffered was his infinite longing for peace uttered more plaintively." The second and third are descriptions of the Last Judgment,—the one a late improvisation, with some traces of outside influence:

Oh, the stars in the elements are falling,
And the moon drips away into blood,
And the ransomed of the Lord are
returning unto God,
Blessed be the name of the Lord.

And the other earlier and homelier picture from the low coast lands:

Michael, haul the boat ashore,
Then you'll hear the horn they blow,
Then you'll hear the trumpet sound,
Trumpet sound the world around,
Trumpet sound for rich and poor,
Trumpet sound the Jubilee,
Trumpet sound for you and me.

Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate

justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins. Is such a hope justified? Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?

The silently growing assumption of this age is that the probation of races is past, and that the backward races of today are of proven inefficiency and not worth the saving. Such an assumption is the arrogance of peoples irreverent toward Time and ignorant of the deeds of men. A thousand years ago such an assumption, easily possible, would have made it difficult for the Teuton to prove his right to life. Two thousand years ago such dogmatism, readily welcome, would have scouted the idea of blond races ever leading civilization. So wofully unorganized is sociological knowledge that the meaning of progress, the meaning of "swift" and "slow" in human doing, and the limits of human perfectability, are veiled, unanswered sphinxes on the shores of science. Why should Æschylus have sung two thousand years before Shakespeare was born? Why has civilization flourished in Europe, and flickered, flamed, and died in Africa? So long as the world stands meekly dumb before such questions, shall this nation proclaim its ignorance and unhallowed prejudices by denying freedom of opportunity to those who brought the Sorrow Songs to the Seats of the Mighty?

Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our three gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song—soft, stirring melody in an ill-harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil, and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire two hundred years earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the Spirit. Around us the history of the land has centred for thrice a hundred years; out of the nation's heart we have called all that was best to throttle

and subdue all that was worst; fire and blood, prayer and sacrifice, have billowed over this people, and they have found peace only in the altars of the God of Right. Nor has our gift of the Spirit been merely passive. Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation,—we fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth, lest the nation be smitten with a curse. Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood. Are not these gifts worth the giving? Is not this work and striving? Would America have been America without her Negro people?

Even so is the hope that sang in the songs of my fathers well sung. If somewhere in this whirl and chaos of things there dwells Eternal Good, pitiful yet masterful, then anon in His good time America shall rend the Veil and the imprisoned shall go free. Free, free as the sunshine trickling down the morning into these high windows of mine, free as yonder fresh young voices welling up to me from the caverns of brick and mortar below—swelling with song, instinct with life, tremulous treble and darkening bass. My children, my little children, are singing to the sunshine, and thus they sing:

And the traveller girds himself, and sets his face toward the Morning, and goes his way.

JOHN W. WORK

Negro Folk Song (1923)

After Dvořák had made a thorough study of music in America, he pronounced the Negro folk-song "original and American," adding that if America ever had a national music, it must be based upon the songs found among the Southern Negroes. Confident in the hope that it would be the beginning of the national music, he composed his "New World

Symphony," employing thematically and characteristically the Negro folk-music as a basis and inspiration.

The "Second Symphony" by Chadwick, the "Sunny South Overtrue," "Rural Symphony," "Sonata" for piano and violin by Schoenfeld, and the "Ten American Sketches" by Kroeger, are all based upon the Negro folk-music.

and subdue all that was worst; fire and blood, prayer and sacrifice, have billowed over this people, and they have found peace only in the altars of the God of Right. Nor has our gift of the Spirit been merely passive. Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation,—we fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth, lest the nation be smitten with a curse. Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood. Are not these gifts worth the giving? Is not this work and striving? Would America have been America without her Negro people?

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Besides his peculiar scale, his peculiar rhythm, and his peculiar syncopation, there is another peculiar quality,—the text of his song. It is Virtue. He sings of courage, patience, humility, faith, hope, endurance, Joy, and Love, and in all the hundreds of songs we know, there is not the slightest hint of any such sentiment as bitterness, hatred, or revenge. In the sublimity of ideal, this music is original and unapproached by the folk-music of any other people.

If this music which the Negro believes is his, and feels is his, is not his, but only an imitation of some other peoples, where is its prototype? What music antedating the Negro folk-song is stamped with such resemblance, such similitude, as to make possible any just claim of "imitation"? Henry T. Finck, in the New York *Evening Post* of June 2, 1923, states that Booker T. Washington writes in the preface to a collection of "Negro Melodies," made by Coleridge-Taylor, that his race realizes that "Apart from the music of the red men, the Negro Folk Song is the only distinctive American music." "This," continues Mr. Finck, "is the almost universal belief to-day, among the whites of this country, too,—yet it is about as unspeakably absurd as anything could possibly be." In reply it ought to be stated, first, that Coleridge-Taylor never made a collection of Negro melodies, but merely made transcriptions of certain Negro folk-songs which had been collected and published in America; to this edition Dr. Washington wrote the preface, second, Mr. Finck can not disprove Dr. Washington's statement by his bare assertion. "This is about as unspeakably absurd as anything could possibly be," for Dr. Washington stated a fact, supported by such authorities as Dvorák and Krehbiel and further by the proof that no other distinctive American music has been discovered.

Mr. Finck quotes with much satisfaction and approval, from a letter written to him by Colonel Dangerfield Parker in which this statement occurs: "The so-called Negro music has been composed by white men, Foster and others." Does he mean that "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Roll, Jordan, Roll," and thousands of other "Negro folk-songs" were composed by white men? Surely not. Or is he or Mr. Finck

acquainted with the folk music of the Negro? The origin of many of these songs we definitely know—and there is no trustworthy evidence that any race, save the Negro race, had anything to do with their production. Now what of the songs of Foster? As beautiful as they are, and as deeply as they touch our hearts, they are merely imitations of the Negro folk-songs. They were doubtless inspired by the songs which Foster heard among the Negroes. They are *not* Negro folk-songs! They are the very best imitations of the Negro folk-music. The composer caught something of the Negro spirit, much of his beautiful melody, much of his smooth rhythm, nothing of his syncopation, and in "Old Folks at Home" and "Massa's in the Col', Col', Groun," he practically used the Negro scale.

This music excels any of the secular folk-songs of the Negro, but it does not approach the spirituals. "He received the inspiration for many of his Negro songs in the humble cabins of the darkies and wove into his music many of the melodies which he heard in such places." According to Mr. Finck, Richard Wallashek, upon examination of slave songs collected by Miss McKim and H.C. Spaulding, was surprised to find them "ignorantly arranged; not to say ignorantly borrowed from the national songs of all nations—from military signals, well known marches, German student songs, etc."

The writer is not acquainted with these collections of slave songs consequently he does not know what they are; but he certainly knows what they are *not* (if Wallashek's description of them is accurate). They are *not* the slave songs we know as "Negro Folk Songs" or "Spirituals."

American History and Encyclopedia of Music states: "while the songs of the American Indian are of questionable value musically those of the Negro, another peculiarly *American* product, are of undoubted worth."

"The Negro's music isn't ours," says Dr. Damrosch, "it is the Negro's. It has become a popular form of musical expression and is interesting, but it is not ours. Nothing more characteristic of a race exists, but it is characteristic of the Negro, not of the American race."

"The songs of the slaves," writes Dr. Krehbiel, "are practically the only American product of

their kind which meet the scientific definition of Folk Song."

American History and Encyclopedia of Music states: "While not strictly of American origin, they have undoubtedly gone to form the foundation of such Folk Song literature as this country possesses."

Can this music be the basis and inspiration of an American National Music? Some Americans say, "No"—others say, "Yes."

What do facts, evidence, and conditions answer? Facts answer that this music is American. It expresses a phase of American life in its literature and a broader scope in its ideal. Southern life from 1619 to 1863 is narrated in Negro folk-song. Religious and social customs are clearly described therein. "Steal Away to Jesus," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Great Camp Meeting," "I'm Troubled in Mind," "You May Bury Me in the East," "Every Day Will Be Sunday," "Rise, Shine," and hundreds of others tell interesting stories. Both in sentiment and in melody there is the ideal approaching the sublime. The poetry contemplates Virtue; its spirit is the spirit of Right. It is epitomized in that matchless song "I Want To Be Like Jesus." In the melody of this music there is clearly the ideal of perfection. "There Is A Balm In Gilead," "Roll, Jordan, Roll," "Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray," "Were You There," are illustrations of this ideal.

It seems incredible that in the face of such clear evidence, there could be in the mind of any one any doubt concerning the origin of that music known as "Plantation Melodies," "Jubilee Songs," "Negro Spirituals," and "Folk Songs of the American Negro." Yet, every now and then, some one comes forward with the statement that this music is not original with the Negro, but is nothing more than an imitation of the white man's music. It is sometimes advanced that this music is *not* American, and can form no part of American music.

No one who gives due thought to this subject can arrive at any other conclusion, than that this music is original with the Negro, and that it is genuinely American.

Let us look into the nature of folk-song. It is the musical expression of the feelings of a people

as a whole. It is primitive and simple, spontaneous and sincere. It is the product and possession of the whole people and a history of their racial life.

Let us consider briefly the peoples who settled America, and the conditions surrounding them: The Englishman, the Scot, the Spaniard, the Dutch, the Swede, and the Portuguese all came from civilizations fully developed. They were all beyond the stage of folk-song creation, for civilization atrophies those conditions from which folk-songs grow.

The Negro was the only immigrant to this country who was capable of producing folk-song. He was in a primitive state, untouched by the folk-song-atrophying influences of civilization, emotional, of a musical temperament and naturally expressing himself in song.

The new world was a wonderland to the immigrants, and especially to the African. All the newness, strangeness and vastness; the mountains, rivers, and bays; the climate and the people; all these were overwhelming. They gave him new experiences which had to be expressed.

No wonder he sang! Rather would it have been wonderful if he had not sung and produced a folk-song; for all the necessary and appropriate forces and influences worked together in complete harmony to create the folk-song of the American Negro.

The musical vehicle thru which he conveyed these first new experiences was indeed simple. It was a scale of only five notes, the pentatonic scale, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6. This was purely and wholly African, and has been taken as a basis for argument to prove that the Negro's music is not American. But such argument is futile and valueless because it is the spirit which must determine whether or not this music is American. *Does this music express America, or any part of American life?*

The Negro expressed in his music that part of America that he knew, the South; and that character of American life of which he was a considerable part—bondage.

"Steal Away to Jesus" was a protest against a master's prohibition against religious services; it was a declaration of adhesion to that commandment, "Thou shalt have no other God

before Me"; a declaration of a perfect belief in that pronouncement of the Christ, "He who is ashamed of Me before men, of him will I be ashamed before my Father in Heaven."

No mo' peck of meal for me,
No mo', no mo',
No mo' peck of meal for me,
Many thousands gone.

That song tells its own story. So do they all tell their stories—even the melodies tell their stories.

What could be more expressive of the easy, smooth, luxurious Southern life than such melodies as "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Roll, Jordan, Roll," "O Freedom," "Balm in Gilead," and hundreds of others? Music like this is found nowhere in all the world except in the Southern States of the United States of America.

Some decades after his arrival here, the Negro changed his scale from the pentatonic to sexatonic, from a five tone to a six tone scale. Thus he created an entirely new scale, no longer African but American, and original with himself. This was accomplished through the addition of flat 7—a note expressing complete surprise. After this new creation the folk-song was generally expressed in this scale.

The best known songs which illustrate this original American scale are "Great Camp Meeting," "Roll, Jordan, Roll." There can be no doubt that the flat 7 is the expression of consummate surprise. It is quite credible that this surprise struck the African through the newness, strangeness, and suddenness of the new world which broke upon his vision. The note expressing all this is the flat 7 and is the note that evolves the African into the American scale—which is 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, flat 7. This flat 7 is not an accidental, but a natural.

This scale is *original* with the American Negro, and is *American*. The evolution of the pentatonic (African) into the sexatonic (American) scale was contemporaneous with the evolution of the African into the American.

The rhythm and highly developed syncopation of this music are peculiarly its own. Any violation of these two qualities destroys the character and the individuality of the music. So

intense was his love for perfection in rhythm that the creator of this music resorted to original inventions, where the text of the song was lacking in word or phrase, meeting the demands of rhythm.

Judg-a-ment, Judg-a-ment,
Judg-a-ment day is a-rollin' aroun'
Judg-a-ment, Judg-a-ment,
O how I long to go.

Good News! The chariot's a-comin'
Good News! The chariot's a-comin'
Good News! he chariot's a-comin'
An' I don't want a leave a-me behin.'

There are hundreds of songs that employ this invention, showing abhorrence of faulty or indifferent rhythm.

When Dvorák began his quest for some character of music to furnish a basis and an inspiration for an American National Music, and in the course of his investigations began the study of the Negro folk-music, what struck him more forcibly than any other quality was syncopation. It was a kind of musical expression quite new to him. He had met it nowhere, except in America, and to him it was a very interesting subject for study.

Evidence answers that this music is already being employed as a basis and inspiration of American music, such as we have. *American History and Encyclopedia of Music* says: "The Negro has exerted an influence in the history of Music in America, not only by means of his own song, but indirectly thru the efforts of the Negro minstrel, whose inspirations were derived from Negro sources.

"America owes much to the Negro in the creation and development of its popular music, for a large part of such music is due directly or indirectly to Negro sources."

The influence of this music is also to be observed in our Gospel hymns of to-day as well as in our distinctive American national product—Ragtime. Melody, rhythm, and syncopation are employed to the point of irresistibility. Such composers as Burleigh, Dett, White, and Diton have used this music thematically and have produced works that are truly American.

Thematically this music is of boundless wealth. Such melodies as "Go Down, Moses," "Nobody Knows the Trouble I See," "Deep River," "Listen to the Lambs," "Somebody's Knocking at Your Door," have certain possibilities of development. That these folk-songs have the possibility of Art Music development has been clearly demonstrated by Dvořák, Chadwick, Schoenfeld, Burleigh, F.J. Work, Dett, and Coleridge-Taylor.

Conditions point to the plain truth that, since the Negro folk-song is the only American folk-music that meets the scientific definition of folk-song, since it is so rich in theme and in the beauty of its melody, since it is so comprehensive, so strikingly original, and so strong in its appeal, it is the only natural basis and inspiration for American National Music.

In the building of her National Music, America will surely follow Nature and Truth.

ALAIN LOCKE

The Negro Spirituals (1925)

The Spirituals are really the most characteristic product of the race genius as yet in America. But the very elements which make them uniquely expressive of the Negro make them at the same time deeply representative of the soil that produced them. Thus, as unique spiritual products of American life, they become nationally as well as racially characteristic. It may not be readily conceded now that the song of the Negro is America's folk-song; but if the Spirituals are what we think them to be, a classic folk-expression, then this is their ultimate destiny. Already they give evidence of this classic quality. Through their immediate and compelling universality of appeal, through their untarnishable beauty, they seem assured of the immorality of those great folk expressions that survive not so much through being typical of a group or representative of a period as by virtue of being fundamentally and everlasting human. This universality of the Spirituals looms more and more as they stand the test of time. They have outlived the particular generation and the peculiar conditions which produced them; they have survived in turn the contempt of the slave-owners, the conventionalizations of formal religion, the repressions of Puritanism, the corruptions of sentimental balladry, and the neglect and disdain of second-generation respectability. They have escaped the lapsing conditions and the fragile vehicle of folk-art, and come

firmly into the context of formal music. Only classics survive such things.

In its disingenuous simplicity, folk-art is always despised and rejected at first; but generations after, it flowers again and transcends the level of its origin. The slave-songs are no exception; only recently have they come to be recognized as artistically precious things. It still requires vision and courage to proclaim their ultimate value and possibilities. But while the first stage of artistic development is yet uncompleted, it appears that behind the deceptive simplicity of Negro song lie the richest undeveloped musical resources anywhere available. Thematically rich, in idiom of rhythm and harmony richer still, in potentialities of new musical forms and new technical traditions so deep as to be accessible only to genius, they have the respect of the connoisseur even while still under the sentimental and condescending patronage of the amateur. Proper understanding and full appreciation of the Spirituals, in spite of their present vogue, is still rare. And the Negro himself has shared many of the common and widespread limitations of view with regard to them. The emotional intuition which has made him cling to this folk-music has lacked for the most part that convinced enlightenment that eventually will treasure the Spirituals for their true musical and technical values. And although popular opinion and the general

Thematically this music is of boundless wealth. Such melodies as "Go Down, Moses," "Nobody Knows the Trouble I See," "Deep River," "Listen to the Lambs," "Somebody's Knocking at Your Door," have certain possibilities of development. That these folk-songs have the possibility of Art Music development has been clearly demonstrated by Dvořák, Chadwick, Schoenfeld, Burleigh, F.J. Work, Dett, and Coleridge-Taylor.

Conditions point to the plain truth that, since the Negro folk-song is the only American folk-music that meets the scientific definition of folk-song, since it is so rich in theme and in the beauty of its melody, since it is so comprehensive, so strikingly original, and so strong in its appeal, it is the only natural basis and inspiration for American National Music.

In the building of her National Music, America will surely follow Nature and Truth.

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conception have changed very materially, a true estimate of this body of music cannot be reached until many prevailing preconceptions are completely abandoned. For what general opinion regards as simple and transparent about them is in technical ways, though instinctive, very intricate and complex, and what is taken as whimsical and child-like is in truth, though naïve, very profound.

It was the great service of Dr. Du Bois in his unforgettable chapter on the Sorrow Songs in *The Souls of Black Folk* to give them a serious and proper social interpretation, just as later Mr. Krehbiel in his *Afro-American Folk Songs* gave them their most serious and adequate musical analysis and interpretation. The humble origin of these sorrow songs is too indelibly stamped upon them to be ignored or overlooked. But underneath broken words, childish imagery, peasant simplicity, lies, as Dr. Du Bois pointed out, an epic intensity and a tragic profundity of emotional experience, for which the only historical analogy is the spiritual experience of the Jews and the only analogue, the Psalms. Indeed they transcend emotionally even the very experience of sorrow out of which they were born; their mood is that of religious exaltation, a degree of ecstasy indeed that makes them in spite of the crude vehicle a classic expression of the religious emotion. They lack the grand style, but never the sublime effect. Their words are colloquial, but their mood is epic. They are primitive, but their emotional artistry is perfect. Indeed, spiritually evaluated, they are among the most genuine and outstanding expressions of Christian mood and feeling, fit musically and emotionally, if not verbally, of standing with the few Latin hymns, the handful of Gregorian tunes, and the rarest of German chorals as a not negligible element in the modicum of strictly religious music that the Christian centuries have produced.

Perhaps there is no such thing as intrinsically religious music; certainly the traceable interplay of the secular and the religious in music would scarcely warrant an arbitrary opinion in the matter. And just as certainly as secular elements can be found in all religious music are there discoverable sensuous and almost pagan

elements blended into the Spirituals. But something so intensely religious and so essentially Christian dominates the blend that they are indelibly and notably of this quality. The Spirituals are spiritual. Conscious artistry and popular conception alike should never rob them of this heritage, it is untrue to their tradition and to the folk-genius to give them another tone. That they are susceptible of both crude and refined secularization is no excuse. Even though their own makers worked them up from the "shout" and the rhythmic elements of the sensuous dance, in their finished form and basic emotional effect all of these elements were completely sublimated in the sincere intensities of religious seriousness. To call them Spirituals and treat them otherwise is a travesty.

It was the Negro himself who first took them out of their original religious setting, but he only anticipated the inevitable by a generation—for the folk-religion that produced them is rapidly vanishing. Noble as the purpose of this transplanting was, damage was done to the tradition. But we should not be ungrateful, for surely it was by this that they were saved to posterity at all. Nevertheless it was to an alien atmosphere that the missionary campaigning of the Negro schools and colleges took these songs. And the concert stage has but taken them an inevitable step further from their original setting. We should always remember that they are essentially congregational, not theatricals, just as they are essentially a choral not a solo form. In time, however, on another level, they will get back to this tradition,—for their next development will undoubtedly be, like that of the modern Russian folk-music, their use in the larger choral forms of the symphonic choir, through which they will reachieve their folk atmosphere and epic spirituality.

It is a romantic story told in the Story of the Jubilee Singers, and retold in Professor Work's *Folk Song of the American Negro* (excerpted elsewhere in this volume): the tale of that group of singers who started out from Fisk University in 1871, under the resolute leadership of George L. White, to make this music the appeal of the struggling college for philanthropic support. With all the cash in the Fisk treasury, except a

dollar held back by Principal Adam K. Spence, the troupe set out to Oberlin, where, after an unsuccessful concert of current music, they instantly made an impression by a program of Negro Spirituals. Henry Ward Beecher's invitation to Brooklyn led to fame for the singers, fortune for the college, but more important than these things, recognition for the Spirituals. Other schools, Hampton, Atlanta, Calhoun, and Tuskegee joined the movement, and spread the knowledge of these songs far and wide in their concert campaigns. Later they recorded and published important collections of them. They thus were saved over that critical period of disfavor in which any folk-product is likely to be snuffed out by the false pride of the second generation. Professor Work rightly estimates it as a service worth more racially and nationally than the considerable sums of money brought to these struggling schools. Indeed, as he says, it saved a folk-art and preserved as no other medium could the folk-temperament, and by maintaining them introduced the Negro to himself. Still the predominant values of this period in estimating the Spirituals were the sentimental, degenerating often into patronizing curiosity, on the one side, and hectic exhibitionism, on the other. Both races condescended to meet the mind of the *Negro slave, and even while his moods were taking their hearts by storm, discounted the artistry of genius therein.*

It was only as the musical appreciation of the Spirituals grew that this interest changed and deepened. Musically I think the Spirituals are as far in advance of their moods as their moods are in advance of their language. It is as poetry that they are least effective. Even as folk poetry, they cannot be highly rated. But they do have their quaint symbolisms, and flashes, sometimes sustained passages of fine imagery, as in the much quoted

I know moonlight, I know starlight
I lay dis body down
I walk in de graveyard, I walk troo de
graveyard
To lay dis body down.

I lay in de grave an' stretch out my arms,
I lay dis body down.

I go to de judgement in de evenin' of de day
When I lay dis body down,
An' my soul an' yo' soul will meet de day
I lay dis body down.

or

Bright sparkles in de churchyard
Give light unto de tomb;
Bright summer, spring's over—
Sweet flowers in their bloom.

My mother once, my mother twice, my
mother, she'll rejoice,
In the Heaven once, in the Heaven twice,
she'll rejoice.
May the Lord, He Will be glad of me
In the Heaven, He'll rejoice.

or again

My Lord is so high, you can't get over Him,
My Lord is so low, you can't get under Him,
You must come in and through de Lam.

In the latter passages, there is a naïveté, and also a faith and fervor, that are mediæval. Indeed one has to go to the Middle Ages to find anything quite like this combination of child-like simplicity of thought with strangely consummate artistry of mood. A quaintly literal, lisping, fervent Christianity, we feel it to be the evangelical and Protestant counterpart of the naïve Catholicism of the tenth to the thirteenth century. And just as there we had quaint versions of Bernard of Clairvaux and Saint Francis in the Virgin songs and saints legends, so here we have Bunyan and John Wesley percolated through a peasant mind and imagination, and concentrated into something intellectually less, but emotionally more vital and satisfying. If the analogy seems forced, remember that we see the homely colloquialism of the one through the glamorous distance of romance, and of the other, through the disillusioning nearness of social stigma and disdain. How regrettable though, that the very qualities that add charm to the one should arouse mirthful ridicule for the other.

Over-keen sensitiveness to this reaction, which will completely pass within a half generation or so, has unfortunately caused many

singers and musicians to blur the dialect and pungent colloquialisms of the Spirituals so as not to impede with irrelevant reactions their proper artistic and emotional effect. Some have gone so far as to advocate the abandonment of the dialect versions to insure their dignity and reverence. But for all their inadequacies, the words are the vital clues to the moods of these songs. If anything is to be changed, it should be the popular attitude. One thing further may be said, without verging upon apologetics, about their verbal form. In this broken dialect and grammar there is almost invariably an unerring sense of euphony. Mr. Work goes so far as to suggest—rightly, I think—that in many instances the dropped, elided, and added syllables, especially the latter, are a matter of instinctive euphonic sense following the requirements of the musical rhythm, as, for example, "The Blood came a twinklin' down" from "The Crucifixion" or "Lying there fo' to be heal" from "Blind Man at the Pool." Mr. Work calls attention to the extra beat syllable, as in "De trumpet soun's it in-a' my soul," which is obviously a singing device, a subtle phrase-molding element from a musical point of view, even if on verbal surface value, it suggests illiteracy.

Emotionally, these folks-songs are far from simple. They are not only spread over the whole gamut of human moods, with the traditional religious overtone adroitly insinuated in each instance, but there is further a sudden change of mood in the single song, baffling to formal classification. Interesting and intriguing as was Dr. Du Bois's analysis of their emotional themes, modern interpretation must break with that mode of analysis, and relate these songs to the folk activities that they motivated, classifying them by their respective song-types. From this point of view we have essentially four classes, the almost ritualistic prayer songs or pure Spirituals, the freer and more unrestrained evangelical "shouts" or camp-meeting songs the folk-ballads so overlaid with the tradition of the Spirituals proper that their distinctive type quality has almost been unnoticed until lately, and the work and labor songs of

strictly secular character. In choral and musical idiom closely related, these song types are gradually coming to be regarded as more and more separate, with the term Spiritual reserved almost exclusively for the songs of intensest religious significance and function. Indeed, in the pure Spirituals one can trace the broken fragments of an evangelical folk-liturgy, with confession, exhortation, "mourning," conversion, and "love-feast" rejoicing as the general stages of a Protestant folk-mass. The instinctive feeling for these differences is almost wholly lost, and it will require the most careful study of the communal life as it still lingers in isolated spots to set the groupings even approximately straight. Perhaps after all the final appeal will have to be made to the sensitive race interpreter, but at present many a half secularized ballad is mistaken for a "spiritual," and many a camp-meeting shout for a folk-hymn. It is not a question of religious content or allusion,—for the great majority of the Negro songs have this—but a more delicate question of caliber of feeling and type of folk use. From this important point of view, Negro folk-song has yet to be studied.

The distinctiveness of the Spirituals after all, and their finest meaning resides in their musical elements. It is pathetic to notice how late scientific recording has come to the task of preserving this unique folk-art. Of course the earlier four-part hymn harmony versions were travesties of the real folk renditions. All competent students agree in the utter distinctiveness of the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic elements in this music. However, there is a regrettable tendency, though a very natural one in view of an inevitable bias of technical interest, to over-stress as basically characteristic one or other of these elements in their notation and analysis. Weldon Johnson thinks the characteristic beauty of the folk-song is harmonic, in distinction to the more purely rhythmic stress in the secular music of the Negro, which is the basis of "ragtime" and "jazz" while Krehbiel, more academically balances these elements, regarding the one as the African component in them, and the other as the modifying influence

of the religious hymn. "In the United States," he says, "the rhythmic element, though still dominant, has yielded measurably to the melodic, the dance having given way to religious worship, sensual bodily movement to emotional utterance." But as a matter of fact, if we separate or even over-stress either element in the Spirituals, the distinctive and finer effects are lost. Strain out and emphasize the melodic element a la Foster, and you get only the sentimental ballad; emphasize the harmonic idiom; and you get a cloying sentimental glee; over-emphasize the rhythmic idiom and instantly you secularize the product into syncopated dance elements. It is the fusion, and that only, that is finely characteristic; and so far as possible, both in musical settings and in the singing of the Negro Spirituals, this subtle balance of musical elements should be sought after and maintained. The actual mechanics of the native singing, with its syllabic quavers, the off-tones and tone glides, the improvised interpolations and, above all, the subtle rhythmic phrase balance, has much to do with the preservation of the vital qualities of these songs.

Let us take an example. There is no more careful and appreciative student of the Spirituals than David Guion; as far as is possible from a technical and outside approach, he has bent his skill to catch the idiom of these songs. But contrast his version of "God's Goin' to Set Dis Worl' on Fire" with that of Roland Hayes [fig. 3]. The subtler rhythmic pattern, the closer phrase linkage, the dramatic recitative movement, and the rhapsodic voice glides quavers of the great Negro tenor's version are instantly apparent. It is more than a question of musicianship, it is a question of feeling instinctively qualities put there by instinct. In the process of the art development of this material the Negro musician has not only a peculiar advantage but a particular function and duty. Maintaining spiritual kinship with the best traditions of this great folk-art, he must make himself the recognized vehicle of both its transmission and its further development.

At present the Spirituals are at a very difficult point in their musical career; for the

moment they are caught in the transitional stage between a folk-form and an art-form. Their increasing concert use and popularity, as Carl van Vechten has clearly pointed out in a recent article, has brought about a dangerous tendency toward sophisticated over-elaboration. At the same time that he calls attention to the yeoman service of Mr. Henry T. Burleigh in the introduction of the Spirituals to the attention and acceptance of the concert stage, Mr. Van Vechten thinks many of his settings tincture the folk spirit with added concert furbelows and alien florid adornments. This is true. Even Negro composers have been perhaps too much influenced by formal European idioms and mannerisms in setting these songs. But in calling for the folk atmosphere, and insisting upon the folk, quality, we must be careful not to confine this wonderfully potential music to the narrow confines of "simple versions" and musically primitive molds. While it is proper to set up as a standard the purity of the tradition and the maintenance of idiom, it is not proper to insist upon an arbitrary style or form. When for similar reasons, Mr. Van Vechten insists in the name of the folk-spirit upon his preference for the "evangelical renderings" of Paul Robeson's robust and dramatic style as over against the subdued, ecstatic, and spiritually refined versions of Roland Hayes, he overlooks the fact that the folk itself has these same two styles of singing, and in most cases discriminates according to the mood, occasion, and song type, between them. So long as the peculiar quality of Negro song is maintained, and the musical idiom kept unadulterated, there is and can be no set limitation. Negro folk-song is not midway its artistic career as yet, and while the preservation of the original folk forms is for the moment the most pressing necessity, an inevitable art development awaits them, as in the past it has awaited all other great folk-music.

The complaint to be made is not against the art development of the Spirituals, but against the somewhat hybrid treatment characteristic of the older school of musicians. One of the worst features of this period has been the

God's goin' to set dis worl' on fire - re
 God's goin' to set dis worl'
 God's goin' to set dis worl' on fire, some o' dese days, some o' dese days,
 God's goin' to set dis worl' on fire, some o' dese days, some o' dese days,
 God's goin' to set dis worl' on fire, re, goin' to
 God's goin' to set dis worl' on fire, God's goin' to
 set dis worl' on fire some o' dese days, set dis worl' on fire, some o' dese days,

FIGURE 3

predominance of solo treatment and the loss of the vital sustained background of accompanying voices. In spite of the effectiveness of the solo versions, especially when competently sung by Negro singers, it must be realized more and more that the proper idiom of Negro folk-song calls for choral treatment. The young Negro musicians, Nathaniel Dett, Carl Diton, Ballanta Taylor, Edward Boatner, Hall Johnson, Lawrence Brown, and others, while they are doing effective solo settings, are turning back gradually to the choral form. Musically speaking, only the superficial resources in this direction have been touched as yet; just as soon as the traditional conventions of four-part harmony and the oratorio style and form are broken through,

we may expect a choral development of Negro folk-song that may equal or even outstrip the phenomenal choral music of Russia. With its harmonic versatility and interchangeable voice parts, Negro music is only conventionally in the four-part style, and with its skipped measures and interpolations it is at the very least potentially polyphonic. It can therefore undergo without breaking its own boundaries, intricate and original development in directions already the line of advance in modernistic music.

Indeed one wonders why something vitally new has not already been contributed by Negro folk-song to modern choral and orchestral musical development. And if it be objected that

it is too far a cry from the simple folk-spiritual to the larger forms and idioms of modern music, let us recall the folk-song origins of the very tradition which is now classic in European music. Up to the present, the resources of Negro music have been tentatively exploited in only one direction at a time,—melodically here, rhythmically there, harmonically in a third direction. A genius that would organize its distinctive elements in a formal way would be the musical giant of his age. Such a development has been hampered by a threefold tradition, each aspect of which stands in the way of the original use of the best in the Negro material. The dominance of the melodic tradition has played havoc with its more original harmonic features, and the oratorio tradition has falsely stereotyped and overlaid its more orchestral choral style, with its intricate threading in and out of the voices. Just as definitely in another direction has the traditional choiring of the orchestra stood against the opening up and development of the Negro and the African idioms in the orchestral forms. Gradually these barriers are being broken through. Edgar Varése's *Integrales*, a "study for percussion instruments," presented last season by the International Composers' Guild, suggests a new orchestral technique patterned after the characteristic idiom of the African "drum orchestra." The modernistic, *From the Land of Dreams*, by Grant Still, a young Negro composer who is his student and protégé and Louis Grünberg's setting for baritone and chamber orchestra of Weldon Johnson's *The Creation: A Negro Sermon*, are experimental tappings in still other directions into the rich veins of this new musical ore. In a recent article (*The Living Age*, October 1924),

Darius Milhaud sums up these characteristic traits as "the possibilities of a thoroughgoing novelty of instrumental technique." Thus Negro music very probably has a great contribution yet to make to the substance and style of contemporary music, both choral and instrumental. If so, its thematic and melodic contributions from Dvořák to Goldmark's recent *Negro Rhapsody* and the borrowings of rhythmical suggestions by Milhaud and Stravinsky are only preluding experiments that have proclaimed the value of the Negro musical idioms, but have not fully developed them. When a body of folk-music is really taken up into musical tradition, it is apt to do more than contribute a few new themes. For when the rhythmic and harmonic basis of music is affected, it is more than a question of superstructure, the very foundations of the art are in process of being influenced.

In view of this very imminent possibility, it is in the interest of musical development itself that we insist upon a broader conception and a more serious appreciation of Negro folk-song, and of the Spiritual which is the very kernel of this distinctive folk-art. We cannot accept the attitude that would merely preserve this music, but must cultivate that which would also develop it. Equally with treasuring and appreciating it as music of the past, we must nurture and welcome its contribution to the music of tomorrow. Mr. Work has aptly put it in saying: "While it is now assured that we shall always preserve these songs in their original forms, they can never be the last word in the development of our music. . . . They are the starting point, not our goal; the source, not the issue, of our musical tradition."

LAURENCE BUERMAYER

The Negro Spirituals and American Art (1926)

In his book, *A Modern Symposium*, Mr. Lowes Dickinson makes one of his speakers explain the emotional poverty of American life and literature by their lack of any profound or deeply felt religious experience. Religion in America, he says, has been chiefly a matter of custom and social respectability, a guarantee of right conduct, not a central and dominating interest which organized the individual's personality as a whole. The reason for this has been that Americans, as a people, came to the battle with nature equipped with the knowledge and technical skill developed through long centuries in Europe. They began where Europe left off: hence the impact of natural forces could be met with weapons which made victory a foregone conclusion. Americans, never having known utter helplessness, have never known real fear and have never had to seek supernatural aid in an hour of bitter extremity. Individual exceptions to this rule, of course, there have been, but the national consciousness has always felt itself prepared to vanquish nature by natural means, its disposition has been practical and optimistic, it has not known terror and despair, and it has therefore missed the fulness of religious experience which, for example, the Jews and the early Christians possessed.

This statement, true as it may be of the dominant race in America, has assuredly no application to an important part of the American people—the Negro race. No people has ever been more wholly at the mercy of circumstance than were the slaves who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were brought from Africa and settled upon the plantations of the South. Unorganized, hopelessly illiterate, snatched from their own civilization and introduced into a society completely alien and radically hostile to them, they had and could hope to have no real control over their destinies. They had no instruments for making their will prevail over

the forces of their environment, and no idea how such instruments might be found. The Jews, during their exile in Egypt or their Babylonian captivity, were not more helpless or more in need of inner consolation and sustenance than the Negro slaves. And for the Negroes, as for the Jews, light in the darkness was found in a supernatural religion, a scheme of things unseen but profoundly real, which corrected the injustices of the visible world and compensated the disinherited for what they lacked in the realm of material things. The Negroes thus found in religion something more than an assistance in practical and wordly success.

Although the religion of the Negroes was Christian in name, it had scarcely anything in common with the hard-headed, prudential Calvinism of the native American tradition. It was less legalistic; it had substantially no intellectual content; it was an affair of the heart and not of the mind. Like the Catholic religion, it provided a large place for ritual, for religious drama, but, unlike the Catholic, its ritual was one in which all could participate. It belonged to its members without exception, not primarily or peculiarly to the clergy. It was also distinctively racial, in that many of its customs were taken over bodily from the ancient tribal religions of Africa and were purely primitive and pagan. Free from any ecclesiastical authority, it was able to develop into a form precisely adjusted to the emotional needs of its congregations; there was no inflexible past to lay a dead hand upon its natural growth. Hence participation in it was spontaneous, whole-hearted and whole-souled, free from perfunctory observance of rules obeyed without personal conviction. In a word, it expressed the whole personality of the Negroes as orthodox Christianity never expressed the whole personality of the whites. Consequently, it flowered in an art which was human and personal as no other American art

has ever been. This art was the music and poetry of the Spirituals.

Recent investigation has made it clear that the long delay in appreciation of the Spirituals, the failure of critics to recognize their importance as a distinctive and authentic art form has been due to their fundamental musical quality.¹ In European music, melody is the essential, dominating principle. Harmony and rhythm are secondary to melody. A composition is primarily a theme, and everything else is subsidiary to thematic development. But in Negro music the ground plan, the first principle, is the rhythmic organization, and both melody and harmony are secondary to this. Hence, though the themes of European music at its best are more varied and distinguished than those of Negro music, Negro rhythms are much the more complicated, richer, and more moving. The distinctive quality, the true expressiveness of Negro music is lost to anyone who has ears only for melodic charm and the listener who has not learned to seek out the rhythmic scheme, and to vibrate in unison with it, cannot participate in the experience which it provides. The general absence, in those whose musical education is of the conventional pattern, of such habits of attention, has been fatal to a just comprehension of the Negro Spirituals. Their significance, the wealth of experience, both religious and aesthetic, which they contain have never been grasped by the American consciousness or incorporated in the American tradition.

Had it been so understood and assimilated, the indictment of American art and civilization quoted above would have been vastly less justified. It can scarcely be denied that American intelligence has been predominantly calculating and unimaginative, that "intellectual" has been too often synonymous with "cerebral," that there has been no deep fund of experience for American art to draw upon. In consequence, in spite of an individualism which has often been stridently self-assertive, American self-expression usually seems shallow and personal individuality rare. American art, in other words, has been in the main a rather feeble and savorless echo of

European art, not growing out of the soil of national life, but transplanted from abroad and kept alive in a hot-house. American architecture, American music, American painting and sculpture, and the greater part of American literature—in a word, all the expressions of the "genteel tradition" have been an imitation of European models. Our only important indigenous art has been without influence and recognition, partly because of misunderstanding, partly because of race prejudice.

It is, or should be, a commonplace that individual self-expression is impossible to anyone who has not assimilated a tradition. Assimilation of a tradition is not the same thing as imitation of a model; it involves living through the experience of which the tradition is an outgrowth. It must therefore develop out of roots which go down into the deeper soil of experience, of common activities inter-related at many points and embracing the inarticulate and unrationaled parts of the personality as well as the superficially conscious parts. It must, in other words, have primitive elements, and it is precisely in these primitive elements that the art of the Spirituals is richest. Though anonymous, they were, of course, written and composed by individuals, but the individuality of their authors is submerged in the collective spirit which they express. This does not mean that they are stereotyped or conventional, but only that their burden is the tribulations, hopes and joys which a whole people have in common, not the particular purposes or aspirations by which one man is distinguished from another. They are the cry of a race asking to be led out of captivity, finding solace in protesting against the cruelty of the oppressor, or in dwelling in fancy upon the freedom, the joys of possession and accomplishment of which the race as a whole is deprived. ("Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land, tell ole Pharaoh to let my people go," "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" "Sometimes I feel like an eagle in de air," "All God's chillun got shoes.") Like all oppressed peoples, they are too much absorbed in their common woes to be much concerned, or, indeed, to be conscious of the hardships

incidental to individual temperament or character; there is no protest of the individual against the customs or ideals of the group. Indeed, separation of any sort from the group is excessively hard to bear and is an occasion for lament. ("I couldn't hear nobody pray.") The voice of a Voltaire, an Ibsen, or a Nietzsche would be as incongruous in the Spirituals as it would be in the *Iliad*. This primitiveness is genuine; it is no self-conscious homesickness for the primitive like the worship of "nature" in Rousseau or Chateaubriand. The only approach to it in American art is the poetry of Walt Whitman, but unlike *Leaves of Grass* it appealed to and was enjoyed by those whose lives it celebrated: Whitman's vogue was among the over civilized.

It is obviously impossible to find in the Spirituals the expression of a complete or rounded experience of life. They contain not a vestige of reflection, of the "wonder" out of which grows the intellectual life. The Negro world was "human, all-too-human"; even when all allowances are made for their conditions of life, the total absence of one of the characteristic human interests points to a deficiency in experience. How much this is a question of inherent quality of mind is a question doubtless unanswerable, but the defect does not in any case impair the value of Negro music for American art as it exists. Interest in the general, the universal (and the practical is a form of the general), whatever its importance for a well-balanced culture, readily slips into a deficient realization of the sensuous, into a preoccupation with bleak abstractions. This the Negro has entirely escaped, and in escaping it he has qualified himself to bring to America the aesthetic contribution which is more imperatively needed than any other.

In the Spirituals the words sung, if considered apart from the music, are likely to seem trite, sometimes baldly prosaic, and almost always destitute of the magic of phrase which we expect from poetry of the first order. It must be remembered, however, that the words were no more intended to stand by themselves than are the words in an opera libretto, which invariably,

even in the best of operas, seem thin and prosaic if they are read simply as poetry. If words and music are to be united in a single whole, neither can be self-sufficient; too weighty a content in either leaves too little attention for the other. It is almost inconceivable that the last scene of *Anthony and Cleopatra*, the opening of the third book of *Paradise Lost*, or the "Ode to a Nightingale" should be set to music, or that words should be sung to the Eroica Symphony. The Spirituals, indeed, are more even than a union of words and music, they contain elements from the dance as well. Time was beaten to them by the whole body, by the head as well as by the hands and feet. They are, in the literal physical sense, extremely moving. They thus engaged all the activities of the personality and so represent a very highly integrated art.

Not only is the art of the Spirituals highly integrated, it is integrated, musically, at a very high level. The rhythms are of an extremely complex and moving order, and the sense displayed for counterpoint is also very considerable. The contrapuntal effects, unfortunately, are largely lost in the printed and published versions of the Spirituals, and they disappear almost entirely when the songs are attempted by white singers. They depend partly upon traditions of singing which have never been really mastered, except by the Negroes themselves, partly upon the Negro gift for improvisation, which makes each rendering of the songs, by competent Negro musicians, a distinct experience or creation. The same gift for improvisation appears in the extremely rich and varied harmonic effects, scarcely suggested by the written notes, which a Negro choir is able to introduce. The real importance of the Spirituals, their extraordinary musical richness and emotional conviction, can only be appreciated when they are sung by a Negro chorus of the first rank. If they are sung as solos, or in arrangements made by those whose musical perceptions are controlled by the conventional European standards, the greater part of their distinctive quality disappears. But at their best, as sung, for example, by the chorus of the Bordentown Manual Training and Industrial

School for Negroes, under the exceedingly skillful direction of Mr. Frederick J. Work, they reveal reaches and depths of musical and human experience unexplored by the art of any other race.

NOTE

1. See James Weldon Johnson, Preface to *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, The Viking Press, 1925.

B. A. BOTKIN

Self-Portraiture and Social Criticism in Negro Folk-Song (1927)

As one of the recreations of a sociologist, two professors of the University of North Carolina have been quietly and assiduously cultivating one of the richest fields of folk expression in general and of Negro self-expression in particular, furnishing valuable experimental data for the study of folk-song in America. It should be emphasized that their work is of equal importance for both aesthetics and social science, significant alike for the light it throws upon the processes of folk-art and for the evidence it presents as to the working of the group mind and the development of a race. Hitherto folk-song has been considered the special possession of folklorists, ballad scholars, and musicians. But in 1925 along came the first volume in the University of North Carolina Social Study Series, entitled *The Negro and His Songs*, to prove that, since folk-art is social in its impulse and inception, if not in expression, the best approach to it is through the medium of sociology. Enough credit has not been given to Dr. Odum as a pioneer in the field. His work was initiated in 1909 when he published his doctoral dissertation at Clark University, under the title *Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negroes*, reprinted from the *American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education*; and in 1911 when an extensive article on *Folk-Song and Folk Poetry as Found in the Secular Songs of the Southern Negroes* appeared in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*. The fruits of these researches, with the assistance of Mr. Guy B. Johnson, have been made available to the general public in two impressive

and highly readable volumes, the full significance of which has yet to be considered.

Other collectors, like Natalie Curtis Burlin and H. E. Krehbiel, have concerned themselves chiefly with religious and play songs, due, no doubt, to the traditional association of folksongs with the religious and play instincts in man, with ritual and the ballad-dance. In the field of play-songs of the nursery, game, and dance, the most important contributions have been Thomas W. Talley's *Negro Folk Rhymes*, 1922, and Dorothy Scarborough's *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*, 1925. To a mine of collected material Professor Talley appended an illuminating study of Negro folk-song on the musical, poetic, and ethnological sides, especially with regard to African origins and ante-bellum conditions in America. Miss Scarborough undertook a comprehensive survey of the entire body of Negro folk-song from the point of view of the collector and the scholar, including ballad-relations and textual comparison and annotation. She, too, however, was strongest on the side of game and dance songs. Her chapters on *Work-Songs* and *Blues*, suggestive and entertaining as they were, merely laid out the lines for future research. In the blues proper, W. C. Handy's volume in 1926, with introduction by Abbe Niles, filled the needs of musicians and music-lovers. But there was still room for a scientific study of social backgrounds and sources and the inter-relation of formal and native blues and of song and work in general. This has been furnished by Odum and Johnson's two

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volumes of first-hand collection and authoritative analysis, of which the second fills in the outlines of the former with much additional material and theory, including chapters on types of Negro melodies and phono-photographic records of Negro singers. By means of laboratory experiments which have made possible accurate graphic representation of the most elusive idiosyncrasies of the voice, including slurs and vibrato too subtle for ordinary musical notation, the recording and analysis of folk-tunes and voice-types has been brought definitely within the scope of science.

These various researches point to two interesting conclusions. First, they show as a whole that the task of criticism and interpretation must be shared with white scholars. Collectively, they have the benefit of previous experience. And, individually, they demonstrate the truism that a stranger brings to the study of the literature and society of another race a coolness of detachment and a clearness of perspective vouchsafed only to the outsider. Classic examples, in other fields, are Taine's *History of English Literature*, De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, and Lord Bryce's *American Commonwealth*. Secondly, as to the work of Professors Odum and Johnson in particular, their collections of Negro workaday songs prove that the best index to the psychology of a race, paradoxical as it may seem, is what a man thinks about when he is at work.

True, a man is judged by the way he spends his leisure, but, curiously enough, it is work-songs and not play-songs that reflect the preoccupations of leisure.

This follows as a corollary from the axiom that all art originates in a desire to escape from the present situation. Thus, in the game-songs of children, one finds the surplus energy of young bodies still unadapted to the tasks of the grown-up world endeavoring to express itself in imitative action, as, for example, in the well-nigh universal *Mulberry Bush*. On the other hand, the workaday songs, as distinguished from pastime songs, more often than not concern themselves with the pleasures of leisure: loving and fighting, eating and sleeping, loafing and gaming.

Examination of a few of the dominant types and themes of workaday songs reveals further that, in common with the worker of other races, the mind of the Negro laborer seems to dwell principally on the subjects of comfort and love, which furnish the motive of labor. At the same time a racial as well as a social note may be detected in his complaint, the cry, not only of a downtrodden class, but also of an oppressed people.

Psychologically, his imaginative escape is allied to a defense mechanism, as in the following, sung by diggers on a July day:

Oh, next winter gonna be so cold,
Oh, next winter gonna be so cold,
Oh, next winter gonna be so cold,
Fire can't warm you, be so cold.

All the sorrow and tenderness of love, its bitter and its sweet, are compressed into another pick song with remarkable sureness of dramatic development and an eloquent power of suggestion. "She asked me in de parlor" is perhaps the most finished production of its kind, a perfect example of folk-art in the homely natural vigor and directness of its pathos and its beauty, admirably suited at the same time to the psychological purpose of emotional release from the sweat and grime of back-breaking toil.

Well, she ask me in her parlor,
An' she cooled me wid her fan,
An' she whispered to her mother,
"Mama, I love that dark-eyed man."

Well, I ask her mother for her
An' she said she was too young.
Lawd, I wished I never had seen her
An' I wished she'd never been born.

Well, I led her to de altar,
An' de preacher give his comman',
An' she swore by God that made her
That she never love another man.

The note of self-pity struck at the close of the second stanza represents a trait of the Negro, bred in him by centuries of oppression. It is responsible for the plaintiveness and wistfulness of his blues and even the wail and moan of his music. And it is the theme of many of

his workaday songs, like the pick song "U—h, U—h, Lawdy":

U—h, U—h, Lawdy,
I wonder why
I got to live
Fer de by an' de by.

U—h, u—h, Lawdy,
Don't you bother me.
I'm always mighty happy
When I'm on a spree.

U—h, u—h, Lawdy,
U—h, u—h, Lawdy,
U—h, u—h, Lawdy,
U—h, Lawdy, u—h, Lawdy, po' me!

Even more typical of the Negro is the ironical or satirical blend of pathos and humor, seen in the chain-gang song "I ain't free":

De rabbit in the briarpatch,
De squirrel in de tree,
Would love to go huntin',
But I ain't free,
But I ain't free,
But I ain't free,
Would love to go huntin',
But I ain't free, ain't free.

De rooster's in de hen house,
De hen in de patch,
I love to go shootin'
At a ol' shootin' match,
But I ain't free, *etc.*,
At a ol' shootin' match,
But I ain't free, ain't free.

Ol' woman in de kitchen,
My sweetie hanging' roun',
'Nudder man gonna git 'er,
I sho' be boun',
'Cause I ain't free, *etc.*,
'Nudder man'll git 'er,
'Cause I ain't free, ain't free.

Dig in de road band,
Dig in de ditch,
Chain gang got me,
An' de boss got de switch
I ain't free, *etc.*,
Chain gang got me,

And similarly in the ending of "I don't mind bein' in jail," made familiar in the popular "Jail-House Blues":

I don't mind bein' in jail
If I didn't have to stay so long.

In "Better 'n I Has at Home" the prisoner makes light of his trials with ironical resignation, in which self-pity mingles with self-disparagement:

Cawn pone, fat meat,
All I gits to eat—
Better 'n I has at home,
Better 'n I has at home.

Cotton socks, striped clothes,
No Sunday glad rags at all—
Better 'n I gits at home, *etc.*

Rings on my arms,
Bracelets on my feet—
Stronger 'n I has at home, *etc.*

Bunk for a bed,
Straw under my head—
Better 'n I gits at home, *etc.*

Baby, baby, lemme be,
Chain gang good enough for me—
Better 'n I gits at home, *etc.*

The strength of his imagination, stimulated by keen longing, often makes the object of his desires vividly real to him. Consider the lively fancy that opens the "Jail House Wail":

The jail's on fire, Lawd,
The stockade's burning down.

Well, they ain't got nowhere,
Lawd, to put the prisoners now.

Taken prisoners out o' jail, Lawd,
Carried 'em to country road.

Say, I ruther be in chain gang
Than be in jail all time.

The same process is seen in the child who plays sick because he would rather stay in bed than be in school "all time," or fervently wishes that the schoolhouse would burn down.

And with animal cunning, like the child locked in the closet or the attic, the jail-bird

schemes, invoking pleasant visions of escape and vengeance:

Say, jailer keeps you bound down,
Lawd, say jailer dog you roun'.

Says if I had my way wid jailer,
I'd take an' lock him in cell.

I'd take key an' tie it on the door,
An' go long way from here, Lawd, Lawd.

Because poetry, like religion, in the words of Santayana, gives him another world to live in, the hard pressed Negro takes naturally to song as prayer and to prayer as song. As the longing for freedom motivates the spirituals and accounts for their universal appeal, so the desire to be where he is not and do what he is not doing explains the blues. The Negro is a roamer, and like all roamers loves to sing the sadness and the weariness of the lonesome road:

Pity a po' boy
Stray 'way from home, (*bis*).

If I ever gits back,
I sho' never mo' to roam, (*bis*).

But when he cannot roam, he vents his restlessness in a threat:

Some o' these days,
Hit won't be long,
Mammy gonna call me
An' I be gone.

Some o' dese nights,
An' I don't kere,
Mammy gonna want me,
An' I won't be here.

Some o' dese days
In de by an' by,
You won't have no' n' t' eat,
Den you gonna cry.

Some o' dese days
While I's here to home,
Better feed me an' pet me,
Don't, I's gonna roam.

Perhaps the most frequently encountered symbol of freedom and vicarious experience is the train, which has a powerful fascination for

the Negro as for the child mind, whether in the "Chain-Gang Blues"; where its whistle comes to him like the trump of doom:

Standin' on the road side,
Waitin' for the ball an' chain.
Say, if I was not all shackled down
I'd ketch that wes' boun' train;

or in the free labor gang, where the "Section Boss" improvises his crude poetry, with touching wistfulness and naivete, in the spirit of the child who likes to play engineer or motorman:

Yonder come the engine
Ringin' o' the bell:
Engineer on the right,
Fireman on the left.

See the engineer makin' time,
See the engineer gone.
Fall off the car,
Throw off the tools.

Throw off the tools,
Let the engine go by,
If I could run like he runs,
I'd run an' never stop.

See the train makin' up speed,
See the cars go 'long.
If I had wings like that engine,
I could run an' fly.

I could pull the bell,
I could blow the whistle,
I could pull the bell,
An' let the engine run.

If I could run like he runs,
I never would quit,
I'd always railroad
I'd always run an' fly.

Trains, of course, have been made familiar to us through the spirituals and the blues. The significance of workaday songs as the basis of these two types of sorrow songs, religious and secular, is attested by the fact that they supply to the latter the homely imagery, concrete symbols, and practical motives of the workaday world, such as those associated with trains.

Oh, de gospel train's a-comin', *etc.*
Oh, she's comin' 'roun' de curve, *etc.*

Oh, de train am heavy loaded, *etc.*
 Oh, sinner have you got your ticket? *etc.*
 Oh, she's boun straight way to heaven, *etc.*
 Oh, Marse Jesus am de captain, *etc.*
 Oh, de ride am free to heaven, *etc.*

And in this world the wanderer sings:
 I'm gonna ketch dat train, don't know
 where it's from.

Or:

Longest train I ever saw
 Was nineteen coaches long.
 Darlin' what have I done to you?
 What makes you treat me so?
 An' I won't be treated this-a way.

And Left Wing Gordon moans:

O Illinois Central,
 What can you spare?
 Fo' my baby's in trouble
 An' I ain't dere.

An inseparable part of the self-portraiture of Negro workaday songs is their social criticism. Out of the Negro's sense of self-pity develops an inevitable conviction of social injustice and an indictment of the existing order. Professor Talley has already given us numerous examples of the slave's smouldering resentment of his treatment at the hands of the whites. And the free laborer still sings:

Niggers plant the cotton,
 Niggers pick it out,
 White man pockets money,
 Nigger goes without.

And under the ironical title, "Everybody call me the wages man," he concludes:

White man in starched shirt settin' in shade,
(three times),
 Laziest man that God ever made,
 Baby, baby.

And this from the Negro whom the white man has always accused of laziness. "Missus" and "Mammy," "Marse" and "Nigger," have become charged with new meaning since the Negro

worker has had time to contemplate the bondage of liberty:

Missus in de big house,
 Mammy in de yard.
 Missus holdin' her white hands,
 Mammy workin' hard, (*three times*).
 Missus holdin' her white hands,
 Mammy workin' hard.

Ol' marse ridin' all time,
 Niggers workin' roun'.
 Marse sleepin' day time,
 Niggers diggin' in de groun', *etc.*

The prisoner also has his grievances:
 When time come to be tried,
 Jail keeper lied on me.

Again:

Lawd, I went to judge to ask for a fine.
 Judge say, Lawd, he ain't got no time.

The constant threat of the chain-gang hanging over his head (as portrayed in T. S. Stribling's *Birthright*) has bred in the Southern Negro a haunting dread of persecution, thus humorously viewed by the "bad man":

Went up to 'Lanta,
 Who should I meet?
 Forty-leben blue coats
 Comin' down de street,
 Forty-leben blue boats
 Comin' down de street.
 I ain't done nothin',
 Why dey follerin' me?
 I ain't done nothin',
 Can't dey let me be?

And persecution has also called forth a defense in the nature of a dual personality, one for himself and another for the white man, whom he takes delight in beating at his own game.

I steal dat corn
 From de white man's barn,
 Den I slips aroun',
 Tells a yarn,
 An' sells it back again. . . .

I steal de melons
 From his patch.

It takes a smarter man dan him
Fer ter ketch,
An' I sells 'em back again.

Deceit as the defense of the weaker is by no means restricted to the Negro: women and children have also been accused of it.

Out of the oppressiveness of the law grows the necessity of breaking the law; out of the occasional offender develops the "bad man," likewise the boaster, with an offence rather than a defense mechanism, though the latter is still at the root of it, capitalizing his crimes as a means of conquering women, and led to further crime as a result of these troublesome conquests.

I'm de rough stuff of dark-town alley,
I'm de man dey hates to see.
I'm de rough stuff of dis alley,
But de women's all falls for me.

And this gem, which any poet would be glad to have written, remarkable for its sense of form and plot,—its parallelism and compression, telling a story entirely by suggestion:

I got a gal, you got a gal,
All us niggers got a gal.

He fool 'roun', I fool 'roun',
All us niggers fool 'roun'.

I got a razor, he got a razor,
All us niggers got a razor.

I 'hind de bars, he 'hind de bars,
All us niggers, 'hind de bars.

And it has been left to a "bad man," the picaresque Left Wing Gordon, to sum up the spirit of the blues in his favorite refrain:

O my babe, you don't know my min',
When you see me laughin',
Laughin' to keep from cryin',

and to strike the keynote of Negro love, typical of the curious inconstancy and hurly-burly of Negro life:

When you think I'm lovin' you.
I'm leavin' you behin',

When you think I'm leavin'
I'm comin' right behin'.

And so we end where we began, with comfort and love, the rewards of labor and the fruits of leisure, which the Negro prizes as only a race with his history can prize them:

De gal love de money
An' de man love de gal;
If dey bofe don't git what dey wants,
It's livin' in hell.

There is scarcely an interest or an activity of the Negro that is not mirrored in these songs, in which he proves himself as much the philosopher as the poet. Unusually direct and concrete even for such a direct and concrete genre as folk-song, and more wise and witty than the folk-songs of most races, these spontaneous snatches exhibit a development of form far in excess of the simplicity and often the crudity of their sentiment.

As to the authors of this volume, they have accomplished their task with completeness and fairness, as impartial observers but not entirely disinterested—with humor and sympathy, with frankness and charm, and, more commendable still, with a reasonable degree of freedom from the besetting sin of collectors; namely, idealization and generalization. And we are told that the end is not yet in sight: songs are still coming in, increasing the importance of the work of collecting and classifying one of the largest and most varied stores of folk-song in existence.

The preponderance of the secular songs of the Negro over his spirituals is indicated by statistics. The composition of spirituals is not dying out, but is undergoing a secularizing process. Within the class of secular songs, the blues, of course, far outnumber any other type. And the need of preserving these native blues grows as the record and sheet-music market is being flooded with an increasing number of worthless imitations.

If any conclusion may be drawn as to the significance of Negro song as a whole, it is that all the Western world is feeling the urge of its social rhythm, as the work of man, in field and forest, on ships and docks has felt the impulse of its chant of labor, and as the soul of man has caught the stir of its spirit-cry. Now to the old sorrow songs of the plantation, harking back to

the slave-ship, must be added these new sorrow songs of the workaday, work-weary world and of the workless lonesome road: the blues. The child-like faith of slave-days is giving way to the worldly cynicism, the disillusionment of freedom, the product of industrial exploitation, migration, and concentration in cities. The free worker or the drifter has his problems and burdens even as the slave had his visions; both take refuge in song. And the sorrow songs of these two ages bear a marked resemblance. For in the end it might be asked if the dominant note of all Negro song is not the homesickness of an alien, homeless folk, "po' boy long way from home," a nostalgia born of a racial, traditional, and ancestral longing for a home that no longer exists, like the Promised Land which the Jews have codified in Zion, and like the Heaven of the Christians to which the Negro has transferred his unsatisfied earthly longings. The Negro is restless and unresting, obsessed with the need of seeking and finding. Appropriately enough, then, his songs, sacred and secular, spirituals and blues, are songs of going home,

full of rivers and roads, trains and shoes, arks and chariots "comin' for to carry me home."

Gonna shout trouble over
When I git home,
Gonna shout trouble over,
When I git home.

No mo' prayin', no mo' dyin'
When I git home,
No mo' prayin' an' no mo' dyin'
When I git home.

Meet my father
When I git home.
Meet my father
When I git home.

Shake glad hands
When I git home,
Shake glad hands
When I git home.

Meet King Jesus
When I git home,
Yes, I meets King Jesus
When I git home.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals (1934)

The real spirituals are not really just songs. They are unceasing variations around a theme. Contrary to popular belief their creation is not confined to the slavery period. Like the folktales, the spirituals are being made and forgotten everyday. There is this difference: the makers of the songs of the present go about from town to town and church to church singing their songs. Some are printed and called ballads, and offered for sale after the services at ten and fifteen cents each. Others just go about singing them in competition with other religious minstrels. The lifting of the collection is the time for the song battles. Quite a bit of rivalry develops.

These songs, even the printed ones, do not remain long in their original form. Every congregation that takes it up alters it considerably.

For instance, "The Dying Bed Maker," which is easily the most popular of the recent compositions, has been changed to "He's a Mind Regulator" by a Baptist church in New Orleans.

The idea that the whole body of spirituals are "sorrow songs" is ridiculous. They cover a wide range of subjects from a peeve at gossips to Death and Judgment.

The nearest thing to a description one can reach is that they are Negro religious songs, sung by a group, and a group bent on expression of feelings and not on sound effects.

There never has been a presentation of genuine Negro spirituals to any audience anywhere. What is being sung by the concert artists and glee clubs are the works of Negro composers or adaptors based on the spirituals. Under this head come the works of Harry T. Burleigh, Rosamond

the slave-ship, must be added these new sorrow songs of the workaday, work-weary world and of the workless lonesome road: the blues. The child-like faith of slave-days is giving way to the worldly cynicism, the disillusionment of freedom, the product of industrial exploitation, migration, and concentration in cities. The free worker or the drifter has his problems and burdens even as the slave had his visions; both take refuge in song. And the sorrow songs of these two ages bear a marked resemblance. For in the end it might be asked if the dominant note of all Negro song is not the homesickness of an alien, homeless folk, "po' boy long way from home," a nostalgia born of a racial, traditional, and ancestral longing for a home that no longer exists, like the Promised Land which the Jews have codified in Zion, and like the Heaven of the Christians to which the Negro has transferred his unsatisfied earthly longings. The Negro is restless and unresting, obsessed with the need of seeking and finding. Appropriately enough, then, his songs, sacred and secular, spirituals and blues, are songs of going home,

full of rivers and roads, trains and shoes, arks and chariots "comin' for to carry me home."

Gonna shout trouble over
When I git home,
Gonna shout trouble over,
When I git home.

No mo' prayin', no mo' dyin'
When I git home,
No mo' prayin' an' no mo' dyin'
When I git home.

Meet my father
When I git home.
Meet my father
When I git home.

Shake glad hands
When I git home,
Shake glad hands
When I git home.

Meet King Jesus
When I git home,
Yes, I meets King Jesus
When I git home.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals (1934)

The real spirituals are not really just songs. They are unceasing variations around a theme. Contrary to popular belief their creation is not confined to the slavery period. Like the folktales, the spirituals are being made and forgotten everyday. There is this difference: the makers of the songs of the present go about from town to town and church to church singing their songs. Some are printed and called ballads, and offered for sale after the services at ten and fifteen cents each. Others just go about singing them in competition with other religious minstrels. The lifting of the collection is the time for the song battles. Quite a bit of rivalry develops.

These songs, even the printed ones, do not remain long in their original form. Every congregation that takes it up alters it considerably.

For instance, "The Dying Bed Maker," which is easily the most popular of the recent compositions, has been changed to "He's a Mind Regulator" by a Baptist church in New Orleans.

The idea that the whole body of spirituals are "sorrow songs" is ridiculous. They cover a wide range of subjects from a peeve at gossips to Death and Judgment.

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Johnson, Lawrence Brown, Nathaniel Dett, Hall Johnson, and Work. All good work and beautiful, but *not* the spirituals. These neo-spirituals are the outgrowth of the glee clubs. Fisk University boasts perhaps the oldest and certainly the most famous of these. They have spread their interpretation over America and Europe. Hampton and Tuskegee have not been unheard. But with all the glee clubs and soloists, there has not been one genuine spiritual presented.

To begin with, Negro spirituals are not solo or quartette material. The jagged harmony is what makes it, and it ceases to be what it was when this is absent. Neither can any group be trained to reproduce it. Its truth dies under training like flowers under hot water. The harmony of the true spiritual is not regular. The dissonances are important and not to be ironed out by the trained musician. The various parts break in at any old time. Falsetto often takes the place of regular voices for short periods. Keys change. Moreover, each singing of the piece is a new creation. The congregation is bound by no rules. No two times singing is alike, so that we must consider the rendition of a song not as a final thing, but as a mood. It won't be the same thing next Sunday.

Negro songs to be heard truly must be sung by a group, and a group bent on expression of feelings and not on sound effects.

Glee clubs and concert singers put on their tuxedoes, bow prettily to the audience, get the pitch and burst into magnificent song—but not *Negro* song. The real Negro singer cares nothing about pitch. The first notes just burst out and the rest of the church join in—fired by the same inner urge. Every man trying to express himself through song. Every man for himself. Hence the harmony and disharmony, the shifting keys and broken time that make up the spiritual.

I have noticed that whenever an untampered-with congregation attempts the renovated spirituals, the people grow self-conscious. They sing sheepishly in unison. None of the glorious individualistic flights that make up their own songs. Perhaps they feel on strange ground. Like the unlettered parent before his child just home from college. At any rate they are not very popular.

This is no condemnation of the neo-spirituals. They are a valuable contribution to the music and literature of the world. But let no one imagine that they are the songs of the people, as sung by them.

The lack of dialect in the religious expression—particularly in the prayers—will seem irregular.

The truth is, that the religious service is a conscious art expression. The artist is consciously creating—carefully choosing every syllable and every breath. The dialect breaks through only when the speaker has reached the emotional pitch where he loses self-consciousness.

In the mouth of the Negro the English language loses its stiffness, yet conveys its meaning accurately. “The booming bounberries of this whirling world” conveys just as accurate a picture as mere “boundaries,” and a little music is gained besides. “The rim bones of nothing” is just as truthful as “limitless space.”

Negro singing and formal speech are breathy. The audible breathing is part of the performance and various devices are resorted to adorn the breath taking. Even the lack of breath is embellished with syllables. This is, of course, the very antithesis of white vocal art. European singing is considered good when each syllable floats out on a column of air, seeming not to have any mechanics at all. Breathing must be hidden. Negro song ornaments both the song and the mechanics. It is said of a popular preacher, “He's got a good straining voice.” I will make a parable to illustrate the difference between Negro and European.

A white man built a house. So he got it built and he told the man: “Plaster it good so that nobody can see the beams and uprights.” So he did. Then he had it papered with beautiful paper, and painted the outside. And a Negro built him a house. So when he got the beams and all in, he carved beautiful grotesques over all the sills and stanchions, and beams and rafters. So both went to live in their houses and were happy.

The well-known “hal!” of the Negro preacher is a breathing device. It is the tail end of the expulsion just before inhalation. Instead of permitting the breath to drain out, when the wind

gets too low for words, the remnant is expelled violently. Example: (inhalation) "And oh!"; (full breath) "my Father and my wonder-working God"; (explosive exhalation) "ha!"

Chants and hums are not used indiscriminately as it would appear to a casual listener. They have a definite place and time. They are used to "bear up" the speaker. As Mama Jane of Second Zion Baptist Church, New Orleans, explained to me: "What point they come out on, you bear 'em up."

For instance, if the preacher should say: "Jesus will lead us," the congregation would bear him up with: "I'm got my ha-hands in my Jesus' hands." If in prayer or sermon, the mention is made of nailing Christ to the cross: "Didn't Calvary tremble when they nailed Him down?"

There is no definite post-prayer chant. One may follow, however, because of intense emotion. A song immediately follows prayer. There is a pre-prayer hum which depends for its material upon the song just sung. It is usually a pianissimo continuation of the song without words. If some of the people use the words it is done so indistinctly that they would be hard to catch by a person unfamiliar with the song.

As indefinite as hums sound, they also are formal and can be found unchanged all over the South. The Negroised white hymns are not exactly sung. They are converted into a barbaric chant that is not a chant. It is a sort of liquefying of words. These songs are always used at funerals and on any solemn occasion. The Negro has created no songs for death and burials, in spite of the sombre subject matter contained in some of the spirituals. Negro songs are one and all based on a dance-possible rhythm. The heavy interpretations have been added by the more cultured singers. So for funerals, fitting white hymns are used.

Beneath the seeming informality of religious worship there is a set formality. Sermons, prayers, moans and testimonies have their definite forms. The individual may hang as many new ornaments upon the traditional form as he likes, but the audience would be disagreeably surprised if the form were abandoned. Any new

and original elaboration is welcomed, however, and this brings out the fact that all religious expression among Negroes is regarded as art, and ability is recognised as definitely as in any other art. The beautiful prayer receives the accolade as well as the beautiful song. It is merely a form of expression which people generally are not accustomed to think of as art. Nothing outside of the Old Testament is as rich in figure as a Negro prayer. Some instances are unsurpassed anywhere in literature.

There is a lively rivalry in the technical artistry of all of these fields. It is a special honor to be called upon to pray over the covered communion table, for the greatest prayer-artist present is chosen by the pastor for this, a lively something spreads over the church as he kneels, and the "bearing up" hum precedes him. It continues sometimes through the introduction, but ceases as he makes the complimentary salutation to the deity. This consists in giving to God all the titles that form allows.

The introduction to the prayer usually consists of one or two verses of some well-known hymn. "O, that I knew a secret place" seems to be the favorite. There is a definite pause after this, then follows an elaboration of all or parts of the Lord's Prayer. Follows after that what I call the setting, that is, the artist calling attention to the physical situation of himself and the church. After the dramatic setting, the action begins.

There are certain rhythmic breaks throughout the prayer, and the church "bears him up" at every one of these. There is in the body of the prayer an accelerando passage where the audience takes no part. It would be like applauding in the middle of a solo at the Metropolitan. It is here that the artist comes forth. He adorns the prayer with every sparkle of earth, water and sky, and nobody wants to miss a syllable. He comes down from this height to a slower tempo and is borne up again. The last few sentences are unaccompanied, for here again one listens to the individual's closing peroration. Several may join in the final amen. The best figure that I can think of is that the prayer is an obbligato over and above the harmony of the assembly.

WALTER KINGSLEY

“Whence Comes Jass?” (1917)

Variously spelled Jas, Jass, Jaz, Jazz, Jasz, and Jascz.

The word is African in origin. It is common on the Gold Coast of Africa and in the hinterland of Cape Coast Castle. In his studies of the creole patois and idiom in New Orleans, Lafcadio Hearn reported that the word “jaz,” meaning to speed things up, to make excitement, was common among the blacks of the South and had been adopted by the creoles as a term to be applied to music of a rudimentary syncopated type. In the old plantation days, when the slaves were having one of their rare holidays and the fun languished, some West Coast African would cry out, “Jaz her up,” and this would be the cue for fast and furious fun. No doubt the witch-doctors and medicine-men on the Congo used the same term at those jungle “parties” when the tomtoms throbbed and the sturdy warriors gave their pep an added kick with rich brews of Yohimbin bark—that precious product of the Cameroons. Curiously enough the phrase “Jaz her up” is a common one today in vaudeville and on the circus lot. When a vaudeville act needs ginger the cry from the advisors in the wings is “put in jaz,” meaning add low comedy, go to high speed and accelerate the comedy spark. “Jasbo” is a form of the word common in the varieties, meaning the same as “hokum,” or low comedy verging on vulgarity.

Jazz music is the delirium tremens of syncopation. It is strict rhythm without melody. Today the jazz bands take popular tunes and rag them to death to make jazz. Beats are added as often as the delicacy of the player’s ear will permit. In one-two time a third beat is interpolated. There are many half notes or less and many long-drawn wavering tones. It is an attempt to reproduce the marvelous syncopation of the African jungle. Prof. William Morrison Patterson, Ph.D., of Columbia University in his monumental pioneering experimental investigation of the individual difference in the sense of rhythm says:

“The music of contemporary savages taunts us with a lost art of rhythm. Modern sophistication has inhibited many native instincts, and the mere fact that our conventional dignity usually forbids us to sway our bodies or to tap our feet when we hear effective music has deprived us of unsuspected pleasures.” Professor Patterson goes on to say that the ear keenly sensible of these wild rhythms has “rhythmic aggressiveness.” Therefore of all moderns the jazz musicians and their auditors have the most rhythmic aggressiveness, for jazz is based on the savage musician’s wonderful gift for progressive retarding and acceleration guided by his sense of “swing.” He finds syncopation easy and pleasant. He plays to an inner series of time beats joyfully “elastic” because not necessarily grouped in succession of twos and threes. The highly gifted jazz artist can get away with five beats where there were but two before. Of course, beside the thirty-seconds scored for the tympani in some of the modern Russian music, this doesn’t seem so intricate, but just try to beat in between beats on your kettle drum and make rhythm and you will think better of it. To be highbrow and quote Professor Patterson once more:

“With these elastic unitary pulses any haphazard series by means of syncopation can be readily, because instinctively, coordinated. The result is that a rhythmic tune compounded of time and stress and pitch relations is created, the chief characteristic of which is likely to be complicated syncopation. An arabesque of accentual differences, group-forming in their nature, is superimposed upon the fundamental time divisions.”

There is jazz precisely defined as a result of months of laboratory experiment in drum beating and syncopation. The laws that govern jazz rule in the rhythms of great original prose, verse that sings itself, and opera of ultra modernity. Imagine Walter Pater, Swinburne, and Borodin swaying to the same pulses that rule the moonlit music on the banks of African rivers.

GRENVILLE VERNON

That Mysterious "Jazz" (1919)

Just what is "jazz"? Most of us know it when we hear it, but few of us know its derivation, its reason, or the manner in which the veritable "jazz" is produced, for there are "jazzes" which are not veritable. "Jazz" is, of course, negro; somehow or other all musical originality in America seems to be negro. The Negro musically is always a worshipper of rhythm; often he is a rhythm maniac, and "jazz" arises from his rhythmic fervor, combined with a peculiar liking for strange sounds. This at least is the opinion of Lieutenant James Reese Europe, late of the Machine Gun Battalion of the old 15th Regiment. Lieutenant Europe has just returned from more than a year's service in France, which he passed partly in the direction of the band he had organized for his regiment, a band which had a stupendous success in France and which is having equally as great success at home.

"When war broke out I enlisted as a private in Colonel Hayward's regiment, and I had just passed my officer's examination when the Colonel asked me to form a band. I told him that it would be impossible, as the Negro musicians of New York were paid too well to have them give up their jobs to go to war. However, Colonel Hayward raised \$10,000 and told me to get the musicians wherever I could get them. The reed players I got in Porto Rico, the rest from all over the country. I had only one New York negro in the band—my solo cornetist. These are the men who now compose the band, and they are all fighters as well as musicians, for all have seen service in the trenches.

"I believe that the term 'jazz' originated with a band of four pieces which was found about fifteen years ago in New Orleans, and which was known as 'Razz's Band.' This band was of truly extraordinary composition. It consisted of a barytone horn, a trombone, a cornet, and an instrument made out of the china-berry-tree. This instrument is something like a clarinet, and is made by the Southern negroes themselves.

Strange to say, it can be used only while the sap is in the wood, and after a few weeks' use has to be thrown away. It produces a beautiful sound and is worthy of inclusion in any band or orchestra. I myself intend to employ it soon in my band. The four musicians of Razz's Band had no idea at all of what they were playing; they improvised as they went along, but such was their innate sense of rhythm that they produced something which was very taking. From the small cafés of New Orleans they graduated to the St. Charles Hotel, and after a time to the Winter Garden in New York, where they appeared, however, only a few days, the individual musicians being grabbed up by various orchestras in the city. Somehow in the passage of time Razz's Band got changed into 'Jazz's Band,' and from this corruption arose the term 'Jazz.'

"The Negro loves anything that is peculiar in music, and this 'jazzing' appeals to him strongly. It is accomplished in several ways. With the brass instruments we put in mutes and made a whirling motion with the tongue, at the same time blowing full pressure. With wind instruments we pinch the mouthpiece and blow hard. This produces the peculiar sound which you all know. To us it is not discordant, as we play the music as it is written, only that we accent strongly in this manner the notes which originally would be without accent. It is natural for us to do this; it is, indeed, a racial musical characteristic. I have to call a daily rehearsal of my band to prevent the musicians from adding to their music more than I wish them to. Whenever possible they all embroider their parts in order to produce new, peculiar sounds. Some of these effects are excellent and some are not, and I have to be continually on the lookout to cut out the results of my musicians' originality.

"This jazz music made a tremendous sensation in France. I recall one incident in particular. From last February to last August I had been in the trenches, in command of my machine

gun squad. I had been through the terrific general attack in Champagne when General Gouraud annihilated the enemy by his strategy and finally put an end to their hopes of victory, and I had been through many a smaller engagement. I can tell you that music was one of the things furthest from my mind when one day, just before the Allied conference in Paris on August 18, Colonel Hayward came to me and said:

"Lieutenant Europe, I want you to go back to your band and give a single concert in Paris."

"I protested, telling him that I hadn't led the band since February, but he insisted. Well, I went back to my band, and with it I went to Paris. What was to be our only concert was in the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. Before we had played two numbers the audience went wild. We had conquered Paris. General Bliss and French high officers who had heard us insisted that we should stay in Paris, and there we stayed for eight weeks. Everywhere we gave a concert it was a riot, but the supreme moment came in the Tuileries Gardens when we gave a concert in conjunction with the greatest bands in the world—the British Grenadiers' Band, the Band of the Garde Républicain, and the Royal Italian Band. My band, of course, could not compare with any of these, yet the crowd, and it was such a crowd as I never saw anywhere else in the world, deserted them for us. We played to 50,000 people at least, and, had we wished it, we might be playing yet.

"After the concert was over the leader of the band of the Garde Républicain came over and asked me for the score of one of the jazz compositions we had played. He said he wanted his band to play it. I gave it to him and the next day he again came to see me. He explained that

he couldn't seem to get the effects I got, and asked me to go to a rehearsal. I went with him. The great band had played the composition superbly—but he was right: the jazz effects were missing. I took an instrument and showed him how it could be done, and he told me that his own musicians felt sure that my band had used special instruments. Indeed, some of them, afterward attending one of my rehearsals, did not believe what I had said until after they had examined the instruments used by my men.

"I have come back from France more firmly convinced than ever that Negroes should write Negro music. We have our own racial feeling and if we try to copy whites we will make bad copies. I noticed that the Morocco Negro bands played music which had an affinity to ours. One piece, "In Zanzibar," I took for my band, and though white audiences seem to find it too discordant, I found it most sympathetic. We won France by playing music which was ours and not a pale imitation of others, and if we are to develop in America we must develop along our own lines. Our musicians do their best work when using Negro material. Will Marion Cook, William Tires, even Harry Burleigh and Coleridge-Taylor are not truly themselves [except] in the music which expresses their race. Mr. Tires, for instance, writes charming waltzes, but the best of these have in them Negro influences. The music of our race springs from the soil, and this is true today of no other race, except possibly the Russians, and it is because of this that I and all my musicians have come to love Russian music. Indeed, as far as I am concerned, it is the only music I care for outside of Negro."

ANONYMOUS

Jazzing Away Prejudice (1919)

With the bringing down of the curtain at the Auditorium last Saturday night there closed a remarkable period of band concerts. If you were not fortunate enough to attend you missed a

rare treat. This band had made a wonderful record with the American expeditionary forces in France and with its jazz music had proved a source of great entertainment wherever it went.

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When it returned to the United States it was given a great ovation by the people of New York City, and Chicago found it equal to advance notice. It has all the artistic finish of any band that has invaded these parts in many years. We doubt seriously that Creatore at his best could have furnished a better entertainment. The audiences were highly responsive and rewarded each number with the most spirited applause. The closing number of the program, "In No Man's Land," in which the house was thrown into darkness and all the noises of the battlefield reproduced, furnished a thriller that was a fitting finale to a splendid evening's entertainment.

We hope the swing of Europe and his band around the country will be nation wide. The most prejudiced enemy of our Race could not sit through an evening with Europe without coming away with a changed viewpoint. For he is compelled in spite of himself to see us in a new light. It is a well-known fact that the white people view us largely from the standpoint of the cook, porter, and waiter, and his limited

opportunities are responsible for much of the distorted opinion held concerning us. Europe and his band are worth more to our Race than a thousand speeches from so-called Race orators and uplifters. Mere wind-jamming has never given any race material help. It may be entertaining in a way to recite to audiences of our own people in a flamboyant style the doings of the Race, but the spellbinder's efforts, being confined almost exclusively to audiences of our own people, is of as much help in properly presenting our cause to those whom we desire most to reach as a man trying to lift himself by pulling at his own bootstraps. Experience has shown that most of our spellbinders are in it for what there is in it. The good they do is nil.

Europe and his band are demonstrating what our people can do in a field where the results are bound to be of the greatest benefit. He has the white man's ear because he is giving the white man something new. He is meeting a popular demand and in catering to this love of syncopated music he is jazzing away the barriers of prejudice.

ANONYMOUS

Where *The Etude* Stands on Jazz (1924)

The Etude has no illusions on jazz. We hold a very definite and distinct opinion of the origin, the position, and the future of jazz. *The Etude* reflects action in the music world. It is a mirror of contemporary musical educational effort. We, therefore, do most emphatically *not endorse* jazz, merely by *discussing* it.

Jazz, like much of the thematic material glorified by the great masters of the past, has come largely from the humblest origin. In its original form it has no place in musical education and deserves none. It will have to be transmogrified many times before it can present its credentials to the Valhalla of music.

In musical education jazz has been an accursed annoyance to teachers for years. Possibly the teachers are, themselves, somewhat to blame for this. Young people demand interesting,

inspiring music. Many of the jazz pieces they have played are infinitely more difficult to execute than the somber music their teachers have given them. If the teacher had recognized the wholesome appetite of youth for fun and had given interesting, sprightly music instead of preaching against the evils of jazz, the nuisance might have been averted.

As it is, the young pupil who attempts to play much of the "raw" jazz of the day wastes time with common, cheap, trite tunes badly arranged. The pupil plays carelessly and "sloppily." These traits, once rooted, are very difficult to pull out. This is the chief evil of jazz in musical education.

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As it is, the young pupil who attempts to play much of the "raw" jazz of the day wastes time with common, cheap, trite tunes badly arranged. The pupil plays carelessly and "sloppily." These traits, once rooted, are very difficult to pull out. This is the chief evil of jazz in musical education.

On the other hand, the melodic and rhythmic inventive skill of many of the composers of jazz, such men as Berlin, Confrey, Gershwin,

and Cohan, is extraordinary. Passing through the skilled hands of such orchestral leaders of high-class jazz orchestras conducted by Paul Whiteman, Isham Jones, Waring, and others, the effects have been such that serious musicians such as John Alden Carpenter, Percy Grainger, and Leopold Stokowski have predicted that jazz will have an immense influence upon musical composition, not only of America, but also of the world.

Because *The Etude* knows that its very large audience of wide-awake readers desires to keep informed upon all sides of leading musical questions, it presents in this midsummer issue the most important opinions upon the subject yet published. We have thus taken up the "Jazzmania" and dismiss it with this issue. But who knows, the weeds of jazz may be Burbanked into orchestral symphonies by leading American composers in another decade.

We do desire, however, to call our readers' attention to the remarkable improvement that has come in the manufacture of wind instruments of all kinds and to the opportunities which are presented for teaching these instruments. Jazz called the attention of the public to many of these instruments, but their higher possibilities are unlimited, and thousands of students are now studying wind instruments who only a few years ago would never have thought of them.

Charles Wakefield Cadman— Noted American Composer

Candidly, I think too much importance has been placed upon this question of jazz; too much worry has been given it. It is as silly to stir oneself up over the matter of jazz as it is to get into a fever heat over modern Christianity and Fundamentalism. Attacking jazz can do no good. Championing jazz only makes one ridiculous. I feel the best way to meet this problem is to meet it with the open mind. By that I do not think it is necessary to do any straddling.

Simply recognize the fact that jazz is an exotic expression of our present national life. The very fact of its form changing every year shows its impermanence. Its very rhythms and its

fantastic effects, which are not without cleverness (because a good musician is usually called in to orchestrate the rather crude piano scores), somehow reflect the restless energy that pulses through the "spirit of the day," a restlessness that has become most patent since the World War. Jazz makes a more popular appeal at this moment than it would make at a more quiescent period of history. It is the craving for excitement on the part of those who can understand only the more popular forms of music, in other words, those who fancy the savage in music because it brings them a "kick."

It is true, indeed, that there are many who never get beyond the appreciation of jazz, but I am inclined to think that there are thousands who grow tired of the ever-recurring agitated forms and soon search for music with a deeper significance. Jazz is not peace-bringing; jazz is not spiritual, nor is jazz very uplifting. Its very lack of thoughtfulness (save in the rhythmic patterns it employs) and a lack of repose, make it *exotic*. Yet, do not let us overlook the fact that many classic tunes which have been pilfered bodily or even in a fragmentary manner and treated jazzily, have led to the understanding and appreciation of the original versions on the part of the most ardent jazzites. I have seen this to be true in cases under my consideration. The fact that the quality of jazz has improved greatly the past few years and that well-trained musicians are able to listen and smile and enjoy the cleverest of it, leads me to feel that we have nothing to be afraid of, and that the problem will take care of itself through natural evolution. Let us accept any "color effects" it has brought us and leave the pathological and psychological aspects to be worked out through the aforesaid evolution, which has ever and *shall* ever find new expressions and forms in each succeeding day and generation.

John Alden Carpenter— Distinguished American Composer

Replying to yours of the 2nd, I am afraid that I shall not have time to do justice to the theme; but I should like to be allowed to go on record

as deprecating the tendency to drag social problems into a discussion of contemporary popular American music.

All music that has significance must necessarily be the product of its time; and, whether we believe that the world of to-day is headed toward Heaven or Elsewhere, there is no profit in any attempt to induce the creative musician to alter his spontaneous mode of expression in order that he may thus affect the contemporary social conditions. Nor shall we make any better progress by attempting to legislate contemporary American music out of popularity by resolution of clubs or civic bodies.

I am convinced that our contemporary popular music (please note that I avoid labeling it "jazz") is by far the most spontaneous, the most personal, the most characteristic, and, by virtue of these qualities, the most important musical expression that America has achieved. I am strongly inclined to believe that the musical historian of the year two thousand will find the birthday of American music and that of Irving Berlin to have been the same.

Dr. Fank Damrosch—Director of the Institute of Musical Art

Jazz is to real music what the caricature is to the portrait. The caricature may be clever, but it aims at distortion of line and feature in order to make its point; similarly, jazz may be clever but its effects are made by exaggeration, distortion, and vulgarisms.

If jazz originated in the dance rhythms of the Negro, it was at least interesting as the self-expression of a primitive race. When jazz was adopted by the "highly civilized" white race, it tended to degenerate it towards primitivity. When a savage distorts his features and paints his face so as to produce startling effects, we smile at his childishness; but when a civilized man imitates him, not as a joke but in all seriousness, we turn away in disgust.

Attempts have been made to "elevate" jazz by stealing phrases from the classic composers and vulgarizing them by the rhythms and devices used in jazz. This is not only an outrage on

beautiful music, but also a confession of poverty, of inability to compose music of any value on the part of jazz writers.

We are living in a state of unrest, of social evolution, of transition from a condition of established order to a new objective as yet but dimly visualized. This is reflected in the jazz fad. We can only hope that sanity and the love of the beautiful will help to set the world right again and that music will resume its proper mission of beautifying life instead of burlesquing it.

Franz Drdla—Violinist and Composer of the Famous *Souvenir*

(Drdla, the well known Checo-Slovak composer and violinist, has recently toured America as a star artist in the Keith circuit. Naturally he heard a great deal of jazz. Since he has appeared repeatedly in Europe with many of the greatest musicians of his time, including Johannes Brahms, his opinions upon jazz given to *The Etude* at this time are most interesting.)

Every time and every age has its characteristic music precisely as it has its characteristic dress. In the days of the Madrigal, the very character of the words and the text reflect the architecture and the attire of the times. Jazz is the characteristic folk-music of modernity because America is the most modern country of the world. It is, however, an expression of the times and it is not surprising that Jazz should rapidly circulate around the globe like the American dollar.

Folk-music of this type (if you want to call the artificialities of jazz folk-music) seems to spring into existence after times of great deprivation such as those that accompany great wars. The Waltz, for instance, seemed to spring into international currency just after the French Revolution, as a kind of irrepressible expression of joy and liberty from restriction. Later on came the polka; then, after the Franco Prussian War, seemed to be an outburst of the hilarious *can can* in Paris. The world was putting aside its tragedy for a spree.

At the end of the great war, American ragtime simply went wild and that was jazz. Like many things it proved very infectious and soon

the whole world was inoculated. European nations should not condemn American jazz as long as its perpetrators seem to enjoy it even more at times than the native Americans.

Much of the jazz I have heard seems to be in two-four rhythm. It rarely appears in the three-four rhythm. This in itself, with some of the very monotonous background rhythmic figures, makes jazz very boring at times. It lacks variety in rhythm and meter although it tries to make up for this by introducing all sorts of instrumental color from every imaginable instrument that can be scraped, plucked, blown, or pounded.

**Arthur Foote—
Famous American Composer**

I have unluckily no acquaintance with "jazz" in its finer and more refined forms. It does seem a thing that easily turns in the direction of commonness and that can have a bad influence in music. The Ampico and other instruments that reproduce music by means of mechanism, I am sure, do lead their hearers to better appreciation of good music—in fact constitute a very important part of such influences. It seems doubtful if "jazz" can be counted on for anything of the sort. The truth may be that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find melodies and harmonies that are fresh (not to say new), that this interest in "jazz" means exploration of new and striking rhythmical dances—odd, but after centuries of musical development we should be returning to the primitive.

**Henry F. Gilber—
Distinguished American Composer**

Is jazz a new kind of music? Has it anything to contribute to the art? I find that almost all pieces of so-called jazz music, when stripped of their instrumentation (i.e., the instruments upon which they are played: saxophones, muted trombones etc.), have almost nothing new to offer in the way of strictly musical interest. And

this is so, even when we consider jazz from a strictly "popular" standpoint.

The amount of purely musical value, and the amount of differentiation of this music from other "popular" music, can be noted by playing a piece of jazz music on the piano. It is true that for several years the rhythmic element in popular music has been growing more insistent and nervous, and it may have reached its culmination in jazz. I rather think it has. So, as far as simple rhythmic forcefulness and iteration are concerned, jazz can claim the proud distinction of being the "worst yet." Technically speaking, however, it must be granted that the popular music of to-day is far richer in contrapuntal devices, in harmony, and in figuration than popular music formerly, in which the interest rested alone in the melody.

Another point by which jazz may be distinguished from the popular music of the olden time—say ten years ago—is the large number of cat-calls, clarinet-couacs, smears, glides, trombone-glissandos, and agonizing saxophonic contortions which occur in it. But these things are largely rendered possible by the instruments upon which jazz music is played. Take away these instruments and you take away the jazz quality almost entirely. In fact this jazz quality, far from residing in the music itself, is almost wholly a matter of tone-color, and this tone-color is given to it by the instruments—unusual instruments—and not only unusual instruments but also unusual combinations of instruments. For instance who ever thought of writing for a combination of saxophones, banjos, and muted trombones before? Yet in this, and similar combinations, lies most of the jazz effect in my opinion. Take many a piece of classical music—like some of Grieg's pieces, Dvořák's Slavonic Dances, or even some of Mozart's or Beethoven's compositions—and let a good jazz arranger arrange them for the usual jazz orchestra, with all its freak combinations of instruments—and let the arranger not change the original music more than is ordinarily done in transcribing a piano piece for an ordinary orchestra—and I would bet ten to one that it would be received by the majority as a new and authentic piece of jazz music.

In the unusual instruments—their unusual combination—the manner of playing them—the grotesque and burlesque effects which are obtained; in all this lies, for me, the interest in the phenomenon of jazz—not in the music. A great deal of my interest in it is purely humorous. By means of these above listed grotesque effects jazz “takes off” or “makes fun of” certain well-known phrases or legitimate methods of procedure in the respectable and established art of music. Jazz rings true in its Americanism in that it insists on laughing and making fun of even the most serious and beautiful things. It is a kind of musical rowdy, and occupies the same relation to the art of music that “burlesque” (on the stage) does to “legitimate drama.” It can certainly be very funny, and I for one, and I believe many more, have thoroughly appreciated the wit and skill of certain “take-offs.” A little musical nonsense now and then is relished by the best of musicians. One night at Ziegfeld’s midnight frolic—but the mere recollection of the way the saxophone caricatured a coloratura opera-singer is enough to make me laugh “fit to split,” as the saying is.

A word about the saxophone. This instrument may be said to be the principal instrument in the jazz orchestra. It is so much in evidence here, and so little in evidence in the regular symphony orchestra, as to give many persons the idea that it is a special development of jazz. But the saxophone was invented by Adolphe Sax, in Paris, about 1840 Meyerbeer, Massenet, Bizet, Thomas, and many others have written for it. Bizet has written for this instrument a naive and pastoral melody of much beauty, in his music to Daudet’s drama “L’Arlesienne.” However, it has never become an integral part of the standard symphony orchestra. It has always remained a special instrument, used on occasion to impart its rich and expressive tone-color to certain isolated phrases or melodies. It has remained for jazz to exploit it. And this has been done in a way to make the angels weep (with laughter). Originally an instrument having a richly pathetic and lyrical tone quality, it has been made to perform all sorts of ridiculous stunts, amounting to an indecent exposure, of all its worst qualities. It is as

if a grave and dignified person were forced to play the part of a clown at the circus.

Nevertheless, all these grotesque and burlesque “effects” on the saxophone, trombone, clarinet, and other instruments; the unusual combination of tone-qualities; and the invention thereby of new and unheard-of effects; I consider to be the most distinctive feature of the phenomenon called jazz. While this is not a specifically musical distinction, it is, considering the worldwide success of this music, and the remarkable quality of some of these “effects” pregnant with suggestion for the serious American composer.

Vincent Lopez

(Mr. Lopez is at the head of the famous orchestra at the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York. The reported action of French authorities in prohibiting jazz, and thereby making it impossible for certain American players to perform in Paris, has incited Mr. Lopez to wire urgent messages to Secretary of State Hughes, and to Senator Copeland, suggesting that as a reciprocal measure America cut short its hospitality to non-American musicians.)

I have been for a long time making a study both of the word “jazz” and of the kind of music which it represents. The origin of the colloquial word jazz is shrouded in mystery. The story of its beginning that is most frequently told and most generally believed among musicians has to do with a corruption of the name “Charles,” In Vicksburg, Miss., during the period when ragtime was at the height of its popularity and “blues” were gaining favor, there was a colored drummer of rather unique ability named “Chas. Washington.” As is a very common custom in certain parts of the South he was called “Chaz.” “Chaz” could not read music, but he had a gift for “faking” and a marvelous sense of syncopated rhythm. It was a practice to repeat the trio or chorus of popular numbers, and because of the catchiness of “Chaz’s” drumming he was called on to do his best on the repeats. At the end of the first chorus the leader would say: “Now, Chaz!”

From this small beginning it soon became a wide-spread habit to distinguish any form of exaggerated syncopation as "Chaz." It was immensely popular from the start, for it had appeal to the physical emotions unobtainable from any other sort of music. "Chaz" himself had learned the effectiveness of this manner of drumming through following the lead of country fiddlers in their spirited playing of "Natchez Under the Hill," "Arkansaw Traveler," "Cotton-Eye'd Joe," and the numerous other similar tunes so dear to the hearts of quadrille dancers.

In my endeavors to place a finger on the exact spot in music that we can "jazz," I found a process of elimination very convenient. There are many movements in the greatest symphonies that are syncopated; yet by no stretch of the imagination can we call them "jazz." The weird music of the North American Indians, based on sing-song vocal melodies with tom-tom accompaniment, is bizarre enough; but it is not "jazz." The Oriental whine of the musette, as used for the dances of the whirling dervishes, cannot be called "jazz." The languid airs of Hawaiian origin are not in that category. A Strauss waltz, a Sousa march, the gayest tune of a Gilbert and Sullivan light opera, an Argentine tango, a minuet, polka, quadrille, bolero, none of these are jazz; and yet any of them can be made into "jazz" by the simple expedient of accentuating that beat which the natural laws of rhythm require to be unaccented.

The whole universe is founded on order and rhythm, on regularity and steady tempo. The music of the spheres rushing through space is undoubtedly in strict time; the seasons change on schedule; all astronomical calculations are possible because of the methodical regularity of recurrent events. It is entirely contrary to natural laws to syncopate, and only man does it. The music student has difficulty in acquiring this faculty, for he feels that it is inherently wrong. No wild animal gives a long-drawn cry but that it is in time. When a baby does not cry rhythmically a doctor or a mother immediately realizes that something is seriously the matter with the child. When the wrong beat is accented there is an actual physical effect on the hearer, for a law is being broken.

At the very beginning "jazz" meant "without music" or "contrary to music," but a great change has taken place in it. The "jazz" of war times has very definitely departed; although leaving its indelible mark on music as a whole, it fitted a hysterical period when the times were out of joint and a frenzied world sought surcease from mental agony in a mad outbreak of physical gymnastics. There was a time not long ago when anything odd and fantastical in music was labeled "jazz." The musicians became affected with the glamor of syncopation. The different instrumentalists began to imitate the antics of the drummer. It became a clamor, an uproar. The clarinet whined and whistled; the trombone guffawed grotesquely; the trumpets buzzed and fluttered; the pianist gyrated.

It developed into a contest to attract individual attention. The violinist caught the germ and debased his instrument through the most flagrant musical indecencies. We had for orchestras a bunch of acrobatic maniacs to whom music was entirely secondary and mummery was the word. The cowbell reigned supreme. And that was "jazz."

It is certainly a misdemeanor to call my orchestra, or any other good dance organization, a "jazz band," if taken in the sense of what a "jazz band" used to be. Present-day dance music is as different from "jazz" as day from night. Yet the word remains with us; and we do stress syncopation, but we do it musically. It is now combined with the finest arrangements money can buy, the richest chords and modulations that gifted musical minds can conceive and the total elimination of all instruments and effects not of proven musical worth.

Ragtime music was the direct forerunner of "jazz." It was so nicely adapted to a simplified form of dancing that it had an almost universal appeal. It was merely syncopation without any particular emphasis. As the emphasis was added it became "jazz." It is, therefore, sufficiently explicit, so far as the music is concerned, to define "jazz" as emphasized syncopation; but there is another phase of it that includes the dancing in combination with emphasized syncopation.

Because there seems to be something animal-like in the emotional effects of "jazz," we

have turned to animal movements to get a name for it. We have had the "turkey trot," the "elephant glide" the "camel walk" and countless other designations; but at last and apparently accepted permanently the "fox trot." Perfection of lithesome, graceful bodily action in faultless rhythm can hardly be better pictured than by the harmonious movement of a fox as he trots. There is an almost imperceptible hesitation as each foot is placed, a perfect timing that is exact balance and the very acme of equilibrium. The name fits both the dance and the music.

**Will Earhart—Director of Music
Pittsburgh, PA**

I rather welcome the opportunity to express myself on the subject of "jazz" although nobody believes what anybody else says about it. I don't like "jazz" and don't approve of it. My reason for not liking it is that it does not come pleasingly to my ears. Mozart said somewhere—I think in a letter to his father—something to the effect that even in the most terrible situations in opera, music should never cease to be pleasing to the ear. I am willing to concede a place for rough sounds in opera—Alberich's cry is drama if it isn't music—but when music is standing for nothing but sounds and patterns of sounds, I prefer the sounds to be pleasing rather than exciting.

I do not approve of "jazz" because it represents, in its convulsive, twitching, hiccoughing rhythms, the abdication of control by the central nervous system—the brain. This "letting ourselves go" is always a more or less enticing act. Formerly we indulged it in going on an alcoholic spree; but now we indulge it by going (through "jazz") on a neural spree. Just now, the world does not know where to look for some stable principles to cling to, has lost its confidence in the value of ends that it formerly believed in, has been greatly excited, and consequently is not in position to exert the poise and purposeful control that mark the man or the nation that has steadfast ideals, believes in its destiny, and firmly advances toward it. Restlessness, indecision, and excitement are characteristic of

the interim before we again find compelling aims. "Jazz" is symptomatic of this state.

Since it is a symptom, I am not very much worried about it. It will disappear like all things that are not sound and fundamental always have disappeared, and always will. It is a little irritating—when it is not amusing—to hear it justified because it is dynamic, forceful, energetic. A man in an epileptic fit certainly loosens a large amount of energy; but it is ludicrously foggy thinking to appraise such energy as strength. Energy or force has no value except as it is well controlled and purposefully directed. "Jazz" certainly proves that Americans possess nervous energy. It does not prove that they are safe with it. We have made the mistake before of assuming that fussy, uncontrolled energy meant strength, and we are making it again now.

"Jazz" is defended sometimes because, in its later manifestations, well trained musicians have put some real interest of musical thought and design into it. Such bright spots of the kind that I have noticed are merely intermittent. They usually appear as oases with a desert of drivel before and another following. Their effect, to me, is that of a voo-doo dancer suddenly shouting out some witty epigram and then relapsing to his primitive nature.

Perhaps everything must be judged by the company it keeps—and attracts. Bach fugues, Beethoven symphonies, works by Debussy and Ravel are heard in certain places and received by a certain clientele gathered there. They seem to be appropriate to the places in which they are heard, and to the people who gather to hear them. So does "Jazz."

**Lt. Com. John Philip Sousa, U. S. N. R.—
Famous Composer-Conductor**

"Jazz, like the poor, are ever with us."

I heard a gentleman remark, "Jazz is an excellent tonic but a poor dominant."

It is unfortunate that the newness of the term has not allowed lexicographers time to define it properly. My Standard Dictionary gives forth, "Jazz:—Ragtime music in discordant tones or the notes for it." This is a most misleading

meaning and far from the truth and is as much out of place as defining a symphony when murdered by an inadequate and poor orchestra, "as a combination of sounds largely abhorrent to the ear."

Jazz can be as simple as a happy child's musings, or can be of a tonal quality as complex as the most futuristic composition. Many jazz pieces suffer through ridiculous performances, owing to the desire of a performer wishing to create a laugh by any means possible. Sometimes it has as little to do with the composition as the blast of a trombone, or the shrieking of a clarinet in "Traumerei" has to do with the beauties of that composition; it simply makes it vulgar through no fault of its own. Jazz, as far as my observation goes, is simply another word for "Pep" and has a counterpoint in the written drama of "hokum" although that word has not been honored with a line of explanation or definition in either my standard or my slang dictionary.

There is no reason, with its exhilarating rhythm, its melodic ingenuities, why it should not become one of the accepted forms of composition. It lends itself to as many melodic changes as any other musical form. Forms go by cycles. There was a time when the saraband and the minuet occupied the center of the stage, and to-day the fox trot, alias jazz, does, and like the little maiden:

When she was good, she was very, very
good
And when she was bad she was horrid.

**Walter R. Spalding—Professor
of Music, Harvard University**

In reply to your request that I send you a few words concerning the burning jazz question of the hour, it seems to me in this, as in so many other human affairs, that it is a matter out of proportion.

Everyone, I think, feels the excitement and refreshment which has been brought into music by means of the new and stimulating rhythms connected with jazz and ragtime. Some of us

only take umbrage when we hear the extreme devotees of jazz say that it is the greatest modern contribution to music and is destined to supersede all other music. As a matter of fact, jazz is a development of the rhythmical side of music, which is the most vital factor in music, but which in many ways may be considered somewhat of a negative virtue. It is taken for granted that a normal, healthy man will have a good heart beat; and it is taken for granted that good music will have rhythmic vitality and variety.

But good music must surely have many other qualities, such as melodic outline, deep emotional appeal, sublimity and ideality; and if the best that we can say of jazz is that it is exciting, it seems to me that many of the highest attributes of music are left out. In this, however, as in many other aspects of music, the good features will gradually be incorporated into the conventional idiom, and extreme mannerisms will be eliminated; for, whatever music is or is not, it is a free experimental art and has always been developed by composers trying all sorts of new possibilities in the way of rhythmic melody and harmonic effects the possibilities along these lines being boundless.

**Booth Tarkington—
Famous Novelist and Playwright**

I wish I knew enough about jazz to answer your questions with any symptoms of intelligence. I fear, however, that I cannot. I can give you my vague impressions only. I should not think jazz music the outcome of the spirit of unrest of these times. I should not think it the cause of much unrest, either. It might be considered an accompanying phenomenon, perhaps.

I do not think jazz is leading America anywhere.

I do not find myself condemning jazz; that is, not all jazz. I have heard jazz that was mere squeak and boom and holler and bang; and I have also heard jazz that seemed, perhaps, rather sensuous, but it was at least sensuously intelligible. I do not see it as the voice of new America, however. It seems to me to be purely incidental.

**Dr. Stephen Wise—Rabbi
of the Free Synagogue, New York, N Y**

I am not sure jazz is leading America. I think that jazz is one of the inevitable expressions of what might be called the jazzy morale or mood of America. If America did not think jazz, feel jazz, and dream jazz, jazz would not have taken a dominant place in the music of America.

The substitution of jazz for Beethoven, Bach, Wagner, and Handel is no sadder than the substitution of Phillips Oppenheim or Rex Beach for the novels of my youth, those of George Eliot and Thackeray. Mencken is a sort of literary jazz, though perhaps a little less light-footed than jazz helps folks to be. I would not prohibit jazz or discredit it. The fear of which jazz is an inharmonious symptom is far too deep-seated for censorship or inhibitions or prohibitions. When America regains its soul, jazz will go; not before—that is to say, it will be relegated to the dark and scarlet haunts whence it came and whither unwept it will return, after America's soul is reborn.

**Dr. Leopold Stokowski—
Distinguished Orchestral Conductor**

"Jazz" has come to stay. It is an expression of the times, of the breathless, energetic, super-active times in which we are living, and it is useless to fight against it. Already its vigor, its new vitality, is beginning to manifest itself.

The Negro musicians of America are playing a great part in this change. They have an open mind, and unbiased outlook. They are not hampered by traditions or conventions, and with their new ideas, their constant experiments, they are causing new blood to flow in the veins of music. In America, I think, there lies perhaps the greatest hope in the whole musical world.

In France today there are many clever musicians, most outstanding of whom are Debussy and Ravel. In England a school is growing steadily, and shortly it will burst into bloom like a flower. But though there is much talent, the world is still in the throes of a big unrest, for

which it is striving to find expression. There is no great spirit, no great genius, such as Wagner, dominating the world of music at the present time.

With the very complex music of today, an interpreter is a very important factor. The composer creates a work. The interpreter recreates it and breathes life into it and makes it a living pulsating, vibrating thing. He it is who must correlate the instruments, the different kinds of phrasing and the various types of technique and make plain to the public that which, unaided, it could not understand or appreciate.

Art is going to develop in the future, speedily and in multiple forms. There will be no prohibition going on in music. There is going to be greater and greater variety, because it is going to reach more and more persons. Music is going to enter more and more into our lives and become a part of our philosophy.

**Robert M. Stults—Composer
of "The Sweetest Story Ever Told."**

I have expressed myself so frequently on this subject, in casual conversation, and in such a vehement manner, that it will be rather difficult for me to put my opinion in public print, and leave out certain expletives. It is hard to talk about this "mongrel" music and keep calm.

For years past I have watched the gradual deterioration of the so-called popular music of the day. In the modern dances this is particularly noticeable. I don't object to the dances as such, for I have always enjoyed dancing; but the infernal racket that usually accompanies them, and the monkey shines of some of the performers, are enough to give even a musician of my type a chronic case of "jim-jams."

One cannot help comparing the dance music of thirty years ago with the travesties of the present day. Think of the stately old lancers and quadrilles, the dreamy waltzes of Waldteufel and the inspiring Strauss numbers! And then contemplate the "rot" that we are obliged to "hop around to" today. Recall, if you are old enough, the well-balanced dance orchestras of the old days, and then listen to the combination

of fiddles, banjos, saxophones, scrub-brushes and tom-toms that are now in vogue. Shades of Terpsichore! Happy are ye that your ears cannot hear the pandemonium that now reigns.

This jazz epidemic has also had its degenerating effect on the popular songs of the day. In fact, nearly every piece of dance music we now hear is a rehash of these often vulgar songs. But I am optimistic! There, is every indication that the ballad of the past, with its strong heart appeal, is again coming into favor. This is strongly indicated by the number of love songs that have recently sprung into popularity. I may be pardoned if I mention "The Sweetest Story Ever Told," a song written thirty-two years ago, and which during the past two years has seemingly taken on a new lease of life, the sales now approaching the 3,000,000 mark. Another happy sign is the fact that publishers are demanding more and more songs of a higher and more refined sentiment; and publishers are not given to printing music that the people do not want. "Jazz" has created a "malarious" atmosphere in the musical world. It is abnormal. The air needs clarifying!

Clay Smith—Well-Known Chautauqua Performer and Composer of Many Successful Songs

If the truth were known about the origin of the word "jazz" it would never be mentioned in polite society. I have seen many quotations from active-minded musicians who have guessed at the origin of the term but they are far from the facts. Thousands of men know the truth about the ancestry of "jazz," and why it has been withheld is hard to tell.

When I was a boy in school, some thirty-five years ago, I played the trombone and it did not take long in those days for me to get the reputation of being a prodigy. At fifteen and sixteen I had already made tours of western towns including the big mining centres when the West was really wild and woolly. Those were hard rough settlements and many of the men were as tough as mankind ever becomes. Like all adolescent boys let loose on the world I

naturally received information that was none too good for me and was piloted by ignorant men to dance resorts which were open to the entire town. These dance resorts were known as "Honky-Tonks"—a name which in itself suggests some of the rhythms of jazz. The vulgar word "jazz" was in general currency in those dance halls thirty years or more ago. Therefore jazz to me does not seem to be of American Negro origin as many suppose.

The primitive music that went with the "jazz" of those mining-town dance halls is unquestionably the lineal ancestry of much of the Jazz music of today. The highly vulgar dances that accompany some of the modern jazz are sometimes far too suggestive of the ugly origin of the word.

I know that this will prove shocking to some people but why not tell the truth? "The Truth is mighty and will prevail." "Jazz" was born and christened in the low dance halls of our far west of three decades ago. Present-day "jazz" has gone through many reformations and absorbed many racial colors from our own South, from Africa, the Near East, and the Far East. But why stigmatize what is good in the music by the unmentionably low word "jazz"?

If I were to get upon the platform and merely repeat some of the utterly horrible scenes that were forced upon me at those "jazz" resorts during those boyhood tours, any respectable audience would be petrified. Do you wonder that the very name "jazz" is anathema to me!

Having played high-class music with the Smith-Spring-Holmes Company, in some three thousand engagements in Chautauqua and Lyceum, which have taken me to the remotest parts of the country, I have heard so-called modern jazz of all kinds. Who can help it?

Some of the modern jazz arrangements are strikingly original and refreshing, with an instrumentation that is often very novel and charming. Music of this kind is far too good and far too clever to slander with the name "jazz." It is very American in its snap, speed, smartness and cosmopolitan character. Why not call it "Ragtonia" or "Calithumpia" or anything on earth to get away from the term "jazz"? But, even the best of this entertaining and

popular music has no place with the great classics or even with fine concert numbers, except perhaps in a few cases where musicians of the highest standing, such as Stravinsky, Carpenter,

Cadman, Guion, Grainger, Huerter, and others with real musical training, have playfully taken "jazz" idioms and made them into modernistic pieces of the super-jazz type.

J. A. ROGERS

Jazz at Home (1925)

Jazz is a marvel of paradox: too fundamentally human, at least as modern humanity goes, to be typically racial, too international to be characteristically national, too much abroad in the world to have a special home. And yet jazz in spite of it all is one part American and three parts American Negro, and was originally the nobody's child of the levee and the city slum. Transplanted exotic—a rather hardy one, we admit—of the mundane world capitals, sport of the sophisticated, it is really at home in its humble native soil wherever the modern unsophisticated Negro feels happy and sings and dances to his mood. It follows that jazz is more at home in Harlem than in Paris, though from the look and sound of certain quarters of Paris one would hardly think so. It is just the epidemic contagiousness of jazz that makes it, like the measles, sweep the block. But somebody had to have it first: that was the Negro.

What after all is this taking new thing, that, condemned in certain quarters, enthusiastically welcomed in others, has nonchalantly gone on until it ranks with the movie and the dollar as a foremost exponent of modern Americanism? Jazz isn't music merely, it is a spirit that can express itself in almost anything. The true spirit of jazz is a joyous revolt from convention, custom, authority, boredom, even sorrow—from everything that would confine the soul of man and hinder its riding free on the air. The Negroes who invented it called their songs the "Blues," and they weren't capable of satire or deception. Jazz was their explosive attempt to cast off the blues and be happy, carefree happy, even in the midst of sordidness and sorrow. And that is why it has been such a balm for

modern ennui, and has become a safety valve for modern machine-ridden and convention-bound society. It is the revolt of the emotions against repression.

The story is told of the clever group of "Jazz-specialists" who, originating dear knows in what scattered places, had found themselves and the frills of the art in New York and had been drawn to the gay Bohemias of Paris. In a little cabaret of Montmartre they had just "entertained" into the wee small hours fascinated society and royalty; and, of course, had been paid royally for it. Then, the entertainment over and the guests away, the "entertainers" entertained themselves with their very best, which is always impromptu, for the sheer joy of it. That is jazz.

In its elementals, jazz has always existed. It is in the Indian war-dance, the Highland fling, the Irish jig, the Cossack dance, the Spanish fandango, the Brazilian *maxixe*, the dance of the whirling dervish, the hula hula of the South Seas, the *danse du ventre* of the Orient, the *carmagnole* of the French Revolution, the strains of Gypsy music, and the ragtime of the Negro. Jazz proper, however, is something more than all these. It is a release of all the suppressed emotions at once, a blowing off of the lid, as it were. It is hilarity expressing itself through pandemonium; musical fireworks.

The direct predecessor of jazz is ragtime. That both are atavistically African there is little doubt, but to what extent it is difficult to determine. In its barbaric rhythm and exuberance there is something of the bamboula, a wild, abandoned dance of the West African and the Haytian Negro, so stirringly described by the

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anonymous author of *Untrodden Fields of Anthropology*, or of the *ganza* ceremony so brilliantly depicted in Maran's *Batouala*. But jazz time is faster and more complex than African music. With its cowbells, auto horns, calliopes, rattles, dinner gongs, kitchen utensils, cymbals, screams, crashes, clankings, and monotonous rhythm it bears all the marks of a nerve-strung, strident, mechanized civilization. It is a thing of the jungles—modern man-made jungles.

The earliest jazz-makers were the itinerant piano players who would wander up and down the Mississippi from saloon to saloon, from dive to dive. Seated at the piano with a carefree air that a king might envy, their box-back coats flowing over the stool, their Stetsons pulled well over their eyes, and cigars at an angle of forty-five degrees, they would "whip the ivories" to marvellous chords and hidden racy, joyous meanings, evoking the intense delight of their hearers who would smother them at the close with huzzas and whiskey. Often wholly illiterate, these humble troubadours knowing nothing of written music or composition, but with minds like cameras, would listen to the rude improvisations of the dock laborers and the railroad gangs and reproduce them, reflecting perfectly the sentiments and the longings of these humble folk. The improvised bands at Negro dances in the South, or the little boys with their harmonicas and jews'-harps, each one putting his own individuality into the air, played also no inconsiderable part in its evolution. "Poverty," says J. A. Jackson of the *Billboard*, "compelled improvised instruments. Bones, tambourines, make-shift string instruments, tin can and hollow wood effects, all now utilized as musical novelties, were among early Negroes the product of necessity. When these were not available 'patting juba' prevailed. Present-day 'Charleston' is but a variation of this. Its early expression was the 'patting' for the buck dance."

The origin of the present jazz craze is interesting. More cities claim its birthplace than claimed Homer dead. New Orleans, San Francisco, Memphis, Chicago, all assert the honor is theirs. Jazz, as it is to-day, seems to have come into being this way, however: W. C. Handy, a Negro, having digested the airs of the itinerant

musicians referred to, evolved the first classic, *Memphis Blues*. Then came Jasbo Brown, a reckless musician of a Negro cabaret in Chicago, who played this and other blues, blowing his own extravagant moods and risqué interpretations into them, while hilarious with gin. To give further meanings to his veiled allusions he would make the trombone "talk" by putting a derby hat and later a tin can at its mouth. The delighted patrons would shout, "More, Jasbo. More, Jas, more." And so the name originated.

As to the jazz dance itself: at this time Shelton Brooks, a Negro comedian, invented a new "strut," called "Walkin' the Dog." Jasbo's anarchic airs found in this strut a soul mate. Then as a result of their union came "The Texas Tommy," the highest point of brilliant, acrobatic execution and nifty footwork so far evolved in jazz dancing. The latest of these dances is the "Charleston," which has brought something really new to the dance step. The "Charleston" calls for activity of the whole body. One characteristic is a fantastic fling of the legs from the hip downwards. The dance ends in what is known as the "camel-walk"—in reality a gorilla-like shamble—and finishes with a peculiar hop like that of the Indian war dance. Imagine one suffering from a fit of rhythmic ague and you have the effect precisely.

The cleverest "Charleston" dancers perhaps are urchins of five and six who may be seen any time on the streets of Harlem, keeping time with their hands, and surrounded by admiring crowds. But put it on a well-set stage, danced by a bobbed-hair chorus, and you have an effect that reminds you of the abandon of the Furies. And so Broadway studies Harlem. Not all of the visitors of the twenty or more well-attended cabarets of Harlem are idle pleasure seekers or underworld devotees. Many are serious artists, actors and producers seeking something new, some suggestion to be taken, too often in pallid imitation, to Broadway's lights and stars.

This makes it difficult to say whether jazz is more characteristic of the Negro or of contemporary America. As was shown, it is of Negro origin plus the influence of the American environment. It is Negro-American. Jazz proper, however, is in idiom—rhythmic, musical, and

pantomimic—thoroughly American Negro; it is his spiritual picture on that lighter comedy side, just as the spirituals are the picture on the tragedy side. The two are poles apart, but the former is by no means to be despised and it is just as characteristically the product of the peculiar and unique experience of the Negro in this country. The African Negro hasn't it, and the Caucasian never could have invented it. Once achieved, it is common property, and jazz has absorbed the national spirit, that tremendous spirit of go, the nervousness, lack of conventionality and boisterous good-nature characteristic of the American, white or black, as compared with the more rigid formal natures of the Englishman or German.

But there still remains something elusive about jazz that few, if any of the white artists, have been able to capture. The Negro is admittedly its best expositor. That elusive something, for lack of a better name, I'll call Negro rhythm. The average Negro, particularly of the lower classes, puts rhythm into whatever he does, whether it be shining shoes or carrying a basket on the head to market as the Jamaican women do. Some years ago while wandering in Cincinnati I happened upon a Negro revival meeting at its height. The majority present were women, a goodly few of whom were white. Under the influence of the "spirit" the sisters would come forward and strut—much of jazz enters where it would be least expected. The Negro women had the perfect jazz abandon, while the white ones moved lamely and woodenly. This same lack of spontaneity is evident to a degree in the cultivated and inhibited Negro.

In its playing technique, jazz is similarly original and spontaneous. The performance of the Negro musicians is much imitated, but seldom equalled. Lieutenant Europe, leader of the famous band of the "Fifteenth New York Regiment," said that the bandmaster of the Garde Republicaine, amazed at his jazz effects, could not believe without demonstration that his band had not used special instruments. Jazz has a virtuoso technique all its own: its best performers, singers, and players, lift it far above the level of mere "trick" or mechanical effects. Abbie Mitchell, Ethel Waters, and

Florence Mills; the Blues singers, Clara, Mamie, and Bessie Smith; Eubie Blake, the pianist; "Buddy" Gilmore, the drummer, and "Bill" Robinson, the pantomimic dancer—to mention merely an illustrative few—are inimitable artists, with an inventive, improvising skill that defies imitation. And those who know their work most intimately trace its uniqueness without exception to the folk-roots of their artistry.

Musically jazz has a great future. It is rapidly being sublimated. In the more famous jazz orchestras like those of Will Marion Cook, Paul Whiteman, Sissle and Blake, Sam Stewart, Fletcher Henderson, Vincent Lopez and the Clef Club units, there are none of the vulgarities and crudities of the lowly origin or the only too prevalent cheap imitations. The pioneer work in the artistic development of jazz was done by Negro artists; it was the lead of the so-called "syncopated orchestras" of Tyers and Will Marion Cook, the former playing for the Castles of dancing fame, and the latter touring as a concretizing orchestra in the great American centers and abroad. Because of the difficulties of financial backing, these expert combinations have had to yield ground to white orchestras of the type of the Paul Whiteman and Vincent Lopez, organizations that are now demonstrating the finer possibilities of jazz music. "Jazz," says Serge Koussevitzky, the new conductor of the Boston Symphony, "is an important contribution to modern musical literature. It has an epochal significance—it is not superficial, it is fundamental. Jazz comes from the soil, where all music has its beginning." And Leopold Stokowski says more extendedly of it:

Jazz has come to stay because it is an expression of the times, of the breathless, energetic, superactive times in which we are living, it is useless to fight against it. Already its new vigor, its new vitality is beginning to manifest itself. . . . America's contribution to the music of the past will have the same revivifying effect as the injection of new, and in the larger sense, vulgar blood into dying aristocracy. Music will then be vulgarized in the best sense of the word, and enter more and more into the daily lives

of people.... The Negro musicians of America are playing a great part in this change. They have an open mind, and unbiased outlook. They are not hampered by conventions or traditions, and with their new ideas, their constant experiment, they are causing new blood to flow in the veins of music. The jazz players make their instruments do entirely new things, things finished musicians are taught to avoid. They are pathfinders into new realms.

And thus it has come about that serious modernistic music and musicians, most notably and avowedly in the work of the French modernists Auric, Satie and Darius Milhaud, have become the confessed debtors of American Negro jazz. With the same nonchalance and impudence with which it left the levee and the dive to stride like an upstart conqueror, almost overnight, into the grand salon, jazz now begins its conquest of musical Parnassus.

Whatever the ultimate result of the attempt to raise jazz from the mob-level upon which it originated, its true home is still its original cradle, the none too respectable cabaret. And here we have the seamy side to the story. Here we have some of the charm of Bohemia, but much more of the demoralization of vice. Its rash spirit is in Grey's popular song, *Runnin' Wild*:

Runnin' wild; lost control
Runnin' wild; mighty bold,
Feelin' gay and reckless too
Carefree all the time; never blue
Always goin' I don't know where
Always showin' that I don't care
Don' love nobody, it ain't worth while
All alone; runnin' wild.

Jazz reached the height of its vogue at a time when minds were reacting from the horrors and strain of war. Humanity welcomed it because in its fresh joyousness men found a temporary forgetfulness, infinitely less harmful than drugs or alcohol. It is partly for some such reasons that it dominates the amusement life of America to-day. No one can sensibly condone its excesses or minimize its social danger if uncontrolled; all culture is built upon inhibitions

and control. But it is doubtful whether the "jazz-hounds" of high and low estate would use their time to better advantage. In all probability their tastes would find some equally morbid, mischievous vent. Jazz, it is needless to say, will remain a recreation for the industrious and a dissipater of energy for the frivolous, a tonic for the strong and a poison for the weak.

For the Negro himself, jazz is both more and less dangerous than for the white—less in that, he is nervously more in tune with it; more, in that at his average level of economic development his amusement life is more open to the forces of social vice. The cabaret of better type provides a certain Bohemianism for the Negro intellectual, the artist and the well-to-do. But the average thing is too much the substitute for the saloon and the wayside inn. The tired longshoreman, the porter, the housemaid, and the poor elevator boy in search of recreation, seeking in jazz the tonic for weary nerves and muscles, are only too apt to find the bootlegger, the gambler and the demi-monde who have come there for victims and to escape the eyes of the police.

Yet in spite of its present vices and vulgarizations, its sex informalities, its morally anarchic spirit, jazz has a popular mission to perform. Joy, after all, has a physical basis. Those who laugh and dance and sing are better off even in their vices than those who do not. Moreover, jazz with its mocking disregard for formality is a leveller and makes for democracy. The jazz spirit, being primitive, demands more frankness and sincerity. Just as it already has done in art and music, so eventually in human relations and social manners, it will no doubt have the effect of putting more reality in life by taking some of the needless artificiality out. . . . Naturalness finds the artificial in conduct ridiculous. "Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away," said Byron. And so this new spirit of joy and spontaneity may itself play the role of reformer. Where at present it vulgarizes, with more wholesome growth in the future, it may on the contrary truly democratize. At all events, jazz is rejuvenation, a recharging of the batteries of civilization with primitive new vigor. It has come to stay, and they are wise, who instead of protesting against it, try to lift and divert it into nobler channels.

From *The Appeal of Jazz* (1927)

Jazz has secured and still retains a more widespread vogue among its contemporary listeners than any other form of music ever known. Its general currency among the black people of the American continent, from which it sprang, would alone account for a vast number of jazz lovers. But the interesting feature of its popularity is the way in which it has attracted the white folk of the United States, the masses of the British Isles, the peoples of practically every country in Europe, of Canada, of Australia, of New Zealand and South America. In every quarter of the globe where white races dwell, jazz has obtained a footing; only among more distant Orientals—over whom no Western music can be expected to exert a spell—has it failed to make its mark. But it has penetrated to Turkey, and is now much favored in Constantinople. This syncopated dance music of to-day strikes a chord of which we civilised beings were, previously, but dimly conscious—something elemental, something crude, if you like, but something which once felt, cannot be ignored. It makes our blood tingle, and there is nothing surprising in the fact that some people find it makes their blood boil.

Jazz music has permeated through all “strata” of society. It shows, so to speak, no respect of persons or classes, but exercises its stimulating or disturbing influence over rich and poor alike. Royalty and labourers, aristocrats and clerks, doctors and shorthand typists obey its call with a unanimity which we shall find amusing or disconcerting according to our outlook. Like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, the modern syncopator bids the children of our cities follow in his wake, and lo! they are prone to foot it to his strains.

What are the causes of this amazingly ubiquitous popularity? Why should this bustling intruder from the West have impelled us to rise from our chairs with one accord, to hop or glide or waddle or trip around the room—a thing which some of us, though we have perhaps

reached middle age, have never done before or else had long ceased to do?

There is little doubt that on its first appearance syncopated dance music attracted white people by the sheer charm of novelty. Though syncopation was in use in European music, it was almost unknown as a dancing medium, except here and there, as among the Magyars. The very idea of getting your feet to fit in with a tune which was played as it were, out of time, exerted a fascination over those who were new to it. There was an instinctive delight in emphasizing with your feet a beat which was not stressed by the players. We all felt, did we not? that we were playing our little part in the performance. In our heart of hearts, we were rather proud of ourselves for being able to accomplish such a thing. To be able to dance with regular steps to music which was written or played in irregular time—this was indeed an achievement. Our ancestors always brought their feet to the ground—or pressed them on the floor—at the same moment as the band placed its emphasis on certain notes. But with the new dance music we were called upon to do nothing of the kind! On the contrary, the orchestra, with a rougery which at first puzzled and then delighted us, was found to be making a point of stressing the unexpected notes and of passing by with a mere nod of the head that sturdy old champion of strict time, the first beat of the bar. What an affront to his dignity! But never mind! It would do him a world of good. How could he expect to monopolize the maximum of attention all his life? It was high time that his hitherto weaker brethren should at last be given a chance, and that his stolid conservatism should receive a gentle dig in the ribs.

Syncopated jazz music marks a striking change. That a form of music which originated among black people should have developed into the most popular music of the white races—nay, the most widely popular form of music in

the world's history—is a phenomenon sufficiently remarkable to lead us to probe it still further.

After the long spell of comparative peace which Europe in general, and England in particular, enjoyed during the period which in this country coincided with the reign of Queen Victoria, this twentieth century of ours has been a restless affair indeed. Amid the elemental passions which were aroused by the war and which were awakening in the preceding years of preparation for it, the strong rhythms of a coloured people's music took root and thrived readily. There was in ragtime and there is in jazz a primitive surging force which may at first sight appear to have little or nothing to do with the melancholy story of European strife and jealousy, but which could not be conceived as making an appeal to the restful Victorians or the eighteenth-century aristocrats with their powdered wigs and their courtly graces. The violently syncopated strains with their negro origins, the strange, often crude and cacophonous instrumentation of the earlier jazz bands, not merely provided a suitably highly-flavoured relief from the actual horrors of the campaign: they were themselves, in their own way, a reflection of the elemental instincts of war fever.

And in Europe, after the war itself had come to its sudden and dramatic conclusion, it has taken—nay, is taking—many years for these passions to die down; the waters are still turbulent, and the rough music of the Negro is still with us. If at last we are now beginning to discover signs that the great ocean of European politics is abating its fury—if a new Europe can be discerned rising from the smouldering ashes which the Great War left behind, do we not also notice a change in the character of this weird jazz music which we have taken to our bosoms? Has not it, too, become more civilized, its rhythms less violent, its orchestration more refined, its performers more disposed to play softly and delicately?

Music, like every other art, is invariably an expression of the times in which it is created. And for the people of Europe jazz music has meant something rather different from that which its original inventors intended or from

that which it signified for the people of the United States of America. To the Englishman, the Frenchman, or the German, jazz music has been a curious intruder whose welcome in our midst has been made more genial by the exceptional circumstances in which he has arrived. In America this jazz goblin is no stranger. He is native to the soil. The white people of the United States have the Negroes there amongst them. Their attitude towards the Negro is correspondingly different from ours. While serious American composers have mostly drawn upon European sources for their musical materials, the American writers of dance music have had recourse to the indigenous product. It was natural that they should do so. These Negro rhythms and to some extent also the peculiar instrumentation of the jazz band, at least in its primitive forms, are the only truly American musical products which that great continent possesses. In a sense it is as reasonable for the white American musician to seize upon them and develop them as it was for the German or English composer to build upon the folk songs of his native land.

Jazz music, though it did undoubtedly represent for the young American, when he became engaged in the war, something analogous to that which it meant to the European fighting man, embodies for the white people of America at large a spirit which is characteristic of their nation. The energy, the industry, the hurry and hustle and efficiency of modern American methods, find their counterpart in the swift-moving, bustling, snappy, restless rhythms of syncopated dance music, in the splendid technique of the performers, in the cunning quips and cranks of the jazz orchestra. To some extent, of course, the methods of American industrialism have found their way to Europe and may therefore be held to be in keeping with the European popularity of jazz music. But whereas in the eyes of an Englishman jazz is a popular importation—admittedly inapposite to his traditions, his ancient Gothic cathedrals, and his old Elizabethan and Georgian houses, yet nevertheless welcomed as a stimulating guest—to the American citizen it is a home product expressing something of the life which he has made his own.

In considering the popularity of the syncopated dance music of the twentieth century it is impossible to pass by, without mention, the curious controversy which has taken place in our midst between the advocates of so-called "Classical" music and jazz. For the purposes of this dispute, the assumption is usually made that jazz is the music of the masses, whereas the classics represent the art of the exclusive few. A gulf is established between the two—if only for the sake of argument—and we are encouraged to believe that it is a valley which can with difficulty be bridged. But its importance has been greatly overestimated. There is in truth no definable borderline between jazz music and the classics. Music is one, and the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and Irving Berlin both fall within its ambit. To be frightened of the one is as unnecessary as to be contemptuous of the other. If we are to be fair and catholic in our tastes we must listen to both impartially.

The man who at present only cares for modern dance music is in some respects a more hopeful specimen than that type of musician who can see nothing but evil in jazz. The mere fact that he enjoys jazz shows that, instead of being, like some unfortunate people, utterly indifferent to all music, he is capable of deriving pleasure from certain musical products. The art of tones and rhythms makes some appeal to him, and it is really only a question of environment, of musical acclimatisation, of gradual training, of overcoming his early prejudice against classical music, for him to find that he can get honest enjoyment also from Bach and Schumann and others.

But the cultured musician who has hardened his heart against jazz music is running a graver danger than that in which the untutored jazz lover is involved. He incurs a risk of failing to understand the point of view of the vast majority of his fellow creatures; of being thought, not without some justification, somewhat superior-minded; of being dubbed by that popular and opprobrious epithet of "high-brow," and consequently of having his opinions and advice, which may very probably possess intrinsic value, treated with scant regard, simply because they are tinged with contempt,

whether expressed or implied, or by a dash of condescension.

Thus it is that a gulf, which need never have existed, is widened by the faults of both parties. The man who cares only for dance music makes up his mind, quite wrongly, of course, that what he terms popular music and light music are synonymous. He ignores the fact—and will with difficulty be induced to believe it even when it is pointed out to him—that the works of the great masters are chock full of light music; that old Bach wrote stacks of dance tunes which are infinitely more light-hearted than many of the mournful waltzes played in the modern ballroom or even than some of the more sentimental foxtrots of recent times; that the output of Byrd and Morley, of Purcell and Rameau, of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, Schubert, Brahms, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, and in our own day Richard Strauss, de Falla, Holst, and others, is crowded with light music and often with the most delightful humour. A concerto or an oratorio may, of course, be deadly dull, but so may a one-step or foxtrot or "blues" melody. If they are, they will soon die a natural death. Jazz music has undoubtedly been a revelation to large numbers of people, of their own powers of musical enjoyment. Surely it is misguided to discourage all these new wanderers into the paths of musical pleasure by rubbing it into them that the one form of music in which they have been able to take any live interest is a detestable and worthless product.

Jazz is the product of a restless age: an age in which the fever of war is only now beginning to abate its fury; when men and women, after their efforts in the great struggle, are still too much disturbed to be content with a tranquil existence; when freaks and stunts and sensations are the order—or disorder—of the day; when painters delight in portraying that which is not, and sculptors in twisting the human limbs into strange, fantastic shapes; when America is turning out her merchandise at an unprecedented speed and motor cars are racing along the roads; when aeroplanes are beating successive records and ladies are in so great a hurry that they wear short skirts which enable them to move faster and cut off their hair to save a few precious

moments of the day; when the extremes of Bolshevism and Fascismo are pursuing their own ways simultaneously, and the whole world is rushing helter-skelter in unknown directions.

Amid this seething, bubbling turmoil, jazz hurries along its course, riding exultantly on the eddying stream. Nevertheless, the end of

civilisation is not yet, and jazz will either be trained and turned to artistic uses or else vanish utterly from our midst as a living force. But even if it disappears altogether it will not have existed in vain. For its record will remain as an interesting human document—the spirit of the age written in the music of the people.

ROBERT GOFFIN

Hot Jazz (1934)

Not so long ago André Coeuroy wrote: "improvised jazz is the most potent force in music at the present time; long may it remain so."

What then exactly is this force that has received the sanction of some of our greatest modern musicians and yet is so little known to others?

It is scarcely necessary to repeat that jazz is Afro-American music, developed in the U.S.A. during the war, and attaining its maximum of expression during the period 1920–1930. In my book *On the Frontiers of Jazz* I have dealt at sufficient length with the various musical, technical and sentimental elements of jazz to make any recapitulation of them here unnecessary. They are common knowledge by now.

Let us therefore confine ourselves to hot jazz, otherwise known as improvised jazz, a type of music that was in existence long before it was formally tabulated. The epithet "hot" is applied to any passage "in which the executant or executants abandon the melodic theme and develop an imaginative structure on the basis of that theme and incorporated with it."

To write the history of this "hot" it would be necessary to trace the whole evolution of jazz in general. For we find its formulae, common enough today, present at every stage of the development of syncopated music. It may be said that jazz would have died a natural death long ago but for this "hot" which has always been its unfailing stimulation, its purest mode of utterance, and to all intents and purposes its *raison d'être*.

The Negro slaves, transplanted from their scorching Africa to the marvellous but inhos-

pitable countries of North America, treasured as their last possession that prodigious sense of rhythm which their traditional dances and their tom-toms beating in the equatorial night had made so ineradicably part of them.

Instinctive and unhappy, highly endowed with the most complete, because the most simple, poetical faculties, they soon began to express their emotions in song; labourers in the cotton plantations, dockers slaving in New Orleans, young Negresses herded together in the markets, fugitives hounded down by mastiffs, they all sang their abominable captivity and the brutal domination of their masters.

The African rhythm had not been lost; they clothed it with simple sentiment, moving expressions of love, biblical cries of celestial yearning, pastoral laments; and thus the Negroes came quite naturally to improvise upon a given rhythmic theme with changes of tone, combinations of voices and unexpected counterpoints—an improvisation that was to culminate in the incomparable harmonies that have bewitched the whole of Europe.

Little by little this habit of improvisation was extended to the brasses and it became customary for groups of musicians to meet and improvise on the themes of spirituals or simply on a given rhythm, each performer weaving his own melody.

Through the cake-walk, rag-time, and blues Negro music proceeded towards that jazz which was soon to assume such important dimensions and absorb the forms which had gone before it.

moments of the day; when the extremes of Bolshevism and Fascismo are pursuing their own ways simultaneously, and the whole world is rushing helter-skelter in unknown directions.

Amid this seething, bubbling turmoil, jazz hurries along its course, riding exultantly on the eddying stream. Nevertheless, the end of

civilisation is not yet, and jazz will either be trained and turned to artistic uses or else vanish utterly from our midst as a living force. But even if it disappears altogether it will not have existed in vain. For its record will remain as an interesting human document—the spirit of the age written in the music of the people.

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Through the cake-walk, rag-time, and blues Negro music proceeded towards that jazz which was soon to assume such important dimensions and absorb the forms which had gone before it.

"At this time jazz still belonged to the black musicians with their ancient traditions of invention and their unique faculty for improvisation and embellishment according to the dictates of their ingenuous hearts. They were the first teachers of the genuine lovers of jazz, while others in whom the commercial instinct was more highly developed ignored this necessary contact and transposed jazz airs in a way quite foreign to the Negro tradition."

This explains the upgrowth of a school of melodic jazz, exploited for a time with great success by Paul Whiteman, Jack Hylton, and other famous leaders, who industrialized jazz to such an extent that nothing remained but a weak dilution devoid of all real musical character.

Melodic jazz has contributed nothing to music and will only be remembered for its unspeakable insipidness; whereas hot jazz is a creative principle which can scarcely fail to affect the music of the future in the most original and unexpected directions.

Hot jazz has already exploded the automatism of musical composition as practised before the war, when the composer wrote a melody, or a score, on the understanding that its realisation should only vary in accordance with the interpretive ability of successive executants, who generally showed but little initiative in their reading of the work and could only express their own personality in their treatment of detail. It is obvious that the music of Beethoven and Debussy is played today exactly as it was when composed, and as it still will be a century hence.

The most extraordinary achievement of hot jazz has been the dissociation of interpretation from the "stenographical" execution of the work, resulting in a finished musical creation which is as much the work of the performer as of the composer. Up to the time of jazz it is safe to say that the performer was no more than the faithful representative of the composer, an actor whose function was to transmit the least phrase and stimulus of his text. But hot jazz has no patience with stimuli by proxy and requires more of its executants, insisting that each should have ample scope for independence and spontaneity of expression. The task of the performer is to realise, in whatever terms he sees fit, the

possibilities of syncopation latent in the generally simple theme written by the composer. He is no longer a conscientious actor reciting his part, but one improvising on the idea or impression of the moment in the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* tradition.

The admirable achievement of the first orchestras was an unconscious one ignored at the time and not fully appreciated till twenty years later. We must turn back to these primitive orchestras and listen humbly to the musical inventions of these untrained Negroes before we can realise the brilliant audacity of these musicians who devoted themselves with enthusiasm and in the face of the most fatuous opposition to this new field, later to become the monopoly of the intelligent and cultivated section of the new generation. From this moment every black orchestra played "hot," with occasional discordant abuse of wawas, washboards, and drums, which soon calmed down.

At that time only very few whites were able to appreciate the sublime grandeur of this music of the heart. We must not forget the first white orchestras to play "hot" in an America rotten with colour prejudice; they laid the foundations of a solidarity and a mutual esteem whose benefits came too late for the majority of those most apt to enjoy them. The Cotton Pickers, New Orleans Rhythm Kings, California Ramblers, and Original Dixieland will all have an honoured place in the eventual Pantheon of syncopated music.

Already a definite tradition is taking form in the domain of hot jazz and a codification is being gradually developed; such discerning critics as Panassié, Prunières, Coeuroy, and Sordet concern themselves with the manifestations of hot jazz and keep its development under the strictest observation and control. We are now so familiar with hot jazz, thanks to the countless records made of different orchestras, that we can distinguish the unmistakable note of its lyricism even in the most florid of its vulgarisations.

The talent and genius of certain composers and performers have received their proper recognition. A number of jazz orchestras have conquered the unanimous approval of the public. Finally certain individuals have enriched jazz with contributions of so personal a nature

as cannot fail to delight all those who take an interest in the subject, and it is to them that we owe all that is best in modern jazz.

There are many orchestras in both Europe and America whose musical perfection has elicited the admiration of such competent judges as Ravel, Darius Milhaud, and Stravinsky, and in these orchestras some exponents of "hot" whose style, to my mind, has had an enormous influence on the development of jazz in general. Special reference must be made to Louis Armstrong, whom I consider as the supreme genius of jazz. This extraordinary man has not only revolutionised the treatment of brass instruments but also modified almost every branch of musical technique as practised today. Nor should we forget that colossus of jazz, the late Bix Beiderbecke, the pianist Earl Hines, and the tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins. There are hundreds of others hardly less important than these four and no less deserving of honour for not being mentioned by name.

Before I conclude this essay I would like to draw attention to the analogy between the

acceptance of "hot" and the favour enjoyed throughout Europe by the *Surréaliste* movement. Is it not remarkable that new modes both of sentiment and its exteriorisation should have been discovered independently? What Breton and Aragon did for poetry in 1920, Chirico and Ernst for painting, had been instinctively accomplished as early as 1910 by humble Negro musicians, unaided by the control of that critical intelligence that was to prove such an asset to the later initiators.

Finally, it may be mentioned that hot jazz is regarded today by all the intelligent and cultivated youth of Europe as its staple musical nourishment. As Dominique Sordet says, many young men have derived an almost religious enthusiasm from the contact of this superabundant source of lyricism. For them hot jazz is almost the only form of music that has any meaning for their disrupted generation, and it is my fervent hope that America will not disregard this extraordinary element in its sentimental life and one which is surely of more importance than sky-scrapers and Fordism.

LOUIS ARMSTRONG

From Swing That Music (1936)

For a man to be a good swing conductor he should have been a swing player himself, for then he knows a player is no good if the leader sets down on him too much and doesn't let him "go to town" when he feels like going. That phrase, "goin to town," means cuttin' loose and takin' the music with you, whatever the score may call for. Any average player, if he's worth anything at all, can follow through a score, as it's written there in front of him on his instrument rack. But it takes a swing player, and a real good one, to be able to leave that score and to know, or "feel," just when to leave it and when to get back on it. No conductor can tell him, because it all happens in a second and doesn't happen the same way any two times running.

It is just that liberty that every individual player must have in a real swing orchestra that makes it most worth listening to. Every time they play there is something new swinging into the music to make it "hot" and interesting. And right here I want to explain that "hot," as swing musicians use the word, does not necessarily mean loud or even fast. It is used when a swing player gets warmed up and "feels" the music taking hold of him so strong that he can break through the set rhythms and the melody and toss them around as he wants without losing his way. That creates new effects and is done whether the music is loud or soft or fast or slow.

You will think that if every man in a big sixteen-piece band had his own way and could

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You will think that if every man in a big sixteen-piece band had his own way and could

play as he wanted, that all you would get would be a lot of jumbled up, crazy noise. This would be and is true with ordinary players, and that is why most bands have to play "regular" and their conductors can't dare let them leave their music as it is scored. The conductor himself may decide on certain variations, an "arrangement" they call it, but the players have to follow that scoring. In that way the conductor or "arranger" may write some "hot" phrasing into an old score and, to those who don't know, the orchestra may seem to be "swinging." But when you've got a real bunch of swing players together in an orchestra, you can turn them loose for the most part. "Give 'em their head," as they say of a race horse. They all play together, picking up and following each other's "swinging," all by ear and sheer musical instinct. It takes a very fine ear and some years of playing to do that. That is why there have been so few really fine swing orchestras in the world. First you have to get a combination of natural swing players and then they've got to learn how to play in and out together as one man. No conductor can *make* them do it, or even show them much how to. His biggest part is to make suggestions and try to get them into a good humor and then let them alone. And I mean alone! If he doesn't, if he starts telling one man just how to play this part and another how to play another part, pretty soon he'll ruin his orchestra and he'll have one that just plods along with the score, playing regular, and all the life will be gone out of the men. Swing players have got to have a good time when they are playing and they can't have a good time, playing and rehearsing as they do twelve and fourteen hours a day, if you just make machines out of them.

No man in my band which you hear over the radio *has* to do anything, except be a good musician and "show" on time and in good shape for rehearsals. If he *can't* play away from the score, I don't want him. He doesn't belong in a real swing band, and, Heaven knows, there are plenty of fine non-swing or "regular" bands in the land which will be glad enough to have him. My men know that—and my knowing it may be the biggest reason why we are out in front today. If I hadn't come up myself as a swing

trumpeter, and found out that you've got to be let alone and allowed to play your own way, probably I would be bearing down more on my boys and flattening out their style; and they would not be happy because they all know better.

So if you have been hearing about swing music, but have not known much about the difference, listen closely when you hear one of the big "regular" orchestras playing on the air or in your favorite hotel or club, and then listen carefully to a swing orchestra like Benny Goodman's or Jimmy Dorsey's or the Casa Loma or the Louis Armstrong Band. Pretty soon you will begin to notice that all of the players in the "regular" orchestra are playing almost perfectly together to a regular, set, rhythmic beat, and are smoothly following the melody to the end. No one instrument will be heard standing out at any time during the piece (unless, of course, there happens to be a soloist leading them for a number). Then when you listen to a swing band, you will begin to recognize that all through the playing of the piece, individual instruments will be heard to stand out and then retreat and you will catch new notes and broken-up rhythms you are not at all familiar with. You may have known the melody very well but you will never have heard it played just that way before and will never hear it played just that way again. Because the boys are "swinging" around, and away from, the regular beat and melody you are used to, following the score very loosely and improvising as they go, by ear and free musical feeling. If you pay attention for a little while, you will easily notice the difference. You will probably feel differently, too—the "regular" style music will relax you but the swing is likely to make you feel keen—waiting on edge for the "hot" variations you feel are coming up at any moment. That is because you recognize, maybe without knowing it, that something really creative is happening right before you.

Now I know there are a lot of people who will read this book who will say that "swing" is just a new name for the same old jazz they've been hearing for many years and that I am trying to make it look as though it was something new. Even some of the editors of the publishing

house which is publishing this book told me that at first, though of course in a very polite way. But I cannot say too strongly to these people that there is all the difference in the world and if they will just try to understand it they will very soon be singing out when they tune in a band on their radios, "That's swing!" or "That's not swing," and will be able to tell at once.

Now the *basic idea* of swing music is not new. The swing idea of free improvisation by the players was at the core of jazz when it started back there in New Orleans thirty years ago. Those early boys were swing-men, though they didn't know so much about it then as we do today. But they had the *basic idea*, all right. What happened was that this idea got lost when jazz swept over the country. I think the reason it got overlooked and lost was that when the public went crazy over jazz the music publishing companies and the record companies jumped in and had all the songs written down and recorded and they and the theatre producers and Northern dance halls paid our boys more money than they'd ever heard of to help write down and play these songs. Popular songs before jazz had always been played the way they were written and that was what made "song hits" for the publishers. So the commercial men wanted the new jazz tunes played the same way so the public would come to learn them easily and sing them. The public liked that, too, because the new tunes were "catchy" and different and people liked to sing them and hear them played that way. Jazz was new to them and they didn't understand it enough to be ready for any "crazy business." So most of the good jazz players and jazz bands which followed the Dixieland Five went down the easiest road where the big money was, and you can hardly blame them when you look back now and see how few people understood what it was really all about anyway. Some of the boys stuck along

and just wouldn't follow scoring, it wasn't in 'em, and some of the others that didn't learn to read music went on swinging the way they had learned to love. Very few of them ever made much money, but playing in small clubs and dives they kept swing alive for many years.

Then there was another group of the boys who took a straddle and I think they were the smartest and that they have probably done more to bring swing into its own than anybody. They were the swing-men who went on into the commercial field, joined big conventional bands, played the game as it was dished out to them and made their money, and yet who loved swing so much that they kept it up outside of their regular jobs. They did it through the jam sessions held late at night after their work was done. It makes me think of the way the early Christians would hold their meetings in the catacombs under Rome. With those musicians I guess it was the old saying: "He who fights and runs away will live to fight another day." At any rate, the truth is that most of the best-known swing artists of today are or were the crackshot musicians with big conventional bands (name bands, we call them because they are usually known by the name of their leader) or on big radio programs, but they don't miss their jam sessions where they can cut loose as they please, with or without a leader, feel their own music running through them and really enjoy themselves. These swing-men who have come up to the top because of their musicianship are slowly having an influence on the big bands they play with. Some of them have become so popular with the public that they now have their own bands and can do more what they like to do, like Mr. "Red" Norvo, Mr. Benny Goodman, Mr. Tommy Dorsey, Mr. Jimmy Dorsey, Mr. "Red" Nichols, Mr. Earl Hines, Mr. Chick Webb, Mr. "Fats" Waller, Mr. Teddy Hill, and others.

ROLLIN LYNDE HARTT

The Negro in Drama (1922)

Because she has been an actress and is now writing pageants and little plays, I asked Mrs. Hartt to share my study of the Negro in Drama. So these impressions are not a reporter's merely, nor at all a professional critic's; I saw through the eyes of an artist, and if an artist may perhaps be a trifle too generous when appraising the genius of fellow-craftsmen—at the moment, that is—pray note that some little time has gone by since we saw Gilpin in "The Emperor Jones," and went to an astonishing matinee at the Negro theatre in Harlem, and chatted with Negro players, Negro scenario writers, and Negro moving picture producers in their Dressing-Room Club at the Harlem Community House established by Community Service. Yesterday—calmly I think—we reviewed our exploits.

Every theatre-loving New Yorker—and every theatre-loving sojourner in New York—knows the "Emperor Jones," black scapegrace lording it over a West Indian island "not yet self-determined by American marines." During the opening scene, revolution breaks out. From then on, we see the Emperor fleeing. Solitary. At night. Through the forest. Far away, a tom-tom reveals where his enemies are preparing the silver bullet which, as he has boasted, alone can kill him. He is visited by awful "hants." A bravo at first, he becomes more and more horror-stricken. Finally, he shoots himself. The play is practically all Gilpin. Gilpin soliloquizing. On a stage nearly dark.

Mr. Robert Bridges remarked to me the other day, "I'd hate to see a white man try it. Salvini might have succeeded. No living white man could." To the actress, Gilpin is amazing: "Never before in my whole experience have I seen an actor carry so difficult a rôle. He was forced to people the stage with imaginary characters. If he had not had an extraordinary imagination, you would never have felt the reality of the foes who filled him with terror. He lived his part, in absolute sincerity; there was no trick of technique

you ever caught him at. And that prayer in the forest—that agonized prayer! He put into it the complete realization of what he was saying as an artist, and as a human being."

It takes an actress fully to measure the triumph. "Soliloquy is the most difficult thing a player can handle; every Hamlet finds this the great test. Yet Gilpin never made you nervous—you never felt that he was having a hard time to wade ashore with it. And he 'got it over' in the dark—a most difficult feat. I doubt if Salvini could have played the 'Emperor'! I don't know any one but Gilpin who could. Let alone other exactions, what a strain on the voice! The average actor in the average cast feels that strain, though it is shared by anywhere from ten to twenty-five people, so that each gets time to rest his voice. Gilpin has almost none. Yet throughout the play it responds to every nuance of his thought."

A modest genius is Gilpin. Invited to the actors' banquet, he came with the intention of not staying. Interviewed by newspaper men, he declared in effect. "Many a Negro could play the 'Emperor,'" and later on, in the Dressing-Room Club down under the establishment, a Negro said to us: "We have a lot of Gilpins." But it was in none too expectant a mood that we visited the Lafayette Theatre in Seventh Avenue near 131st Street, Harlem. The more fools we. Prepared for crude melodrama, we found—but first to describe the theatre.

It is a spacious affair, handsome and scrupulously cared for. Posters outside announced the Lafayette Players (stock company, all black) in "The Love of Choo Chin." With charming courtesy, a colored girl sells tickets. A mannerly girl usher, wearing Chinese dress in honor of Choo Chin, showed us to our box. The orchestra (colored) consisted entirely of young women. On the drop curtain, cheerful nymphs (colored) disported themselves in a familiar enough drop-curtain Eclogue. The audience

(all black) was remarkable chiefly for its air of very pleasing refinement. What wonder? Among the 150,000 Negroes in Harlem, university graduates abound.

"The Love of Choo Chin" is a play within a play. The Prologue introduces a rich American just back from China. To an old crony of his, he relates his adventures. Yes, there was a girl. The drama itself tells the story our hero tells his friend—how he fell in love with Choo Chin; how Choo Chin rejected him in order to marry an odious Celestial, who, otherwise, would take her father's life; and how the detestable alliance was happily forestalled—happily indeed, as it turned out that Choo Chin was really the daughter of Americans slain during the Boxer Uprising. The Epilogue resumes the confidences between our hero and his friend. Finally enters the girl in American dress. So the hero presents his bride, and all ends sweetly.

It is a pretty play. We were told afterward that only the huge popularity of "East is West" prevented its becoming a tip-top Broadway success. The Lafayette Players staged it splendidly, with elaborate scenery, correct costuming, careful stage direction, and an exercise of fine artistic conscience throughout. "I never saw a better performance by a stock company anywhere," remarked the lady at my side. "What dignity and sincerity in the entire cast!"

However, it was at one point quite uproariously amusing—to us. White folks can black up, but black folks can't white up, and the rich American traveller was unequivocally a Negro. We could forget that. We could not forget, however, that his English butler, who dropped his *h*'s, was also a Negro. Oh, a lovely Negro! Black! This, as Hashimura Togo would say, was "very tough projectile for white folks to chew," though the audience took it beautifully, and there is now and then a much more hilarious absurdity on our own stage—to wit, an Englishman attempting Negro dialect.

Except as regards color, that black man played the English butler to perfection. With your eyes shut, you would have been completely deceived, so imitative is the Negro voice. To be sure, we noticed once or twice on the part of other performers a tendency to lapse into Afro-American.

Once or twice only. Faultless diction was the rule. And such deep, rich voices! How flexible! How carrying and enduring! Said Mrs. Hartt, "If a white player had any one of those voices, he'd be made!"

She was especially delighted with Evelyn Ellis, the leading lady, and praised "her wide and unusual range of talent, her ability to play an emotional rôle coupled with a charming sense of comedy; her absolute control of her body; her gesture; her voice, in its delicate modulations; her sympathetic understanding of the poetic lines of the play. Throughout the entire performance I failed to detect one instance of false reading." And before the second act was over, she said, "I'm going to write to her."

"Wouldn't you like to meet her?" I asked. "I think it might be managed."

During an entre-acte, I stepped to the rear of the house, and said to one of the ushers, "The lady in the box with me was formerly Miss Helen Harrington, of the Coburn Players. Could you arrange for her to meet Miss Ellis?"

The little usher went behind the scenes, and returned, presently, with word that Miss Ellis would come to our box after the performance.

See how our mood had changed. In a Negro theatre, we had no longer a sensation of being among people of an alien race—perhaps because art knows no color line, perhaps also because the audience, black outwardly, seemed white inwardly, and, without overdoing the matter, responded appreciatively to nobility of phrase and sentiment, as well as to humor, in a most exquisite drama.

When Miss Ellis came to us, she stood at the curtained doorway of our box, and consequently the white actress turned her back to me while talking with the colored actress. I overheard only this—Miss Ellis saying, "Oh, you don't know how much that means to me!"

Out in Seventh Avenue, afterward, I asked, "What did you say to that colored girl?"

"I said, 'Miss Ellis, you are a very great artist.'"

And so she is. Some day a dramatist with enough genius will write a play about an octo-troon, and a manager with enough genius will give Evelyn Ellis the leading rôle. There'll be a fortune in it.

On our way home, the white actress said, "I want to cry." It was a mood I could perfectly understand. All that talent, all that refinement, all that charm, and—colored! I had been in the same mood, once, after an hour with Miss Helen Keller; came away saying to myself, not, "How magnificent that a creature born blind and deaf has achieved such a triumph!" but instead, "How tragical that a splendid, beautiful, gifted woman—so radiant and sweet—must endure such limitations!" Which was of course quite the wrong point of view, as regards Miss Keller. By and by, it will be the wrong point of view as regards Miss Ellis. Shut out from our world, the Negroes are fast making a world of their own. It holds great promise. Who knows but that it may one day equal ours? When that day arrives, what honor will crown the Negroes who, despite hardships that would break the spirit of a less forgiving race, have promoted the growth of artistic sensibility among their people!

In the upper Seventh Avenue district, Community Service started the Harlem Community House to foster Negro jollity and Negro genius. Gilpin used to come there to hobnob with Negro actors. In the Dressing-Room Club, a page about Gilpin from a Sunday paper adorned the bulletin board, when I was there. A framed photograph of members of the Drama League at their banquet showed Gilpin among them. In a kind of an office, Marian S. Nicholas was devoting her spare moments to collaborating with Leigh Whipple upon scenarios. Upstairs, P. A. McDougall conducted a dramatic school. After an evening in that center of creative, as well as interpretative, activity, Mrs. Hartt remarked, "Nothing in all my life has been so interesting as this experience of discussing the drama with intellectual Negroes." And with charmingly courteous Negroes, I may add. When we entered the Dressing-Room Club, a group of Negro actors were seated about a table playing cards. Instantly, every man rose.

There is a lot to talk about in such a group. Gilpin is now on the road. Here in New York it is reported that his manager has in hand a musical comedy, "Nobody Knows," with a cast of thirty Negroes, among them Creamer and Layton, the song writers. Not long ago the Colored

Players' Guild of New York presented "The Niche," by Dora Norman, and "The Pitfalls of Appearance," by G. A. Woods. Both writers are members of the Guild. "Put and Take," a Negro revue, ran for several months in New York. "Shuffle Along" still occupies the Music Hall on 63rd Street. Negro students at Morehouse College, Atlanta, recently presented "Hamlet." And at the time we visited the Community House, pupils of its dramatic school were rehearsing a pageant. We begged to look in on them.

Having carried the leading rôle in Percy MacKaye's Gloucester pageant, "The Canterbury Pilgrims," and having written pageants of her own, Mrs. Hartt is a trained critic in such matters. As the teacher explained his pageant (he had created it, himself), I wondered what she would say. What she did say was, "Excellent! The real thing—pure pageantry, conceived with a fine handling of symbolism, and a sincere and lovely reaching out for beauty." The author, by the way, is a devoted student of Keats. As for his pupils—young girls from fourteen to eighteen years old—they showed "an unusual reverence for art. More, indeed, than is common among white students. Nobody giggled. . . . On the whole, it was as creditable a performance as you will find in any dramatic school, and in one respect it was exceptional. All had fine voices." But I think that the white author of pageants was especially impressed by our Negro writer's method—his adoption of a poetic theme and his endeavor to elaborate it with scrupulous consistency. The Negro mind loves simplicity, directness, the dominance of one idea. Its aim is purposive—even didactic.

In drama, whether for stage or screen, it is not content with mere dramatic genre-painting. It burns to say something. Downstairs, Miss Nicholas read us the scenario she and Leigh Whipple had written. The theme was reincarnation. From beginning to end, the story developed that theme. Another photo-play, "The Slacker," written by a Negro, and produced by Negroes, with Negro actors, for Negro audiences, made loyalty its theme. Shown throughout black America during the War, it sought to offset German propaganda among Negroes. "Why fight for a country that oppresses you?"

cried German agents. Here was black America's answer.

In the Dressing-Room Club we saw a gaudy poster advertising that film, and Negro actors are prouder of it, even, than of the photographic group showing Gilpin at the Drama League's banquet. "The Slacker" got results—tangible, measurable, and nobly patriotic. They glory in it.

The walls of the Dressing-Room Club were covered with photographs. Chronologically arranged, they would have illustrated the Afro-American's progress from mere vaudeville clowning and stage minstrelsy upward through silent drama into the realm of complete and finished art. The Negro was never by nature a buffoon. He was never supremely a comedian. White folks blacked up are always funnier. It is in serious drama that he has come into his own. And it is in serious drama, whether spoken or silent, that he finds himself a power.

Professor Kerlin, author of that admirable book, "The Voice of the Negro," declares that

the real leader of the Negro race today is the Negro press. It has grown enormously. The literate Negro family to-day takes from one to five Negro newspapers. But what of the illiterates? Throughout black America, Negro theatres and Negro movie houses are rapidly multiplying, and Negroes, unable to read, see Negro plays performed by Negroes in establishments owned and managed by Negroes. They see Negro films. And a Negro film producer said to us in the Dressing-Room Club, "I'm working just now on a photoplay called 'Toussaint L'Ouverture.' It's a sermon. If a film isn't a sermon, I don't want anything to do with it." Within a very few years, the Negro theatre will become as influential as the Negro press—more influential, possibly. If, as Professor Kerlin declares, the Negro has "discovered his Fourth Estate," he has also discovered his Fifth. It is a momentous discovery, coming as it does when for the first time in history the Negro seems determined to shape his own career.

PAUL ROBESON

Reflections on O'Neill's Plays (1924)

All this seems so very strange to me—writing about the theatre. If three years ago, someone had told me that I would be telling of my reactions as an actor I would have laughed indulgently. Even now the whole chain of events has a distinct dream-like quality. To have had the opportunity to appear in two of the finest plays of America's most distinguished playwright is a good fortune that to me seems hardly credible. Of course I am very, very happy. And with these things there has come a great love of the theatre, which I am sure will always hold me fast.

In retrospect all the excitement about *All God's Chillun* seems rather amusing, but at the time of the play's production, it caused many an anxious moment. All concerned were absolutely amazed at the ridiculous critical reaction. The play meant anything and everything from segregated schools to various phases of intermarriage.

To me the most important pre-production development, was an opportunity to play the *Emperor Jones*, due to an enforced postponement. This is undoubtedly one of "the great plays"—a true classic of the drama, American or otherwise. I recall how marvelously it was played by Mr. Gilpin some years back. And the greatest praise I could have received was the expression of some that my performance was in some wise comparable to Mr. Gilpin's.

And what a great part is "Brutus Jones." His is the exultant tragedy of the disintegration of a human soul. How we suffer as we see him in the depths of the forest re-living all the sins of his past—experiencing all the woes and wrongs of his people—throwing off one by one the layers of civilization until he returns to the primitive soil from which he (racially) came. And yet we exult when we realize that here was a man who

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in the midst of all his trouble fought to the end and finally died in the “eighth of style anyway.”

In *All God's Chillun* we have the struggle of a man and woman, both fine struggling human beings, against forces they could not control,—indeed, scarcely comprehend—accentuated by the almost Christ-like spiritual force of the Negro husband,—a play of great strength and beautiful spirit, mocking all petty prejudice, emphasizing the humanness, and in Mr. O'Neill's words, “the oneness” of mankind.

I now come to perhaps the main point of my discussion. Any number of people have said to me: “I trust that now you will get a truly heroic and noble role, one portraying the finest type of Negro.” I honestly believe that perhaps never will I portray a nobler type than “Jim Harris” or a more heroically tragic figure than “Brutus Jones, Emperor,” not excepting *Othello*.

The Negro is only a medium in the creation of a work of the greatest artistic merit. The fact that he is a Negro Pullman Porter is of little moment. How else account for the success of the play in Paris, Berlin, Copenhagen, Moscow and other places on the Continent. Those people never heard of a Negro porter. Jones's emotions are not primarily Negro, but human.

Objections to *All God's Chillun* are rather well known. Most of them have been so foolish that to attempt to answer them is to waste time. The best answer is that audiences that came to scoff went away in tears, moved by a sincere and terrifically tragic drama.

The reactions to these two plays among Negroes but point out one of the most serious

drawbacks to the development of a true Negro dramatic literature. We are too self-conscious, too afraid of showing all phases of our life—especially those phases which are of greatest dramatic value. The great mass of our group discourage any member who has the courage to fight these petty prejudices.

I am still being damned all over the place for playing in *All God's Chillun*. It annoys me very little when I realize that those who object most strenuously know mostly nothing of the play and who in any event know little of the theatre and have no right to judge a playwright of O'Neill's talents.

I have met and talked with Mr. O'Neill. If ever there was a broad, liberal-minded man, he is one. He has had Negro friends and appreciated them for their true worth. He would be the last to cast any slur on the colored people.

Of course I have just begun. I do feel there is a great future on the serious dramatic stage. Direction and training will do much to guide any natural ability one may possess. At Provincetown I was privileged to be under the direction of Mr. James Light. I'm sure even he thought I was rather hopeless at first. I know I did. But he was patient and painstaking, and any success I may have achieved I owe in great measure to Mr. Light. I sincerely hope I shall have the benefit of his splendid guidance in the future.

What lies ahead I do not know. I am sure that there will come Negro playwrights of great power and I trust I shall have some part in interpreting that most interesting and much needed addition to the drama of America.

MONTGOMERY GREGORY

The Drama of Negro Life (1925)

President-emeritus Charles William Eliot of Harvard University recently expressed the inspiring thought that America should not be a “melting-pot” for the diverse races gathered on her soil but that each race should maintain its essential integrity and contribute its own special and

peculiar gift to our composite civilization: not a “melting-pot” but a symphony where each instrument contributes its particular quality of music to an ensemble of harmonious sounds. Whatever else the Negro may offer as his part there is already the general recognition that his

in the midst of all his trouble fought to the end and finally died in the “eighth of style anyway.”

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folk-music, born of the pangs and sorrows of slavery, has made America and the world his eternal debtor. The same racial characteristics that are responsible for this music are destined to express themselves with similar excellence in the kindred art of drama. The recent notable successes of Negro actors and of plays of Negro life on Broadway point to vast potentialities in this field. Eugene O'Neill, who more than any other person has dignified and popularized Negro drama, gives testimony to the possibilities of the future development of Negro drama as follows: "I believe as strongly as you do that the gifts the Negro can—and will—bring to our native drama are invaluable ones. The possibilities are limitless and to a dramatist open up new and intriguing opportunities." Max Reinhardt, the leading continental producer, while on his recent visit to New York commented enthusiastically upon the virgin riches of Negro drama and expressed a wish to utilize elements of it in one of his projected dramas.

Before considering contemporary interest in Negro drama it will be well to discover its historical background. William Shakespeare was the first dramatist to appreciate the "intriguing opportunities" in the life of the darker races and in his master-tragedy *Othello*, he has given us the stellar rôle of the Moor in a study of the effect of jealousy upon a nature of simple and overpowering emotion. So great an embarrassment has this "Black-a-moor" been to the Anglo-Saxon stage that the "supreme tragedy of English drama" has suffered a distinct unpopularity, and its chief interpreters have been compelled to give a bleached and an adulterated presentation of the black commander of the Venetian army. Thus O'Neill had an excellent precedent for his *Emperor Jones*.

The example of Shakespeare was not followed by his immediate successors. In fact, a character of sable hue does not appear in the pages of English literature until a century later when Aphra Behn wrote that sentimental romance, *Oronoko*, portraying the unhappy lot of a noble Negro prince in captivity. This tearful tragedy had numerous imitators in both fiction and drama, an example of the latter being the *Black Doctor*, written by Thomas Archer and

published in London in 1847. It was not long after this publication that London and the continent were treated to an extraordinary phenomenon,—the appearance of a Maryland Negro in *Othello* and other Shakespearean rôles in the royal theaters. Ira Aldridge is thus the first Negro to surmount the bars of race prejudice and to receive recognition on the legitimate English-speaking stage.

Up until the Civil War, then, there was but meager interest in the drama of the African or Negro in England, and practically none in the United States. That great sectional conflict aroused a tremendous sentimental interest in the black population of the South and gave us Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which also enjoyed a wide popularity as a drama. *The Octoroon*, written on the same pattern, soon followed on the American stage. These works mark the first instance where an attempt is made to present to the American public in a realistic manner the authentic life of the Negro. They accustomed the theater-goer to the appearance of a number of Negro characters (played by blacked-face white actors) on the stage, and this fact was in itself a distinct gain for Negro drama.

Although *Uncle Tom's Cabin* passed into obscurity, "Topsy" survived. She was blissfully ignorant of any ancestors, but she has given us a fearful progeny. With her, popular dramatic interest in the Negro changed from serious moralistic drama to the comic phase. We cannot say that as yet the public taste has generally recovered from this descent from sentimentalism to grotesque comedy, and from that in turn to farce, mimicry and sheer burlesque. The earliest expression of Topsy's baneful influence is to be found in the minstrels made famous by the Callenders, Lew Dockstader, and Primrose and West. These comedians, made up into grotesque caricatures of the Negro race, fixed in the public taste a dramatic stereotype of the race that has been almost fatal to a sincere and authentic Negro drama. The earliest Negro shows were either imitations of these minstrels or slight variations from them. In fact, the average play of Negro life to-day, whether employing white or black actors, reeks with this pernicious influence.

It was not until 1895 that the Negro attempted to break with the minstrel tradition, when John W. Isham formed *The Octofoons*, a musical show. Minor variety and vaudeville efforts followed, but the first all-Negro comedy to receive Broadway notice was Williams and Walker's *In Dahomey*, which played at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre for several weeks. Williams and Walker, Cole and Johnson, S. H. Dudley, and Ernest Hogan now presented a succession of shows in which the Negro still appeared in caricature but which offered some compensation by the introduction of a slight plot and much excellent music and dancing. Such shows as *Abyssinia*, *Rufus Rastus*, *Bandana Land*, and *Mr. Lode of Coal*, are still familiar names to the theater-goers between 1900 and 1910. During the latter year "Bert" Williams' inimitable genius was fully recognized, and from then until his death he was an idol of the American public. It may not be amiss to state that it was Williams' ambition to appear in a higher type of drama, and David Belasco states in the introduction to *The Son of Laughter*, a biography of "Bert" Williams by Margaret Rowland, that his death probably prevented him from appearing under his direction as a star. Negro drama will always be indebted to the genius of this great comedian and appreciative of the fact that by breaking into *The Follies* "Bert" Williams unlocked the doors of the American theater to later Negro artists.

The reader will probably be familiar with the extraordinary successes of the latest Negro musical comedies, *Shuffle Along*, *Runnin' Wild*, and *From Dixie to Broadway*, and with the names of their stars—Sissle and Blake, Miller and Lyles, and Florence Mills. In many respects these shows represent notable advances over the musical shows that preceded them, yet fundamentally they carry-on the old minstrel tradition. Ludwig Lewisohn, the eminent New York critic, thus evaluates their work: "Much of this activity, granting talent and energy, is of slight interest; much of it always strikes me as an actual imitation of the white 'blacked-face' comedian—an imitation from the Negro's point of view of a caricature of himself. All of these things have little or no value as art, as an expression of either the Negro individual or the Negro race."

Yet in all justice it should be said that these shows have given a large number of talented Negroes their only opportunity for dramatic expression and have resulted in the development of much stage ability. "Bert" Williams and Florence Mills are examples of dramatic geniuses who have elevated their work in these productions to the highest art. Certainly historically these musical shows are a significant element in the groping of the Negro for dramatic expression, and who knows but that they may be the genesis for an important development of our drama in the future?

Serious Negro drama is a matter of recent growth and still is in its infancy. It is in this field of legitimate drama that the Negro must achieve success if he is to win real recognition in the onward sweep of American drama. The year 1910 may be said to mark the first significant step in this direction, for it witnessed the production with a distinguished cast, including Guy Bates Post and Annie Russell, at the New Theatre in New York City, of Edward Sheldon's *The Nigger* (later called *The Governor*), a somewhat melodramatic treatment of the tragedy of racial admixture in the South. It marks the first sincere attempt to sound the depths of our racial experience for modern drama. A more sympathetic and poetic utilization of this dramatic material appears a few years later in the composition of three one-act plays (*Granny Maumee*, *The Rider of Dreams*, and *Simon the Cyrenian*), by Ridgely Torrence. Of equal importance was the artistic staging of these plays with a cast of talented Negro actors by Sheldon, Mrs. Norman Hapgood, and others. The venture was a pleasing artistic success, and but for the intervention of the World War might have resulted in the establishment of a permanent Negro Little Theatre in New York City. Not only had the public been impressed with the artistic value of such plays, but it also had been given its first demonstration of the ability of the Negro actor in other than burlesque parts. Opal Cooper especially won the plaudits of the critics, and, like John the Baptist, he proved to be only the forerunner of one who was to touch the peaks of histrionic accomplishment.

Then by a *tour-de-force* of genius—for the histrionic ability of Charles Gilpin has been

as effective as the dramatic genius of Eugene O'Neill—the serious play of Negro life broke through to public favor and critical recognition. Overnight this weird psychological study of race experience was hailed as a dramatic masterpiece and an unknown Negro was selected by the Drama League as one of the ten foremost actors on the American stage. In any further development of Negro drama, *The Emperor Jones*, written by O'Neill, interpreted by Gilpin, and produced by the Provincetown Players, will tower as a beacon-light of inspiration. It marks the breakwater plunge of Negro drama into the main stream of American drama.

In 1923 Raymond O'Neill assembled a noteworthy group of Negro actors in Chicago and formed the "Ethiopian Art Theatre." Following successful presentation there he launched his interesting theater on Broadway. Whereas Torrence started out with several original race plays, O'Neill attempted the adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*. His chief success was the production of *The Chip Woman's Fortune*, a one-act race play by the young Negro dramatist, Willis Richardson. The acting of Evelyn Preer, the Kirkpatricks, Olden and Solomon Bruce was equal to the best traditions of the American theater—but even great acting could not atone for an unwise selection of plays. This untimely collapse of a most promising enterprise should hold a valuable lesson for other promoters of Negro drama.

Since these passing successes of the Negro on the regular stage, there have been several hopeful experiments in the Little Theatre and educational fields, with larger likelihood of permanent results. At Howard University, in Washington, D. C., the writer, with the enthusiastic co-operation of Marie-Moore-Forrest, Cleon Throckmorton, Alain Leroy Locke, and the University officials, undertook to establish on an enduring basis the foundations of Negro drama through the institution of a dramatic laboratory where Negro youth might receive sound training in the arts of the theater. The composition of original race plays formed the pivotal element in the project. The Howard Players have given ample evidence of having the same significance for Negro drama that the

erstwhile "47 Workshop" at Harvard University and the North Carolina University Players have had for American drama in general. Atlanta University, Hampton Institute, and Tuskegee Institute have been making commendable efforts in the same direction. In Harlem, the Negro quarter of New York City, Anne Wolter has associated with her an excellent corps of dramatic workers in the conduct of "The Ethiopian Art Theatre School."

Finally, mention must be made of two young Negro actors who have been maintaining the same high standard of artistic performance as established by Gilpin. Paul Robeson has succeeded to the role of *The Emperor Jones*, and has appeared in the leading part in O'Neill's latest Negro drama, *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. Eugene Corbie has likewise given a creditable performance as the "Witch Doctor" in *Cape Smoke*. Thus a sufficient demonstration has been made that Gilpin's achievement was not merely a comet-flare across the dramatic horizon but a trustworthy sign of the histrionic gift of his race.

The past and present of Negro drama lies revealed before us. It is seen that the popular musical comedies with their unfortunate minstrel inheritance have been responsible for a fateful misrepresentation of Negro life. However, the efforts toward the development of a sincere and artistic drama have not been altogether in vain. O'Neill and Torrence have shown that the ambitious dramatist has a rich and virgin El Dorado in the racial experiences of black folk. As the spirituals have risen from the folk-life of the race, so too will there develop out of the same treasure-trove a worthy contribution to a native American drama. The annual prizes now being offered through the vision of Charles S. Johnson of *The Opportunity* magazine and of W.E.B. DuBois and Jessie Fauset of *The Crisis* magazine for original racial expression in the various literary forms are acting as a splendid stimulus to Negro writers to begin the adequate expression of their race life.

Our ideal is a national Negro Theater where the Negro playwright, musician, actor, dancer, and artist in concert shall fashion a drama that will merit the respect and admiration of America. Such an institution must come from the Negro

himself, as he alone can truly express the soul of his people. The race must surrender that childish self-consciousness that refuses to face the facts of its own life in the arts but prefers the blandishments of flatterers, who render all efforts at true artistic expression a laughing-stock by adorning their characters with the gaudy gowns of cheap romance. However disagreeable the fact may be in some quarters, the only avenue of genuine achievement in American drama for the Negro lies in the development of the rich veins of folk-tradition of the past and in the portrayal of the authentic life of the Negro masses

of to-day. The older leadership still clings to the false gods of servile reflection of the more or less unfamiliar life of an alien race. The "New Negro," still few in number, places his faith in the potentialities of his own people—he believes that the black man has no reason to be ashamed of himself, but that in the divine plan he too has a worthy and honorable destiny.

The hope of Negro drama is the establishment of numerous small groups of Negro players throughout the country who shall simply and devotedly interpret the life that is familiar to them for the sheer joy of artistic expression.

JESSIE FAUSET

The Gift of Laughter (1925)

The black man bringing gifts, and particularly the gift of laughter, to the American stage is easily the most anomalous, the most inscrutable figure of the century. All about him and within himself stalks the conviction that like the Irish, the Russian and the Magyar he has some peculiar offering which shall contain the very essence of the drama. Yet the medium through which this unique and intensely dramatic gift might be offered has been so befogged and misted by popular preconception that the great gift, though divined, is as yet not clearly seen.

Popular preconception in this instance refers to the pressure of white opinion by which the American Negro is surrounded and by which his true character is almost submerged. For years the Caucasian in America has persisted in dragging to the limelight merely one aspect of Negro characteristics, by which the whole race has been glimpsed, through which it has been judged. The colored man who finally succeeds in impressing any considerable number of whites with the truth that he does not conform to these measurements is regarded as the striking exception proving an unshakable rule. The medium then through which the black actor has been presented to the world has been that of the "funny man" of America. Ever since those far-off times

directly after the Civil War when white men and colored men too, blacking their faces, presented the antics of plantation hands under the caption of "Georgia Minstrels" and the like, the edict has gone forth that the black man on the stage must be an end-man.

In passing one pauses to wonder if this picture of the black American as a living comic supplement has not been painted in order to camouflage the real feeling and knowledge of his white compatriot. Certainly the plight of the slaves under even the mildest of masters could never have been one to awaken laughter. And no genuinely thinking person, no really astute observer, looking at the Negro in modern American life, could find his condition even now a first aid to laughter. That condition may be variously deemed hopeless, remarkable, admirable, inspiring, depressing; it can never be dubbed merely amusing.

It was the colored actor who gave the first impetus away from this buffoonery. The task was not an easy one. For years the Negro was no great frequenter of the theater. And no matter how keenly he felt the insincerity in the presentation of his kind, no matter how ridiculous and palpable a caricature such a presentation might be,

himself, as he alone can truly express the soul of his people. The race must surrender that childish self-consciousness that refuses to face the facts of its own life in the arts but prefers the blandishments of flatterers, who render all efforts at true artistic expression a laughing-stock by adorning their characters with the gaudy gowns of cheap romance. However disagreeable the fact may be in some quarters, the only avenue of genuine achievement in American drama for the Negro lies in the development of the rich veins of folk-tradition of the past and in the portrayal of the authentic life of the Negro masses

of to-day. The older leadership still clings to the false gods of servile reflection of the more or less unfamiliar life of an alien race. The "New Negro," still few in number, places his faith in the potentialities of his own people—he believes that the black man has no reason to be ashamed of himself, but that in the divine plan he too has a worthy and honorable destiny.

The hope of Negro drama is the establishment of numerous small groups of Negro players throughout the country who shall simply and devotedly interpret the life that is familiar to them for the sheer joy of artistic expression.

JESSIE FAUSET

The Gift of Laughter (1925)

The black man bringing gifts, and particularly the gift of laughter, to the American stage is easily the most anomalous, the most inscrutable figure of the century. All about him and within himself stalks the conviction that like the Irish, the Russian and the Magyar he has some peculiar offering which shall contain the very essence of the drama. Yet the medium through which this unique and intensely dramatic gift might be offered has been so befogged and misted by popular preconception that the great gift, though divined, is as yet not clearly seen.

Popular preconception in this instance refers to the pressure of white opinion by which the American Negro is surrounded and by which his true character is almost submerged. For years the Caucasian in America has persisted in dragging to the limelight merely one aspect of Negro characteristics, by which the whole race has been glimpsed, through which it has been judged. The colored man who finally succeeds in impressing any considerable number of whites with the truth that he does not conform to these measurements is regarded as the striking exception proving an unshakable rule. The medium then through which the black actor has been presented to the world has been that of the "funny man" of America. Ever since those far-off times

directly after the Civil War when white men and colored men too, blacking their faces, presented the antics of plantation hands under the caption of "Georgia Minstrels" and the like, the edict has gone forth that the black man on the stage must be an end-man.

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the Negro auditor with the helplessness of the minority was powerless to demand something better and truer. Artist and audience alike were in the grip of the minstrel formula. It was at this point in the 1890s that Ernest Hogan, pioneer comedian of the better type, changed the tradition of the merely funny, rather silly "end-man" into a character with a definite plot in a rather loosely constructed but none the less well outlined story. The method was still humorous, but less broadly, less exclusively. A little of the hard luck of the Negro began to creep in. If he was a buffoon, he was a buffoon wearing his ruse. A slight, very slight quality of the Harlequin began to attach to him. He was the clown making light of his troubles but he was a wounded, a sore-beset clown.

This figure became the prototype of the plays later presented by those two great characters, Williams and Walker. The ingredients of the comedies in which these two starred usually consisted of one dishonest, overbearing, flashily dressed character (Walker) and one kindly, rather simple, hard-luck personage (Williams). The interest of the piece hinged on the juxtaposition of these two men. Of course these plays, too, were served with a sauce of humor because the public, true to its carefully taught and rigidly held tradition, could not dream of a situation in which colored people were anything but merely funny. But the hardships and woes suffered by Williams, ridiculous as they were, introduced with the element of folk comedy some element of reality.

Side by side with Williams and Walker, who might be called the apostles of the "legitimate" on the stage for Negroes, came the merriment and laughter and high spirits of that incomparable pair, Cole and Johnson. But they were essentially the geniuses of musical comedy. At that time their singers and dancers outsang and outdanced the neophytes of contemporary white musical comedies even as their followers to this day outsing and outdance in their occasional appearances on Broadway their modern neighbors. Just what might have been the ultimate trend of the ambition of this partnership, the untimely death of Mr. Cole rendered uncertain; but speaking offhand I should say that the relation of

their musical comedy idea to the fixed plot and defined dramatic concept of the Williams and Walker plays molded the form of the Negro musical show which still persists and thrives on the contemporary stage. It was they who capitalized the infectious charm of so much rich dark beauty, the verve and abandon of Negro dancers, the glorious fullness of Negro voices. And they produced those effects in the *Red Shawl* in a manner still unexcelled, except in the matter of setting, by any latter-day companies.

But Williams and Walker, no matter how dimly, were seeking a method whereby the colored man might enter the "legitimate." They were to do nothing but pave the way. Even this task was difficult but they performed it well.

Those who knew Bert Williams say that his earliest leanings were toward the stage; but that he recognized at an equally early age that his color would probably keep him from ever making the "legitimate." Consequently, deliberately, as one who desiring to become a great painter but lacking the means for travel and study might take up commercial art, he turned his attention to minstrelsy. Natively he possessed the art of mimicry; intuitively he realized that his first path to the stage must lie along the old recognized lines of "funny man." He was, as few of us recall, a Jamaican by birth; the ways of the American Negro were utterly alien to him and did not come spontaneously; he set himself therefore to obtaining a knowledge of them. For choice he selected, perhaps by way of contrast, the melancholy out-of-luck Negro, shiftless, doleful, "easy"; the kind that tempts the world to lay its hand none too lightly upon him. The pursuit took him years, but at length he was able to portray for us not only that "typical Negro" which the white world thinks is universal but also the special types of given districts and localities with their own peculiar foibles of walk and speech and jargon. He went to London and studied under Pietro, greatest pantomimist of his day, until finally he, too, became a recognized master in the field of comic art.

But does anyone who realizes that the foibles of the American Negro were painstakingly acquired by this artist, doubt that Williams might

just as well have portrayed the Irishman, the Jew, the Englishman abroad, the Scotchman or any other of the vividly etched types which for one reason or another lend themselves so readily to caricature? Can anyone presume to say that a man who travelled *north, east, south, and west* and even abroad in order to acquire accent and jargon, aspect and characteristic of a people to which he was bound by ties of blood but from whom he was natively separated by training and tradition, would not have been able to portray with equal effectiveness what, for lack of a better term, we must call universal rôles?

There is an unwritten law in America that though white may imitate black, black, even when superlatively capable, must never imitate white. In other words, grease-paint may be used to darken but never to lighten.

Williams' color imposed its limitations upon him even in his chosen field. His expansion was always upward but never outward. He might portray black people along the gamut from roustabout to unctuous bishop. But he must never stray beyond those limits. How keenly he felt this few of us knew until after his death. But it was well known to his intimates and professional associates. W. C. Fields, himself an expert in the art of amusing, called him "the funniest man I ever saw and the saddest man I ever knew."

He was sad with the sadness of hopeless frustration. The gift of laughter in his case had its source in a wounded heart and in bleeding sensibilities.

That laughter for which we are so justly famed has had in late years its over-tones of pain. Now for some time past it has been used by colored men who have gained a precarious footing on the stage to conceal the very real dolor raging in their breasts. To be by force of circumstances the most dramatic figure in a country; to be possessed of the wells of feeling, of the most spontaneous instinct for effective action and to be shunted no less always into the rôle of the ridiculous and funny,—that is enough to create the quality of bitterness for which we are ever so often rebuked. Yet that same laughter influenced by these same untoward obstacles has within the last four years known a deflection

into another channel, still productive of mirth, but even more than that of a sort of cosmic gladness, the joy which arises spontaneously in the spectator as a result of the sight of its no less spontaneous bubbling in others. What hurt most in the spectacle of the Bert Williams' funny man and his forerunners was the fact that the laughter which he created must be objective. But the new "funny man" among black comedians is essentially funny himself. He is joy and mischief and rich, homely native humor personified. He radiates good feeling and happiness; it is with him now a state of being purely subjective. The spectator is infected with his high spirits and his excessive good will; a stream of well-being is projected across the footlights into the consciousness of the beholder.

This phenomenon has been especially visible in the rendition of the colored musical "shows," *Shuffle Along, Runnin' Wild, Liza*, which livened up Broadway recently for a too brief season. Those of us who were lucky enough to compare with the usual banality of musical comedy, the verve and pep, the liveliness and gayety of those productions will not soon forget them. The medley of shades, the rich colorings, the abundance of fun and spirits on the part of the players all combined to produce an atmosphere which was actually palpable, so full was it of the ecstasy and joy of living. The singing was inimitable; the work of the chorus apparently spontaneous and unstudied. Emotionally they garnished their threadbare plots and comedy tricks with the genius of a new comic art.

The performers in all three of these productions gave out an impression of sheer happiness in living such as I have never before seen on any stage except in a riotous farce which I once saw in Vienna and where the same effect of superabundant vitality was induced. It is this quality of vivid and untheatrical portrayal of sheer emotion which seems likely to be the Negro's chief contribution to the stage. A comedy made up of such ingredients as the music of Sissle and Blake, the quaint, irresistible humor of Miller and Lyles, the quintessence of jazzdom in the Charleston, the superlativeness of Miss Mills' happy abandon could know no equal. It would be the line by which all other comedy would

have to be measured. Behind the banalities and clap-trap and crudities of these shows, this supervitality and joyousness glow from time to time in a given step or gesture or in the teasing assurance of such a line as: "If you've never been vamped by a brown-skin, you've never been vamped at all."

And as Carl Van Vechten recently in his brilliant article, *Prescription for the Negro Theater*, so pointedly advises and prophesies, once this spirit breaks through the silly "childish adjuncts of the minstrel tradition" and drops the unworthy formula of unoriginal imitation of the stock revues, there will be released on the American stage a spirit of comedy such as has been rarely known.

The remarkable thing about this gift of ours is that it has its rise, I am convinced, in the very woes which beset us. Just as a person driven by great sorrow may finally go into an orgy of laughter, just so an oppressed and too hard driven people breaks over into compensating laughter and merriment. It is our emotional salvation. There would be no point in mentioning this rather obvious fact were it not that it argues also the possession on our part of a histrionic endowment for the portrayal of tragedy. Not without reason has tradition made comedy and tragedy sisters and twins, the capacity for one argues the capacity for the other. It is not surprising then that the period that sees the Negro actor on the verge of great comedy has seen him breaking through to the portrayal of serious and legitimate drama. No one who has seen Gilpin and Robeson in the portrayal of *The Emperor Jones* and of *All God's Chillun* can fail to realize that tragedy, too, is a vastly fitting rôle for the

Negro actor. And so with the culminating of his dramatic genius, the Negro actor must come finally through the very versatility of his art to the universal rôle and the main tradition of drama, as an artist first and only secondarily as a Negro.

Nor when within the next few years, this question comes up,—as I suspect it must come up with increasing insistence, will the more obvious barriers seem as obvious as they now appear. For in this American group of the descendants of Mother Africa, the question of color raises no insuperable barrier, seeing that with chameleon adaptability we are able to offer white colored men and women for *Hamlet*, *The Doll's House* and the *Second Mrs. Tanqueray*; brown men for *Othello*; yellow girls for *Madam Butterfly*; black men for *The Emperor Jones*. And underneath and permeating all this bewildering array of shades and tints is the unshakable precision of an instinctive and spontaneous emotional art.

All this beyond any doubt will be the reward of the "gift of laughter" which many black actors on the American stage have proffered. Through laughter we have conquered even the lot of the jester and the clown. The parable of the one talent still holds good and because we have used the little which in those early painful days was our only approach we find ourselves slowly but surely moving toward that most glittering of all goals, the freedom of the American stage. I hope that Hogan realizes this and Cole and Walker, too, and that lastly Bert Williams the inimitable, will clap us on with those tragic black-gloved hands of his now that the gift of his laughter is no longer tainted with the salt of chagrin and tears.

THEOPHILUS LEWIS

Same Old Blues (1925)

When Benjamin Brawley says the Theatre is a field "peculiarly adapted to the ability of the Negro race," he doubtless expresses the prevailing opinion of Aframerican savants and simpletons.

If their talk is sincere plenty of white folks hold the same view. Mr. Brawley still has the bulk of opinion on his side when he concludes that "*enough has been done* so far to show that both

have to be measured. Behind the banalities and clap-trap and crudities of these shows, this supervitality and joyousness glow from time to time in a given step or gesture or in the teasing assurance of such a line as: "If you've never been vamped by a brown-skin, you've never been vamped at all."

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If their talk is sincere plenty of white folks hold the same view. Mr. Brawley still has the bulk of opinion on his side when he concludes that "*enough has been done* so far to show that both

Negro effort in the classic drama and the serious portrayal of Negro life on the stage are worthy of respectful consideration." The italics are mine.

Perhaps Mr. Brawley is right; however, I propose to conduct an inquiry into just what has been done. As first witness for the prosecution I call to the stand Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois. In *The Gift of Black Folk*, Dr. Du Bois says Ira Aldridge, who died in 1867, "had practically no successor until Charles Gilpin triumphed in 'The Emperor Jones' during the season 1920-21." It turns out then that the race possessing special talents for the theatre gave the theatre just two first rate actors in fifty-three years.

Now marked ability for success in an art is almost always found in association with avidity for its practice and observation. Example: Negroes unquestionably excel in the popular art of dancing, and they not only seize every opportunity to indulge in social dancing, but great swarms of them are eager to do it professionally, and a great many make a living at it. Negro theatre audiences seem never to tire of fast hoofing. It seems to me the Negro's aptitude for the stricter theatre arts, so generally taken for granted, ought to manifest itself in a similar urge for expression. In which case we would find in most of the urban black belts groups of professional and amateur actors more or less continuously presenting some form of the drama before appreciative if not discriminating audiences. Then there would be some foundation for the assertion that the theatre is a field "peculiarly adapted to the ability of the Negro race."

Let us hear from J.A. Jackson what the facts are. From statistics prepared by Mr. Jackson for the *Negro Year Book*, 1921-22, I learn that there was at that time not a single theatre in the United States solely devoted to the production of serious drama by or for Aframeicans. Three theatres, "The Attucks," Norfolk; "The Dunbar," Philadelphia, and "The Lafayette," Harlem, were presenting a serious drama now and then, but most of the time they were given over to vaudeville and motion pictures. Translated into economic terms, there is not enough money in the Negro's craving and genius for the legitimate theatre arts to make it profitable to devote three stages exclusively to their satisfaction and expression.

Quite as damaging to his own theory is Mr. Brawley's chapter on the Stage in his *Negro in Literature and Art*. Mr. Brawley covers the whole field of the race's contribution to the American theatre in less than seven pages, and quite half the content of the chapter is devoted to movements inspired by white folks and the kudos of white writers. In his *Gift of Black Folk*, Dr. Du Bois begins to tell of the black folks' gift to the theatre on page 309. On page 312 he concludes all he has to say and passes on to painting. Like Mr. Brawley, he uses a great deal of filler from Caucasian pens. Thus, either conned historically, or observed from the point of view of contemporary importance, the Negro's concrete contribution to the Theatre provides an extremely flimsy support for the presumption of his peculiar fitness for distinction on the stage.

The causes of the anaemic condition of the Negro Theatre (a term of convenience) can be readily disclosed by a brief examination of its philosophy. Not that anybody has ever formulated a definite set of principles for its guidance and interpretation. But a fairly coherent unwritten code of attitude and action has been expressed by its development as well as by its apologists.

The first postulate of this philosophy is admirably, if unconsciously, implied in this quotation from *The Gift of Black Folk*. "Charles Gilpin," says the author, got his first chance on the legitimate stage by playing the part of Curtis in Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln*. The important point here is not the misstatement of fact but the author's attitude of mind. He implies, unconsciously I hope, that the legitimate stage is synonymous with the white stage, a presumption the white theatre has never claimed for itself. The term "legitimate stage," as employed by white writers, means the stage devoted to the serious portrayal of character (note, I do not say the portrayal of serious characters), barring, perhaps, the work of stock companies. When Gilpin appeared in *The Old Man's Boy*—this was before the organization of the stock company which later became the Lafayette players—he was playing in legitimate drama. The play was shoddy and short-lived, of course; but so are dozens of plays that open up on

Broadway each season. Certainly Dr. Du Bois would not deny a play by a white author a place on the legitimate stage merely because it had a run of only three nights. Still, in the mind of this foremost Negro scholar, a Negro actor has not played a legitimate role unless he has played it on Broadway.

And this attitude has been assumed by practically the whole body of Negroes with theatrical aspirations. The goal to be won was a chance to play on Broadway. One way to get on Broadway, apparently the easiest way, was to excel in the things being done on Broadway. This the Negro Theatre set itself to do. Hence that most useful factotum who has appeared early in the history of almost every other group or national theater, the actor-dramatist, striving to express the group character and problems esthetically, has never been evolved by the Negro Theatre. In his stead the Negro Theatre has produced the actor-showsmith who sought his material, not in Negro life, but on the Caucasian stage.

Now let us briefly examine the Negro showsmith's major reference work, the American stage. In 1822, says William Winter, Edwin Forrest acted a part which had never before been presented on any stage, that of an American Negro. The play, of course, was a farce. Shortly after this, according to Arthur Hornblow's *History of the Theatre in America*, "The entertaining abilities of the despised slave were recognized and the white actor began to realize he could *make money by imitating* the black man." My italics. It is said that Thomas D. Rice, regarded as the founder and father of "Ethiopian" minstrelsy, probably drew more money to the treasury of the Bowery Theatre than any other American performer of his time. There you have it. White actors making a vogue of presenting Negro imbecilities in a way that appealed to the inferiority complexes of their audiences. For you can rest assured that the crowds who were regaled by the antics of Jim Crow consisted of the fathers and mothers of the hordes who now flock to gape at "White Cargo" while "Roseanne" gathers dust on the shelves of the book shops.

It was to this vogue that the builders of colored musical comedies and revues went to school. The basis of these shows is their humor.

And this humor, you will find by running through the entire gamut of them, is the bastard offspring of Lew Dockstader out of a cracker shoe drummer's joke about a coon chicken thief. What genuine Negro humor these shows contain creeps in furtively and remains unemphasized, as if in fear of being ruled out altogether, while such bogus stuff as showing a darky scared to death of something becomes an obligatory scene.

Perhaps the reason why the Negro Theatre has practically no body of even mediocre drama is because the white American Theatre, which the Aframerican actor-writer so sedulously imitates, has not provided it with a sufficient number of working models, either in the form of plays or characters. Until very recently, the only type of colored character presented on the white stage in serious drama was old Uncle Zeke with a misery in his kidney. Now while a scary black man and a feeder are all the framework you need for a musical comedy, Uncle Zeke, on account of that pain in his back, is not able to hold up the weight of a drama, or even a farce, by himself. As the Negro Pineros never thought of going direct to life for characters, there was nothing for the higher type of colored actor to do but run an elevator while waiting for some white playwright to bring out a play with a darky butler in it. Either that, or, like Ira Aldridge, go abroad and try his hand at Shakespeare.

One group of Negro actors, the Lafayette Players, solved the problem presented by a paucity of Aframerican drama in another fashion. They organized a stock company and began to present cast-off Broadway melodramas. This company has held together about ten years now, during which time they have developed or helped to develop a number of highly competent actors and at least one first rate actor, Charles Gilpin. For that they deserve credit. Still, one is inclined to censure them for not doing something to encourage Negro drama. Couldn't they, for example, afford to pay F.H. Wilson twenty dollars a week on the condition that he write two plays a year for them? Couldn't they encourage some member of their own company to do it, if they want to keep the money in the organization? Or do they really think "The Wicked House of David" is worthy of their talents?

These suggestions, I believe, are an adequate answer to such wails as this by Mr. Brawley: "In no other field has the Negro with artistic aspirations found the road so hard as in that of the classic drama." Instead of crying for white folks to give them a chance on the "legitimate" stage, let Negroes turn their attention to producing Negro drama for Negro audiences. Is it a matter of money? Well, here is a feasible plan to meet that difficulty. Let the five most civilized churches in New York, after they have sent their pastors to Europe, contribute a hundred dollars each a month to the support of a company of players headed by Paul Robeson or Charles Gilpin, and make the endowment conditional on every fourth play presented by the company being the work of a Negro playwright. Downing, Wilson, and Dora Cole have manuscripts which could be used to start off with. If this scheme, or some similar scheme, cannot be made to work in the intellectual capital of black-America, then the increasing swarms of college educated preachers, school teachers, doctors and university alumni are really coal heavers in culture, without a sufficient esthetic urge to create and sustain a racial theatre. If the thing succeeds, then the presumption of the Negro's aptitude for the theatre arts, which is now an article of faith, will begin to bear some resemblance to a fact.

Again glancing backward over the history of the Negro theatre in America, one is astonished by the almost total absence of indigenous little theatre movements. Practically every one of these

movements worth being taken seriously has been inspired by white people. The most vigorous, as well as the most ambitious of these attempts to found a real Negro theatre, is the present effort being made by Mrs. Ann Wolter and her associates. Mrs. Wolter seems to be the type of woman not easily discouraged and her work appears to have in it some of the qualities that make for permanency.

Mrs. Wolter's predecessors in this field, I suspect, were rather credulous souls who were taken in by the extravagant claims of Negro propagandists. None of them seemed to be partial to hard work. They quickly grew weary and laid down the burden, and when they did, the movements they inspired languished and waned moribund. The principal result of the movement fostered by Mrs. Hapgood in 1917, and in the more recent movement started by Mr. Raymond O'Neill was to bring to light a number of talented actors, in the persons of Opal Cooper, Blanche Deas, Sidney Kirkpatrick, Laura Bowman, Evelyn Preer and Edna Thomas. Mr. O'Neill also unearthed a farce which is the best piece of dramatic writing I have known to come from a Negro pen. It is on the accomplishments of these movements, and on the careers of such men as Aldridge and Gilpin that Negro orators and writers base their claims of racial aptitude for the stage. I fail to see the point. According to the way I reason, Paul Robeson's superlative work in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* does not establish the fact of racial genius for the theatre. It merely proves that Robeson is a mighty fine actor.

ALAIN LOCKE

The Drama of Negro Life (1926)

Despite the fact that Negro life is somehow felt to be particularly rich in dramatic values, both as folk experience and as a folk temperament, its actual yield, so far as worthwhile drama goes, has been very inconsiderable. There are many reasons behind this paradox; foremost of course the fact that drama is the child of social

prosperity and of a degree at least of cultural maturity. Negro life has only recently come to the verge of cultural self-expression, and has scarcely reached such a ripening point. Further than this, the quite melodramatic intensity of the Negro's group experience has defeated its contemporaneous dramatization; when life itself

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ALAIN LOCKE

The Drama of Negro Life (1926)

Despite the fact that Negro life is somehow felt to be particularly rich in dramatic values, both as folk experience and as a folk temperament, its actual yield, so far as worthwhile drama goes, has been very inconsiderable. There are many reasons behind this paradox; foremost of course the fact that drama is the child of social

prosperity and of a degree at least of cultural maturity. Negro life has only recently come to the verge of cultural self-expression, and has scarcely reached such a ripening point. Further than this, the quite melodramatic intensity of the Negro's group experience has defeated its contemporaneous dramatization; when life itself

moves dramatically, the vitality of drama is often sapped. But there have been special reasons. Historical controversy and lowering social issues have clouded out the dramatic colors of Negro life into the dull mass contrasts of the Negro problem. Until lately not even good problem drama has been possible, for sentiment has been too partisan for fair dramatic balancing of forces and too serious for either aesthetic interest or artistic detachment. So although intrinsically rich in dramatic episode and substance, Negro life has produced for our stage only a few morally hectic melodramas along with innumerable instances of broad farce and low comedy. Propaganda, pro-Negro as well as anti-Negro, has scotched the dramatic potentialities of the subject. Especially with the few Negro playwrights has the propaganda motive worked havoc. In addition to the handicap of being out of actual touch with the theatre, they have had the dramatic motive deflected at its source. Race drama has appeared to them a matter of race vindication, and pathetically they have pushed forward their moralistic allegories or melodramatic protests as dramatic correctives and antidotes for race prejudice.

A few illuminating plays, beginning with Edward Sheldon's *Nigger* and culminating for the present in O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, have already thrown into relief the higher possibilities of the Negro problem-play. Similarly, beginning with Ridgeley Torrence's *Three Plays for a Negro Theatre* and culminating in *Emperor Jones* and *The No'Count Boy*, a realistic study of Negro folk-life and character has been begun, and with it the inauguration of the artistic Negro folk-play. The outlook for a vital and characteristic expression of Negro life in drama thus becomes immediate enough for a survey and forecast of its prospects and possibilities. Of course, in the broad sense, this development is merely the opening up of a further vein in the contemporary American drama, another step in the path of the dramatic exploration and working out of the native elements of American life. At the same time, especially in the plan and effort of the Negro dramatist, it becomes a program for the development of the Negro drama as such and of a Negro Theatre. Fortunately this

special motive in no way conflicts with the sectional trend and local color emphasis of American drama today with its Wisconsin, Hoosier, Carolina, and Oklahoma projects. It is this coincidence of two quite separate interests that has focussed the attention of both white and Negro artists upon the same field, and although we should naturally expect the most intimate revelations to come from the race dramatist, the present situation sustains a most desirable collaboration in the development of this new and fertile province. Indeed the pioneer efforts have not always been those of the Negro playwright and in the list of the more noteworthy recent exponents of Negro drama, Sheldon, Torrence, O'Neill, Howard Culbertson, Paul Green, Burghardt Du Bois, Angelina Grimké, and Willis Richardson, only the last three are Negroes.

The development of Negro drama at present owes more to the lure of the general exotic appeal of its material than to the special program of a racial drama. But the motives of race drama are already matured, and just as inevitably as the Irish, Russian, and Yiddish drama evolved from the cultural programs of their respective movements, so must the Negro drama emerge from the racial stir and movement of contemporary Negro life. Projects like the Hapgood Players (1917-18), The Horizon Guild (1920), The Howard Players (1921-24), The Ethiopian Art Theatre (1923), The National Ethiopian Art Theatre founded in Harlem last year and The Shadows, a Negro "Little Theatre" just started in Chicago, though short-lived and handicapped for an adequate and competent repertory, are nevertheless unmistakable signs of an emerging Negro drama and the founding of a Negro Theatre.

But the path of this newly awakened impulse is by no means as clear as its goal. Two quite contrary directions compete for the artist's choice. On the one hand is the more obvious drama of social situation, focussing on the clash of the race life with its opposing background; on the other the apparently less dramatic material of the folk life and behind it the faint panorama of an alluring race history and race tradition. The creative impulse is for the moment caught in

this dilemma of choice between the drama of discussion and social analysis and the drama of expression and artistic interpretation. But despite the present lure of the problem play, it ought to be apparent that the real future of Negro drama lies with the development of the folk play. Negro drama must grow in its own soil and cultivate its own intrinsic elements; only in this way can it become truly organic, and cease being a rootless derivative.

Of course the possibilities of Negro problem drama are great and immediately appealing. The scheme of color is undoubtedly one of the dominant patterns of society and the entanglement of its skeins in American life one of its most dramatic features. For a long while strong social conventions prevented frank and penetrating analysis, but now that the genius of O'Neill has broken through what has been aptly called "the last taboo," the field stands open. But for the Negro it is futile to expect fine problem drama as an initial stage before the natural development in due course of the capacity for self-criticism. The Negro dramatist's advantage of psychological intimacy is for the present more than offset by the disadvantage of the temptation to counter partisan and propagandist attitudes. The white dramatist can achieve objectivity with relatively greater ease, though as yet he seldom does, and has temporarily an advantage in the handling of this material as drama of social situation. Proper development of these social problem themes will require the objectivity of great art. Even when the crassest conventions are waived at present, character stereotypes and deceptive formulae still linger; only genius of the first order can hope to penetrate to the materials of high tragedy—and, for that matter, high comedy also—that undoubtedly are there. For with the difference that modern society decrees its own fatalisms, the situations of race hold tragedies and ironies as deep and keen as those of the ancient classics. Eventually the Negro dramatist must achieve mastery of a detached, artistic point of view, and reveal the inner stresses and dilemmas of these situations as from the psychological point of view he alone can. The race drama of the future will utilize satire for the necessary psychological distance

and perspective, and rely upon irony as a natural corrective for the sentimentalisms of propaganda. The objective attack and style of younger contemporary writers like Jean Toomer, who in *Kabnis* has written a cryptic but powerful monologue, promise this not too distantly.

The folk play, on the other hand, whether of the realistic or the imaginative type, has no such conditioned values. It is the drama of free self-expression and imaginative release, and has no objective but to express beautifully and colorfully the folk life of the race. At present, too, influenced perhaps by the social drama, it finds tentative expression in the realistic genre plays of Paul Green, Willis Richardson, and others. Later no doubt, after it learns to beautify the native idioms of our folk life and recovers the ancestral folk tradition, it will express itself in a poetic and symbolic style of drama that will remind us of Synge and the Irish Folk Theatre or Ansky and the Yiddish Theatre. There are many analogies, both of temperament, social condition and cultural reactions, which suggest this. The life which this peasant drama imperfectly reflects is shot through with emotion and potential poetry; and the soggy, somewhat sordid realism of the plays that now portray it does not develop its full possibilities. The drabness of plays like Culbertson's *Jockey* and *Goat Alley* and of *Granny Boling* and *White Dresses* is in great part due to the laborious effort of first acquaintance. They are too studied, too expository. Even in such a whimsical and poetically conceived folk comedy as Paul Green's *No 'Count Boy*, with which the Dallas Little Theatre group won a recent amateur dramatic contest in New York, there is this same defect of an overstudied situation lacking spontaneity and exuberant vitality. It seems logical to think that the requisite touch must come in large measure from the Negro dramatists. It is not a question of race, though, but of intimacy of understanding. Paul Green, for example, is a close student of, almost a specialist in, Negro folk life, with unimpeachable artistic motives, and a dozen or more Negro plays to his credit. But the plays of Willis Richardson, the colored playwright, whose *Chip Woman's Fortune* was the first offering of the Chicago Ethiopian Art Theatre under Raymond O'Neill,

are very much in the same vein. Though the dialogue is a bit closer to Negro idiom of thought and speech, compensating somewhat for his greater amateurishness of technique and structure, there still comes the impression that the drama of Negro life has not yet become as racy, as gaily unconscious, as saturated with folk ways and the folk spirit as it could be, as it eventually will be. Decidedly it needs more of that poetic strain whose counterpart makes the Irish folk drama so captivating and irresistible, more of the joy of life even when life flows tragically, and even should one phase of it remain realistic peasant drama, more of the emotional depth of pity and terror. This clarification will surely come as the Negro drama shifts more and more to the purely aesthetic attitudes. With life becoming less a problem and more a vital process for the younger Negro, we shall leave more and more to the dramatist not born to it the dramatization of the race problem and concern ourselves more vitally with expression and interpretation. Others may anatomize and dissect; we must paint and create. And while one of the main reactions of Negro drama must and will be the breaking down of those false stereotypes in terms of which the world still sees us, it is more vital that drama should stimulate the group life culturally and give it the spiritual quickening of a native art.

The finest function, then, of race drama would be to supply an imaginative channel of escape and spiritual release, and by some process of emotional reenforcement to cover life with the illusion of happiness and spiritual freedom. Because of the lack of any tradition or art to which

to attach itself, this reaction has never functioned in the life of the American Negro except at the level of the explosive and abortive release of buffoonery and low comedy. Held down by social tyranny to the jester's footstool, the dramatic instincts of the race have had to fawn, crouch and be amusingly vulgar. The fine African tradition of primitive ritual broken, with the inhibitions of Puritanism snuffing out even the spirit of a strong dramatic and mimetic heritage, there has been little prospect for the development of strong native dramatic traits. But the traces linger to flare up spectacularly when the touch of a serious dramatic motive once again touches them. No set purpose can create this, only the spontaneous play of the race spirit over its own heritage and traditions. But the deliberate turning back for dramatic material to the ancestral sources of African life and tradition is a very significant symptom. At present just in the experimental stage, with historical curiosity the dominating motive, it heralds very shortly a definite attempt to poetize the race origins and supply a fine imaginative background for a fresh cultural expression. No one with a sense for dramatic values will underestimate the rich resources of African material in these respects. Not through a literal transposing, but in some adaptations of its folklore, art-idioms and symbols, African material seems as likely to influence the art of drama as much as or more than it has already influenced some of its sister arts. Certainly the logic of the development of a thoroughly racial drama points independently to its use just as soon as the Negro drama rises to the courage of distinctiveness and achieves creative independence.

ROWENA WOODHAM JELLIFFE

The Negro in the Field of Drama (1928)

Eight years ago, when I first became associated with a Negro Little Theatre group, the attitude of the group itself was about as follows. All the players wanted to play leading roles, it was almost impossible to do a play which had in it the

character of a maid or any person of lowly state because no one would play such parts, the part of a villain was popular so long as he was not a Negro villain, and every one wanted a part which allowed them to wear pretty clothes and appear

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to good advantage. The audience attending and supporting the players demanded something at which they could laugh, and refused to pay more than twenty-five cents for that privilege. In other words the actor was interested in drama because it gave an opportunity for pleasant exhibitionism and the audience only when it told a good joke.

Both actors and audience were emphatically opposed to Negro plays and thought them highly degrading to their race. There have come amazing changes, the group leading the way and the audience lagging some little distance behind on the new course but nevertheless following. Three years ago the group chose to try a Negro play. We were praised and condemned for doing it, but somehow the praise rang louder in our ears than the damning. And so we continued, with the result that our Negro plays became extremely popular and brought a largely increased audience which is now about half colored and half white.

I believe that in Negro life and tradition we have the richest ingredient in our national drama both as material for the writer and medium for the actor. The objection on the part of the Negro to the prevalence of the folk-play in the field of Negro drama is, I think, based on a misunderstanding of the present flare for the Negro play. White America, becoming pressed for spiritual elbow room and weary of its mechanical way of life, has turned with genuine appreciation to the drama of the folk level. That the Negro happens most admirably to supply that need, both as source material and interpreter, is a fortunate happenstance for the Negro race. That the present flare bespeaks directly a primary interest in the Negro as such is not true. White America going to the theatre would be no more interested in Negro life on the sophisticated level than in their own life on the same level. Certain it is that as a result of the Negro folk-play there has come an incalculable increase of appreciation of the Negro as an artist, and consequently a new social appraisal.

Of the three classes of theatricals: musical comedy, professional drama, and the tributary theatre, it seems to me that at the present time musical comedy is the hopelessly decrepit mem-

ber of the trio. Its stock has run so thin that one wonders that it has the audacity to lift its head at all. Only the unfailing vitality of its actors gives it sufficient strength to sing its several pitiful swan songs. Surely the Negro has something better to offer in the field of musical comedy. I look for it to burst forth in some new and far more vital form. This may be the next significant development. The professional drama is in a most wholesome state; vital, strong and unafraid. But that the professional drama has to do with the Negro at all today is probably due to having tested its strength and its beauty in the tributary theatre. The tributary theatre, daring to experiment, should have the credit for bringing the Negro play upon the American stage.

The primary consideration of the Negro dramatist and the actor alike should be for the art of the theatre. Sociological considerations should be secondary. Nor should the theatre be considered a medium of propaganda. Undue concern about putting the best racial foot foremost should be forgot. I believe that the Negro artist achieves in the field of drama in about the proportion to which he is able to escape the bonds of race consciousness. Then is he able, having acquired the necessary perspective, to portray and interpret the life and mood of his race beautifully and truly.

Perhaps the chief talent which the Negro actor brings to the art of the theatre is his peculiar quality of motorness, his extraordinary body expressiveness, which more than compensates for the degree of facial expression which is lost to an audience (in comparison with white actors) due to a darker skin coloring. Next in line in his assets I would list his sense of rhythm, manifest in his movement and his diction alike, and his never failing vitality.

The picture building quality of Negro dialect, its rhythmic rise and fall, the earthy quality of Negro folk-life: these are things with which the writer of Negro plays may work. They are, I believe, rare thread for his fabric. We have probably seen but the beginning of the Negro play.

I have been deeply interested in what the Negro can do with so-called white plays. Such plays as "Sun-Up" and "Icebound" have been most successfully done by Negro groups. These plays,

handled by Negro artists, become a new creation, they take on a new and beautiful quality which comes to them from the Negro's particular dramatic stock. I consider this a valuable contribution. In view also of the great common denominator in all folk-plays, I believe that folk-plays of all groups can be creditably done by any group which can move freely and sincerely in any folklore.

I expect that more and more we shall see white groups everywhere doing Negro plays with some credit. The exchange should be equally valuable when Negroes undertake to interpret

the drama of other groups. While it will probably be true that Irish artists can always do Irish plays best and Russians best interpret Russian plays, and Negroes be most convincing in Negro plays, I believe that in the stimulation and versatility which comes from the exchange of dramatic medium, just as the traveler in a foreign country can sometimes see beauty in surroundings to which the native has become dulled, other dramatic gifts may pick up new high lights which native talent fails to catch. This will probably be the opportunity of the tributary and not the professional theatre.

JULES BLEDSOE

Has the Negro a Place in the Theatre? (1928)

There has been a steady growth of interest in the Negro in the theatre. His histrionic ability is being recognized by the powers that be; not because of benevolence, but because the nature of things has decreed that a new element, a new theme be brought into the theatre to attract the attention of a public that was fast growing weary of certain forms of entertainment.

Writers, novelists, playwrights, and producers are just beginning to appreciate the vast and fertile field of drama existent in Negro life.

The Negro's every move is filled with drama from the time of his inception to the grave. Persecutions, economic slavery, and hardships of every nature, all these do strike the chords of pity, remorse and sometimes despair in the heart of the Black Man, and at once set his emotional spirit into play; sometimes expressed in the Spiritual Song of sorrow and religious hope and often he is assailed by that type of melancholia that makes the brother break forth in a fit of that "Indigo song", called the "Blues".

Every creature tries to escape its plight by either fighting within or without. The Negro, by swinging the pendulum in the opposite direction. He tries to outrun his shadow by breaking into frenzied laughter, by wild and tempestuous dancing, as exemplified by the "Charleston" and

other break-downs, and very often humor comes to his rescue: the kind that would make the very Fates themselves laugh.

All these characteristics are the *materia Theatrica*: hence the excursion into our habitat for things native and unexplored.

The Negro as an idiom is and has been an always dependable means of sure fire entertainment. Negro ragtime and dance steps have revolutionized the musical comedy and vaudeville stage. (I mean American). His mannerisms and nuances are employed to great advantage. All a mediocre white comedian has to do is blacken his face and at once he becomes a success in mimicry. Jazz is itself a reversion to primitive African rhythms, having been born in and introduced by the American Negro.

I cite all these instances merely to show that the Black Brother has his place and belongs in the theatre by the process of natural selection. It is gratifying to see a goodly number of intelligent Negroes emerging into this field. For we must prove by the excellence of the many, rather than that of the few, that we as a race "Got Wings" and expect to use them to fly to the heights of histrionic art.

It is up to the few of us that have gotten past the sentinels at the gate, to fling the gates wide open for our successors.

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Once the ambitious educated Negro youth turns his steps toward the theatre as a profession not to be considered too lightly, and revels in it as he does in the professions of Medicine and law; we shall find ourselves able to run the

whole gamut of the theatre and be thoroughly capable of doing the finer things of the stage, whether it be uttering the classic lines of Shakespeare or chanting the masters of song in a manner befitting only the Gods.

EULALIE SPENCE

A Criticism of the Negro Drama as It Relates to the Negro Dramatist and Artist (1928)

Yes, we have our colored artists. We have our Robeson, Rose McClenndon, our Wilson and various others who have reached an undeniable place of prominence in the realm of the theatre. And we have had our Florence Mills.

Even the most casual theatre-goer to-day is familiar with one or more of these stars in the theatrical firmament. But alas, the same cannot be said of the Negro dramatist.

Negro drama does not of necessity include the work of the Negro dramatist. Strictly speaking, Negro drama is any drama or theatrical production which essays to portray the life of the Negro. Where, then, is the Negro dramatist?

Who are the writers that have provided the vehicle for Gilpin, Robeson, Rose McClenndon, and Bledsoe? Frankly, yet reluctantly, too, we may name them, and never a Negro will be found among them. Suppose there had been no *Emperor Jones*, and no *Porgy*; no *In Abraham's Bosom*, and no *Show Boat*? What then? Ask the Negro artist, he knows.

Some there are who have shuddered distastefully at these plays: been affronted by Paul Green, degraded by Du Bose Hayward, and misunderstood by Eugene O'Neill. But ask the Negro artist if he is grateful to these writers. He will tell you. And ask the Negro dramatist what he feels about it. If he is forward-thinking, he will admit that these writers have been a great inspiration; that they have pointed the way and heralded a new dawn.

The drama, more particularly, the American drama, is from twenty to thirty years behind the novel and short story in point of subject matter.

There is almost no subject to-day that cannot be discussed with the most revolting detail between the covers of a book. If there are any who doubt this, let them read *Home to Harlem* by Claude McKay. Not so with our drama. Here we have elected to be squeamish, and perhaps advisedly so. Nevertheless, this does not imply that the theatre has not made enormous strides ahead. The drama has developed a new technique, new ways and means, a new genius of mechanism and a new direction.

Unfortunately, almost everyone thinks that he can write a play. Writers will grant the poet his form and the novelist his; the essayist his mould and the writer of short stories his. However, when it comes to the play, why—one merely takes one's pen in hand and presto! we have Dialogue! I have seen plays written by our Negro writers with this captain: To Be Read, Not Played!

A play to be read! Why not the song to be read not sung, and the canvas to be described, not painted! To every art its form, thank God! And to the play, the technique that belongs to it!

Here it is then that our Negro dramatists have failed to reach a larger and more discriminating public. They have labored like the architect who has no knowledge of geometry and the painter who must struggle to evolve the principles of perspective.

May I advise these earnest few—those seekers after light—white lights—to avoid the drama of propaganda if they would not meet with certain disaster? Many a serious aspirant for dramatic honors has fallen by the wayside because he

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would insist on his lynchings or his rape. The white man is cold and unresponsive to this subject and the Negro, himself, is hurt and humiliated by it. We go to the theatre for entertainment, not to have old fires and hates rekindled.

Of course, if we have a Shaw or a Galsworthy among us, let him wander at will in the more devious by-paths of race dissection. Let him wander wheresoever he will—provided he has no eye for the box-office. For even as fattained a dramatist as Galsworthy could not keep his recent play, *The Forest*, more than a very limited time on the London stage. Why? It dealt with

propaganda, and as beautifully written and staged as it was, it had to be withdrawn.

What, then, is left to the Negro dramatist? Let him portray the life of his people, their foibles, if he will, and their sorrows and ambition and defeats. Oh, yes, let us have all of these, told with tenderness and skill and a knowledge of the theatre and the technique of the times. But as long as we expect our public, white and colored, to support our drama, it were wise to steer far away from the old subjects.

A little more laughter, if you please, and fewer spirituals!

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

From *Black Manhattan* (1930)

During the term of exile of the Negro from the downtown theatres of New York, which began in 1910 and lasted for seven lean years, there grew up in Harlem a real Negro theatre, something New York had never had before; that is a theatre in which Negro performers played to audiences made up almost wholly of people of their own race. In several Southern cities there had been for a decade or more theatres where the audiences, on account of the laws separating the races in places of amusement, were strictly coloured. And in Chicago there was the Pekin Theatre, a Negro theatre patronized principally by coloured people. But the professional experience of Negro performers in New York had always been to play before audiences predominantly white. The rise of a Negro theatre in Harlem was, therefore, a new thing; and, because it was within the radius of the circle in which the theatrical forces of the country are centred, it proved to be a very important thing. It is not an exaggeration to say that it worked some vital changes. The Negro performer in New York, who had always been playing to white or predominantly white audiences, found himself in an entirely different psychological atmosphere. He found himself freed from a great many restraints and taboos that had cramped him

for forty years. In all those years he had been constrained to do a good many things that were distasteful because managers felt they were things that would please white folks. Likewise he was forbidden to do some other things because managers feared they would displease white folks. One of the well-known taboos was that there should never be any romantic love-making in a Negro play. If anything approaching a love duet was introduced in a musical comedy, it had to be broadly burlesqued. The reason behind this taboo lay in the belief that a love scene between two Negroes could not strike a white audience except as ridiculous. The taboo existed in deference to the superiority stereotype that Negroes cannot be supposed to mate romantically, but do so in some sort of minstrel fashion or in some more primeval manner than white people. This taboo had been one of the most strictly observed. In the middle theatrical period Cole and Johnson had come nearest to breaking it in their *Shoofly Regiment* and *Red Moon*. Williams and Walker never seriously attempted to do so. So, with the establishment of the Negro theatre in Harlem, coloured performers in New York experienced for the first time release from the restraining fears of what a white audience would stand for; for the first

would insist on his lynchings or his rape. The white man is cold and unresponsive to this subject and the Negro, himself, is hurt and humiliated by it. We go to the theatre for entertainment, not to have old fires and hates rekindled.

Of course, if we have a Shaw or a Galsworthy among us, let him wander at will in the more devious by-paths of race dissection. Let him wander wheresoever he will—provided he has no eye for the box-office. For even as fattained a dramatist as Galsworthy could not keep his recent play, *The Forest*, more than a very limited time on the London stage. Why? It dealt with

propaganda, and as beautifully written and staged as it was, it had to be withdrawn.

What, then, is left to the Negro dramatist? Let him portray the life of his people, their foibles, if he will, and their sorrows and ambition and defeats. Oh, yes, let us have all of these, told with tenderness and skill and a knowledge of the theatre and the technique of the times. But as long as we expect our public, white and colored, to support our drama, it were wise to steer far away from the old subjects.

A little more laughter, if you please, and fewer spirituals!

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time they felt free to do on the stage whatever they were able to do.

This sense of freedom manifested itself in efforts covering a wide range; efforts that ran all the way from crude Negro burlesque to Broadway drama. This intermediate and experimental theatrical period developed mainly in two Harlem theatres, the Lafayette and the Lincoln. Within several years both these houses had good stock-companies, and for quite a while their repertories consisted chiefly of downtown successes. The Lafayette Players developed into a very proficient organization that gave adequate presentations of *Madame X*, *The Servant in the House*, *On Trial*, *The Love of Choo Chin*, *Within the Law*, and other such plays. These melodramatic plays made a great appeal to Harlem audiences. To most of the people that crowded the Lafayette and the Lincoln the thrill received from these pieces was an entirely new experience; and it was all the closer and more moving because it was expressed in terms of their own race. For a time Negro sketches and musical shows were swept off the stage, but they are now back again.

The two stock-companies had as members some performers who came down from the days of the Isham, Williams and Walker, Cole and Johnson shows; and they also developed a number of young dramatic actors who became great Harlem favourites. There were Anita Bush, Inez Clough, Abbie Mitchell, Ida Anderson, Evelyn Ellis, Lottie Grady, Laura Bowman, Susie Sutton, Cleo Desmond, Edna Thomas, Charles Gilpin, Frank Wilson, Tom Brown, Charles Moore, Sidney Kirkpatrick, Lionel Monagas, A. B. Comathiere, Walter Thompson, "Babe" Townsend, Charles Olden, Andrew Bishop, Clarence Muse, Jack Carter. All of these names were as well known to Harlem as those of Broadway favourites to the rest of the city. Readers who are at all familiar with the present period of the Negro in the theatre will see that in this list there are those who did not remain limited to Harlem or to the circuit played by the Harlem stock-companies, but helped to place the Negro fairly and squarely on Broadway. The Negro theatre in Harlem, in which the coloured performed gained a new freedom and

new incentives, proved to be the exact medium he needed through which to fit himself for the fresh start he was to make.

All through this intermediate period there were times when polite comedy and high-tension melodrama gave way to blackface farce, hilarious musical comedy, and bills of specialties. The black Harlem audiences enjoyed being thrilled, but they also wanted to laugh. And a Negro audience seems never to laugh heartier than when laughing at itself—provided it is a strictly Negro audience. There were several Negro producers who kept the older tradition alive: the Tutt brothers—Whitney and J. Homer—Irving C. Miller, and S. H. Dudley. Their productions always drew good houses. But in this field there stands out above them all a musical show produced at the Lafayette Theatre in 1913, which not only played to great local crowds, but brought Broadway up to Harlem. The piece was *Darktown Follies*, written and staged by Leubrie Hill, formerly a member of the Williams and Walker company. *Darktown Follies* drew space, headlines, and cartoons in the New York papers; and consequently it became the vogue to go to Harlem to see it. This was the beginning of the nightly migration to Harlem in search of entertainment. One visitor to the *Darktown Follies* was Florenz Ziegfeld, and a very much interested visitor he was. He bought the rights to produce the finale to the first act and several song numbers in his own *Follies*. The finale to the first act of *Darktown Follies* was one of those miracles of originality which occasionally come to pass in the world of musical comedy. Its title was "At the Ball," the tune was the sort of melody that, once heard, is unforgettable, and words and music were combined into a very clever piece of syncopation. But it was the staging that made it so striking. The whole company formed an endless chain that passed before the footlights and behind the scenes, round and round, singing and executing a movement from a dance called "ballin' the jack," one of those Negro dances which periodically come along and sweep the country. This finale was one of the greatest hits the *Ziegfeld Follies* ever had. One of the song numbers Mr. Ziegfeld took was "Rock Me in the Cradle of Love," which in the

Darktown Follies had been sung by the Negro tenor to the bronze soubrette in a most impassioned manner, demonstrating that the love-making taboo had been absolutely kicked out of the Negro theatre. In 1915 Edward Sterling Wright came to the Lafayette Theatre with a very creditable presentation of *Othello*.

This period in Harlem filled in the gap between the second and third periods of the Negro in the theatre. The third period is now in full swing, and the Negro theatre in Harlem is also very much alive. At present, aside from the picture houses, there are three large Negro theatres in Harlem. The third was added when several years ago the Alhambra Theatre on Seventh Avenue near One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, long a Keith vaudeville house, was converted into a theatre for performances given by and for Negroes.

April 5, 1917, is the date of the most important single event in the entire history of the Negro in the American theatre; for it marks the beginning of a new era. On that date a performance of three dramatic plays was given by the Coloured Players at Garden Theatre in Madison Square Garden, New York, and the stereotyped traditions regarding the Negro's histrionic limitations were smashed. It was the first time anywhere in the United States for Negro actors in the dramatic theatre to command the serious attention of the critics and of the general press and public.

The plays were three one-act plays written by Ridgely Torrence; they were produced by Mrs. Emily Hapgood; the settings and costumes were designed by Robert Edmond Jones, and the staging was under his direction. The acting was fine; in several of the roles it was superb. In fact, nothing that has been done since has afforded Negro performers such a wide gamut for their powers. The praise of the critics was enthusiastic and practically unanimous.

The performance opened with *The Rider of Dreams*, a play of rustic Negro life, and a true comedy. The second play was *Granny Maumee*, a tragedy of the colour-line, which contained a vivid scene of voodoo enchantment. The play that closed the performance was *Simon the Cyrenian*, which was billed as "A Passion Interlude."

It was the story of Simon, the black man who was Jesus' cross-bearer.

The casts of the three plays were:

The Rider of Dreams
A Comedy

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Lucy Sparrow, BLANCHE DEAS
Booker Sparrow, JOSEPH BURT
Madison Sparrow, OPAL COOPER
Dr. Williams, ALEXANDER ROGERS

Granny Maumee
A Tragedy

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Granny Maumee, MARIE JACKSON STUART
Pearl, FANNIE TARKINGTON
Sapphie, BLANCHE DEAS

Simon the Cyrenian
A Passion Interlude

"And as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian . . . and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus." Luke xxiii, 26.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Procula, INEZ CLOUGH
Drusus, ANDREW BISHOP
Acté, Princess of Egypt, LOTTIE GRADY
Battus, THEODORE ROOSEVELT BOLIN
Simon, JOHN T. BUTLER
Pilate, ALEXANDER ROGERS
Barabbas, JESSE SHIPP
The Mocker with the Crown of Thorns,

ROBERT ATKIN

The Mocker with the Scarlet Robe,
THOMAS WILLIAM

Egyptian Herald, FREDERICK SLADE

Centurion, JEROME OSBORNE, JR.

Longinus, RALPH HERNANDEZ

Soldiers, JERVIS WILSON, EARL TAYLOR,

LISLE BERRIDGE

Attendants to Procula, THOMAS
WILLIAM, MURIEL SMITH

Scene: The Garden of Pilate's House at
Jerusalem.

Time: The day of Jesus' Crucifixion.

These plays, a rustic comedy, a voodoo tragedy, and the passion interlude, made a high demand on the versatility of the company: the first called for humorous characterization, the second for dramatic power, and the third for finished acting. The demand was fully measured up to. George Jean Nathan, in making his estimate of the ten most distinguished performers of the year, gave Opal Cooper for his work in *The Rider of Dreams* seventh place in the list of male actors, and Inez Clough for her portrayal of Procula, the wife of Pilate, in *Simon the Cyrenian*, ninth place among the women.

A glance at the casts of these plays will show some names that have by now become a bit familiar to the reader, and will also buttress the statement made earlier in this book that the accumulation of theatrical training and stage technique has made possible the higher development of each period of the Negro in the theatre over the period preceding. This knocks something of a hole in the popular idea that Negroes, because of their marked aptitude for the theatre, simply walk out on the stage and act. In certain exceptional cases they do, but generally they do not. We see the name Jesse Shipp. Mr. Shipp's professional experience goes back to the minstrel period, with Primrose and West's "Forty Whites and Thirty Blacks," and comes down through the Isham, the Cole and Johnson, and the Williams and Walker shows. At the present time Mr. Shipp is playing a part in *The Green Pastures*. Alex Rogers came down through the Williams and Walker shows. Miss Clough came down through the Isham and the Cole and Johnson shows and the Lafayette Players. Miss Deas came through the Cole and Johnson shows. In addition to Miss Clough, the Lafayette Players were represented by Andrew Bishop and Lottie Grady. One of those special exceptions was Opal Cooper. Mr. Cooper had never been on the professional stage before; his sole previous preparation was what he had gained as an entertainer in a night-club. John T. Butler, who played the role of Simon, was a post-office employee and had acquired his experience in amateur and semi-professional theatricals. Marie Jackson Stuart had long been a dramatic reader.

A notable feature of the production was the singing orchestra under the direction of J. Rosamond Johnson. A singing orchestra as part of a play was at the time a distinct innovation in the theatre in New York. The Coloured Players remained ten days at the Garden Theatre, then moved up to the Garrick with every promise of success; but the fates planned otherwise. The Coloured Players opened on April 5, 1917; and on the following day, April 6, the United States declared war against the Imperial German Government. They played at the Garrick for several weeks, but the increasing stress of the war was too great, even for stronger enterprises in the theatre, and it crushed them out. Nevertheless, this effort marked the beginning of the third, and present, period of the Negro in the American theatre. And it was Emily Hapgood, who has recently died, who first demonstrated the faith that the Negro could make a place on the legitimate stage. After the close of the war the effort was carried forward.

In addition to the theatre in Harlem, there has been another medium through which significant effect has been wrought in the Negro in the theatre; that medium is the night-clubs. To many, especially among coloured people, a Harlem night-club is a den of iniquity, where the Devil holds high revel. The fact is that the average night-club is as orderly as many a Sunday-school picnic has been. These clubs are patronized by many quite respectable citizens. Anyone who visits them expecting to be shocked is likely to be disappointed. Generally night-clubbers go simply to have a good time. They laugh and talk and they dance to the most exhilarating music. And they watch a first-rate revue. Certainly, there are infractions of the Volstead Act; but they also take place in the best-regulated homes. The larger clubs maintain permanent companies of performers; and such clubs as Connie's Inn, the Cotton Club, and Small's Paradise put on revues that are often better than what may be seen in the theatres downtown. The night-clubs have been the training ground for a good part of the talent that has been drawn upon by musical comedy and revues in the professional theatre; and not only for strictly Negro productions, but also for productions in which there have been mixed casts, as, for example, in *Show Boat* and *Golden Dawn*.

The night-clubs also constitute the stage for a number of crack Negro bands. Duke Ellington's is one of the most famous jazz bands in the country. Fletcher Henderson's is another, which, however, generally plays in a downtown club. There are hundreds of musicians and hundreds of performers connected with the night-clubs of Harlem. The waiters, cooks, coat-room girls, doormen, and others make up several more hundreds. It has been estimated that there are something like two thousand Negroes employed in these clubs.

The little-theatre movement has also been started and restarted in Harlem, as the various

efforts for establishment flourished and died. There have been three or four definite and partially successful efforts. The most successful was made by the Krigwa Players, organized by W. E. Burghardt Du Bois in connexion with the literary and artistic program of *The Crisis* magazine. The Krigwa Players had the distinction of winning a place in the Little Theatre Tournament, 1927, to compete for the David Belasco trophy. The company did not win the trophy, but its play, *The Fool's Errand*, written by Eulalie Spence, a New York coloured girl, was awarded one of the Samuel French prizes for the best unpublished manuscript plays in the contest.

RALPH MATTHEWS

The Negro Theatre—A Dodo Bird (1934)

A famous explorer returning from Africa once had much to tell about the Dodo Bird, an extinct fowl which, it was later revealed, did not exist at all. When one sets out to write about the Negro Theatre, he feels almost as guilty as the hapless explorer after the exposé. The Negro Theatre, as such, is a Dodo Bird.

By this I do not intimate that there are not certain cardinal Negroid elements, certain contributions of an unmistakable Afric origin, certain psychological situations that could be born only in the mind of a transplanted race, that distinguish the productions in which black folk appear from those of any other group; but my main premise stands.

Because the American theatre is a commercialised industry instead of a medium merely for the expression of art for art's sake, the Negroes who have entered this field since emancipation have not been so much concerned with developing a vital, moving force depicting the soul of an oppressed people as they were with merely eking out an existence. Their paramount concern was, what side of the Negro can we sell?

No less an individual than the eminent psycho-analyst, Dr. A. A. Brill, answered this unconscious question most effectively when he

said, "Everybody likes to laugh at a black man." Thus for the edification of the dominant race there grew up in the Negro theatre a type of entertainment from which they cannot break away. The black performer was looked upon only as a buffoon and a clown.

The early minstrels were predominantly "Rufus and Rastus" ignominiousness; and the later musical comedies which appeared in the gay nineties bore such titles as *Mr. Lode of Cole*, *A Trip to Coontown*, *Darktown Follies*, and other such names that must have cut deep into the very hearts of the producers and actors themselves.

After more than 30 years there seems to have taken place but slight departure from this same discriminating procedure, as the titles of *Blackbirds* and *Hot Chocolates* all carry the same contemptuous implications.

The work of the pioneer sepia showman was pretty well circumscribed. America accepted him only in the form that exploited his inherent abilities. Thus the musical comedy field, that gave him opportunity for singing and dancing, talents that are attributed to the black man as a racial heritage, flourished; while the drama, which required application, study and artificial development, could not get a foothold until after the late war. Even this, when presented in

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its most pretentious forms, could not conscientiously be classed as Negro theatre, because the productions for the most part are from the pens of white playwrights. Through their productions seeps an unconscious strain of Ofay psychology that presents the Negro not as he sees himself, but as he is seen through the condescending eyes of the detached observer. Thus only the extremities of Negro life have been brought on to the stage. *Porgy*, *In Abraham's Bosom*, *Emperor Jones*, and *The Green Pastures*, all by white authors, fell into this category.

We find towering high above the names of our best dramatic stars the names of Dorothy and Dubose Heywood, Paul Green, Marc Connelly, and Eugene O'Neill. In musical comedies this same situation pertains. White song-writers have been employed on innumerable occasions to be the tunesmiths for sepia revues. It is not my intention to give the impression that Negroes cannot create material for their own offerings, but to show that the American scheme of things does not always allow them this opportunity. In short, the two races have been so indistinguishably associated in the theatre that any attempt to find the line of demarcation would be the problem of a Diogenes.

That the Negro has made a very definite contribution to the American theatre is an irrefutable fact. His humor can be classified in three divisions. There is the droll, "po' me" type, created by Bert Williams, in which the poor black-faced comedian becomes the butt of adversity. His hard-luck situations appeal to the sympathies of his audience whose own sense of defeatism is minimised, and they find mental escape in his misfortunes.

This brand of fun-making also carries with it the Negro's supposed irresponsible and happy-go-lucky nature exemplified in the classic observation, "Hard times don't worry me because I didn't have nothing when times was good."

Contrasted with this we find the slicker type of character brought to the fore by S. H. Dudley, in which one Negro is able to take advantage of his more ignorant brethren.

The third classification finds its humor built on suggestiveness that is quite frankly termed smut. This depends for its appeal on the ease

with which the spoken word can be twisted to a base and vulgar interpretation. The latter type of humor flourished most in the houses catering exclusively to a colored clientele prior to, and for the period immediately following, the war, when colored actors in Metropolitan houses were few.

It was also upon this same type of suggestiveness that the phonograph-record era, which gave rise to an army of blues singers and coon shouters who yodeled their way along the trail blazed by Mamie Smith, was built. Therefore, we found among the best-selling titles such songs as *My Handy Man*, who, the song says, "beats my biscuits and churns my cream," and constant references to the unfortunate gentlemen who "can't climb a hill without shifting gears."

This same type of humor, which the Negro seems unusually prolific in creating, also accounts for the popularity of Harlem night clubs where Park Rowers seek a rendezvous from the politeness of their own circles. Little of the piquant witticisms of the polished Broadway commentators, that depend on their timeliness for their laugh-provoking effects, are found in Negro revues.

Since *Shuffle Along* brought about a renaissance in Negro theatricals, so far as its relation to Broadway was concerned, there came about a gradual change in the attitude toward Negro artists. The years saw them accepted, not as monstrosities or curiosities, but as people capable of giving entertainment value for money received. At that, however, the all-colored show during the decade that followed the memorable revival remained in the experimental stage with few exceptions, of which the *Blackbirds* production's of Lew Leslie were perhaps the most outstanding.

The success of *Shuffle Along* was no accident. During the years that intervened between the balmy days of Williams and Walker, Cole and Johnson and C. Aubrey Hill's productions, and the time that Miller and Lyles and Sissle and Blake brought *Shuffle Along* to Mazda Lane, there had been developing almost unnoticed a wealth of talent in the colored theatres held together by a makeshift circuit throughout the Southland and a few acts in the white houses. It was not until they were assembled under one

huge banner and given sure-fire material that their capabilities became apparent.

At first the idea of sepia choruses, garbed or ungarbed in the fashions of Follies or Vanities blondes, was frowned upon, and many predicted that Broadway would not accept them. The fact that, unlike their fairer sisters, the former supplemented their ability to wear clothes with an ability to dance with a feverish abandon that the latter could not or did not acquire, made them instant hits.

During the time that colored shows had absented themselves from Broadway the race had improved in appearance, thanks to amalgamation and the good offices of such kink destroyers as the late Mme. C. J. Walker. Broadway was, therefore, pleasantly surprised at its first baptism of high yaller femininity.

The sepia torso tossers were literal bundles of energy, and their vivaciousness gave birth to the speed-show idea with its accompanying "Charlestons," "Blackbottoms" and other dances reminiscent of the levee and the plantation, all of which had a particular appeal to the group they sought to please.

Many will contend that the Negro theatre has found its own level in the past decade and that it has taken on a definite form that has buried the stigma of the past, which once left it standing like a dingy jim-crow car on the sideline as the palace coaches of the American theatre rumbled on their way. My contention is that it has merely undergone a transition and that the basic principles upon which America has always accepted the Negro still remain.

The old musical comedy scenes which showed him in overalls against a background depicting a Mississippi levee have given way to a night club panorama, and Harlem has supplanted Dixie as the name synonymous with Negro.

The plunking banjo and the cotton-field chant have been supplanted by the moaning saxophone and the rent-party wail. The melancholy spirituals have been replaced by the equally melancholy but less reverent blues, and the rhythm of the old plantation has vanished in the path of the weird and sensuous tempo

of the jungle and the transplanted beat of the tom-tom.

The "Virginia" and "Chicken wheel" of the early minstrels, and the "Cakewalk" of the pioneer musical comedies have given way to the carefree abandonment of the devil dance. The brass band in its flaming red coats has been displaced by the jazz orchestra with its dancing baton-wielders and "skat" singers. The busy interlocutor is now called a master of ceremonies.

The big names among Negro performers are only those who have appealed to the whimsicalities of the white race and conformed to their idea of what a Negro should be.

Those who have confined their activities exclusively to what we might term the Negro theatre, have either vanished completely from the arena or are wallowing in mediocrity. The American black man honors only those whom the gods have chosen.

Let me not detract one iota from the glory that belongs to these hearty pioneers who braved the tempest in those early days when their profession was looked down upon not only by the opposite group, but by their own race as well. I have nothing but praise for these gladiators who invaded the benighted Southland, playing in stuffy theatres, travelling in discomfort, sleeping and eating in places unfit for decent habitation. Snubbed and ignored by the better citizenry, they carried on, lifting their calling by their own bootstraps until the proper recognition could be attained.

This was the hothouse of Negro theatricals, but in the path of the vitaphone, the radio, and other mechanised forms of entertainment, it has almost mouldered into decay with a few outposts still remaining. Harlem is now the mecca of the Negro theatre and Broadway is its goal. This means assimilation. A merger of talents has taken and continues to take place with the increasing years. Both groups have profited by the pooling of their respective interests and contributions. The American theatre moves on to a finer, more cosmopolitan and higher pinnacle by virtue of these changes. The Negro theatre is a Dodo Bird.

ALAIN LOCKE

A Note on African Art (1924)

The significance of African art is incontestable; at this stage it needs no *apologia*. Indeed no genuine art ever does, except when it has become incumbered with false interpretations. Having passed, however, through a period of neglect and disesteem during which it was regarded as crude, bizarre, and primitive, African art is now in danger of another sort of misconstruction, that of being taken up as an exotic fad and a fashionable amateurish interest. Its chief need is to be allowed to speak for itself, to be studied and interpreted rather than to be praised or exploited. It is high time that it was understood, and not taken as a matter of oddness and curiosity, or of quaint primitiveness and fantastic charm.

This so-called primitive Negro art in the judgment of those who know it best is really a classic expression of its kind, entitled to be considered on a par with all other classic expressions of plastic art. It must be remembered that African art has two aspects which, for the present at least, must be kept rigidly apart. It has an aesthetic meaning and a cultural significance. What it is as a thing of beauty ranges it with the absolute standards of art and makes it a pure art form capable of universal appreciation and comparison; what it is as an expression of African life and thought makes it an equally precious cultural document, perhaps the ultimate key for the interpretation of the African mind. But no confusing of these values as is so prevalent in current discussions will contribute to a finally accurate or correct understanding of either of these. As Guillaume Apollinaire aptly says in *Apropos de l'Arts des Noirs* (Paris 1917), "In the present condition of anthropology one cannot without unwarranted temerity advance definite and final assertions, either from the point of view of archeology or that of aesthetics, concerning these African images that have aroused enthusiastic appreciation from their admirers in spite of a lack of definite information as to their origin and use and as to their definite authorship."

It follows that this art must first be evaluated as a pure form of art and in terms of the marked influences upon modern art which it has already exerted, and then that it must be finally interpreted historically to explain its cultural meaning and derivation. What the cubists and post-expressionists have seen in it intuitively must be reinterpreted in scientific terms, for we realize now that the study of exotic art holds for us a serious and important message in aesthetics. Many problems, not only of the origin of art but of the function of art, wait for their final solution on the broad comparative study of the arts of diverse cultures. Comparative aesthetics is in its infancy, but the interpretation of exotic art is its scientific beginning. And we now realize at last that, scientifically speaking, European art can no more be self-explanatory than one organic species intensively known and studied could have evolved in the field of biology the doctrine of evolution.

The most influential exotic art of our era has been the African. The article of M. Paul Guillaume, its ardent pioneer and champion, is in itself sufficient witness and acknowledgment of this. But apart from its stimulating influence on the technique of many acknowledged modern masters, there is another service which it has yet to perform. It is one of the purposes and definite projects of the Barnes Foundation, which contains by far the most selected art-collection of Negro art in the world, to study this art organically, and to correlate it with the general body of human art. Thus African art will serve not merely the purpose of a strange new artistic ferment, but will also have its share in the construction of a new broadly comparative and scientific aesthetics.

Thus the African art object, a half a generation ago the most neglected of curios, has now become the corner-stone of a new and more universal aesthetic that has all but revolutionized the theory of art and considerably modified

its practice. The movement has a history. Our museums were full of inferior and relatively late native copies of this material before we began to realize its art significance. Dumb, dusty trophies of imperialism, they had been assembled from the colonially exploited corners of Africa, first as curios then as prizes of comparative ethnology. Then suddenly there came to a few sensitive artistic minds realization that here was an art object, intrinsically interesting and fine. The pioneer of this art interest was Paul Guillaume, and there radiated from him into the circles of post-impressionist art in Paris that serious interest which subsequently became an important movement and in the success of which the art of African peoples has taken on fresh significance. This interest was first technical, then substantive, and finally, theoretical. "What formerly appeared meaningless took on meaning in the latest experimental strivings of plastic art. One came to realize that hardly anywhere else had certain problems of form and a certain manner of their technical solution presented itself in greater clarity than in the art of the Negro. It then became apparent that prior judgments about the Negro and his arts characterized the critic more than the object of criticism. The new appreciation developed instantly a new passion, we began to collect Negro art as art, became passionately interested in corrective re-appraisal of it, and made out of the old material a newly evaluated thing."

There is a curious reason why this meeting of the primitive with the most sophisticated has been so stimulating and productive. The discovery of African art happened to come at a time when there was a marked sterility in certain forms of expression in European plastic art, due to generations of the inbreeding of idiom and style. Restless experimentation was dominant. African images had been previously dismissed as crude attempts at realistic representation. Then out of the desperate exhaustion of the exploiting of all the technical possibilities of color by the Impressionists, the problem of form and decorative design became emphasized in one of those natural reactions which occur so repeatedly in art. And suddenly with the substitution in European art of a new emphasis and technical interest, the African representation of

form, previously regarded as ridiculously crude, suddenly appeared cunningly sophisticated. Strong stylistic associations had stood between us and its correct interpretation, and their breaking down had the effect of a great discovery, a fresh revelation. Negro art was instantly seen as a "notable instance of plastic representation." . . .

For western art the problem of representation of form had become a secondary and even mishandled problem, sacrificed to the effect of movement. The three-dimensional interpretation of space, the ground basis of all plastic art, was itself a lost art, and when, with considerable pains, artists began to explore afresh the elements of form perception, fortunately at that time African plastic art was discovered and it was recognized that it had successfully cultivated and mastered the expression of pure plastic form.

It was by such a series of discoveries and revaluations that African art came into its present prominence and significance. Other articles in this issue trace more authoritatively than the present writer can the attested influence of Negro art upon the work of Matisse, Picasso, Modigliani, and Soutine among the French painters, upon Max Pechstein, Elaine Stern among German painters, upon Modigliani, Archipenko, Epstein, Lipschitz, and Lembruch among sculptors. This much may be regarded, on the best authority, as incontestable. The less direct influence in music and poetry must be considered separately, for it rests upon a different line both of influence and of evidence. But in plastic art the influence is evident upon direct comparison of the work of these artists with the African sculptures, though in almost everyone of the above mentioned cases there is additionally available information as to a direct contact with Negro art and the acknowledgement of its inspiration.

The verdict of criticism was bound to follow the verdict of the creative artists. A whole literature of comment and interpretation of "exotic art" in general, and Negro art in particular has sprung up, especially in Germany. Most diverse interpretations, from both the ethnographic and the aesthetic points of view, have been given. On

good authority much of this is considered premature and fantastic, but this much at least has definitely developed as a result,—that the problems raised by African art are now recognized as at the very core of art theory and art history. Ethnographically the most promising lines of interpretation are those laid down in Joyce and Torday's treatise on the Bushongo and by A. A. Goldenweiser in the chapter on Art in his book entitled *Early Civilization*. Aesthetically, the most authentic interpretations are those of Paul Guillaume, who from his long familiarity with this art is selecting the classical examples and working out a tentative stylistic and period classification, and that of the accomplished critic, Roger E. Fry, from whose chapter on Negro Sculpture (*Vision and Design*, 1920) the following is quoted:

We have the habit of thinking that the power to create expressive plastic form is one of the greatest of human achievements, and the names of great sculptors are handed down from generation to generation, so that it seems unfair to be forced to admit that certain nameless savages have possessed this power not only in a higher degree than we at this moment, but than we as a nation have ever possessed it. And yet that is where I find myself. I have to admit that some of these things are great sculpture,—greater, I think, than anything we produced even in the Middle Ages. Certainly they have the special qualities of sculpture in a higher degree. They have indeed complete plastic freedom, that is to say, these African artists really can see form in three dimensions. Now this is rare in sculpture. All archaic European sculpture, Greek and Romanesque, for instance—approaches plasticity from the point of view of bas-relief. The statue bears traces of having been conceived as the combination of back, front, and side bas-reliefs. And this continues to make itself felt almost until the final development of the tradition. Complete plastic freedom with us seems only to have come at the end of a long period, when the art has attained a high degree of representational skill and when it is generally

already decadent from the point of view of imaginative significance. Now the strange thing about these African sculptures is that they bear as far as I can see, no trace of this process. . . . So,—far from clinging to two dimensions, as we tend to do, he (the Negro artist) actually underlines, as it were, the three-dimensionalness of his forms. It is in some such way that he manages to give to his forms their disconcerting vitality, the suggestion that they make of being not mere echoes of actual figures, but of possessing an inner life of their own. . . . Besides the logical comprehension of plastic form which the Negro shows, he has also an exquisite taste in his handling of material.

Equally important with this newer aesthetic appreciation is the newer archeological revaluation. Negro art is no longer taken as the expression of a uniformly primitive and prematurely arrested stage of culture. It is now seen as having passed through many diverse phases, as having undergone several classical developments, and as illustrating several divergent types of art evolution. The theory of evolution has put art into a scientific straight-jacket, and African art has had to fit in with its rigid preconceptions. It is most encouraging therefore to see an emancipated type of scientific treatment appearing, with Torday and Joyce's historical interpretation of art in terms of its corresponding culture values, and in Goldenweiser's rejection of the evolutionary formula which would make all African art originate from crude representationalism, that is to say, naive and non-aesthetic realism. For Goldenweiser, primitive art has in it both the decorative and the realistic motives, and often as not it is the abstract principles of design and aesthetic form which are the determinants of its stylistic technique and conventions. Of course this is only another way of saying that art is after all art, but such scientific vindication of the efficacy of pure art motives in primitive art is welcome, especially as it frees the interpretation of African art from the prevailing scientific formulae. Thus both the latest aesthetic and scientific interpretations agree on a new value and complexity in the art we are considering.

Perhaps the most important effect of interpretations like these is to break down the invidious distinction between art with a capital A for European forms of expression and "exotic" and "primitive" art for the art expressions of other peoples. Technically speaking an art is primitive in any phase before it has mastered its idiom of expression, and classic when it has arrived at maturity and before it has begun to decline. Similarly art is exotic with relation only to its relative incommensurability with other cultures, in influencing them at all vitally it ceases to be exotic. From this we can see what misnomers these terms really are when applied to all phases of African art. Eventually we will come to realize that art is universally organic, and then for the first time scientifically absolute principles of art appreciation will have been achieved.

Meanwhile as a product of African civilization, Negro art is a peculiarly precious thing, not only for the foregoing reasons, but for the additional reason that it is one of the few common elements between such highly divergent types of culture as the African and the European, and offers a rare medium for their fair comparison. Culture and civilization are regarded too synonymously: a high-grade civilization may have a low-grade culture, and a relatively feeble civilization may have disproportionately high culture elements. We should not judge art too rigidly by civilization, or vice versa. Certainly African peoples have had the serious disadvantage of an environment in which the results of civilization do not accumulatively survive, so that their non-material culture elements are in many instances very much more mature and advanced than the material civilization which surrounds them. It follows then that the evidence of such elements ought to be seriously taken as factors for fair and proper interpretation.

Indeed the comparative study of such culture elements as art, folklore, and language will eventually supply the most reliable clues and tests for African values. And also, we may warrantably claim, for the tracing of historical contacts and influences, since the archeological accuracy of art is admitted. Comparative art and design have much to add therefore in clearing up the riddles of African periods and movements. Although

there are at present no reliable conclusions or even hypotheses, one can judge of the possibilities of this method by a glance at studies like Flinders-Petrie's "Africa in Egypt" (Ancient Egypt, 1916) or G. A. Wainwright's "Ancient Survivals in Modern Africa,"—*Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* (Cairo, 1919–20.) Stated more popularly, but with the intuition of the artist, we have the gist of such important art clues in the statement of Guillaume Apollinaire to the effect that African sculptures "attest through their characteristic style an incontestable relationship to Egyptian art, and contrary to current opinion, it seems rather more true that instead of being a derivative of Egyptian art, they, (or rather we would prefer to say, their prototypes) have on the contrary exerted on the artists of Egypt an influence which amply justifies the interest with which we today regard them."

But for the present all this is merest conjecture, though we do know that in many cases the tradition of style of these African sculptures is much older than the actual age of the exemplars we possess. Paul Guillaume, who has been the first to attempt period classification of this art, has conjecturally traced an Early Sudan art as far back as the fifth or sixth century, and has placed what seems to be its classic periods of expression as between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries for Gabon and Ivory Coast art, the eleventh and twelfth for one phase of Sudan art, with another high period of the same between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. There are yet many problems to be worked out in this line—more definite period classification, more exact ethnic classification, especially with reference to the grouping of the arts of related tribes, and perhaps most important of all, the determination of their various genres.

A new movement in one of the arts in most cases communicates itself to the others, and after the influence in plastic art, the flare for things African began shortly to express itself in poetry and music. Roughly speaking, one may say that the French have been pioneers in the appreciation of the aesthetic values of African languages, their poetry, idiom and rhythm. Of course the bulk of the scientific and purely philological interpretation is to the credit of

German and English scholarship. There were several decades of this, before scholars like Rene Basset and Maurice Delafosse began to point out in addition the subtlety of the expressive technique of these languages. Attracted finally by the appeal of Negro plastic art to the studies of these men, poets like Guillaume Apollinaire and Blaise Cendrars brought the creative mind to the artistic re-expression of African idiom in poetic symbols and verse forms. So that what is a recognized school of modern French poetry professes the inspiration of African sources,—Apollinaire, Reverdy, Salmon, Fargue, and others. The bible of this school has been Cendrars' *Anthologie Negre*, now in its sixth edition.

The starting point of an aesthetic interest in Negro musical idiom seems to have been H. A. Junod's work,—“Les Chants et les Contes des Barangus” (1897). From the double source of African folk-song and the quite serious study of American Negro musical rhythms, many of the leading modernists of French music have derived much inspiration. Berard, Satie, Poulenne, Aurie, Honegger, are all in diverse ways affected, but the most explicit influence is upon the work of Darius Milhaud, who is an avowed propagandist of the possibilities of Negro musical idiom. The importance of the absorption of this material by all of the major forms of art, some of them relatively independently of the others, is striking and ought really be considered as a quite unanimous verdict of the creative mind upon the values, actual and potential, in this yet unexhausted reservoir of art material.

Since African art has had such a vitalizing influence in modern European painting, sculp-

ture, poetry, and music, it becomes finally a natural and important question as to what artistic and cultural effect it can or will have upon the life of the American Negro. It does not necessarily follow that it should have any such influence. Today even in its own homeland it is a stagnant and decadent tradition, almost a lost art, certainly as far as technical mastery goes. The sensitive artistic minds among us have just begun to be attracted toward it, but with an intimate and ardent concern. Because of our Europeanized conventions, the key to the proper understanding and appreciation of it will in all probability first come from an appreciation of its influence upon contemporary French art, but we must believe that there still slumbers in the blood something which once stirred will react with peculiar emotional intensity toward it. If by nothing more mystical than the sense of being ethnically related, some of us will feel its influence at least as keenly as those who have already made it recognized and famous. Nothing is more galvanizing than the sense of a cultural past. This at least the intelligent presentation of African art will supply to us. Without other more direct influence even, a great cultural impetus would thus be given. But surely also in the struggle for a racial idiom of expression, there would come to some creative minds among us, from a closer knowledge of it, hints of a new technique, enlightening and interpretative revelations of the mysterious substrata of feeling under our characteristically intense emotionality, or at the very least, incentives toward fresher and bolder forms of artistic expression and a lessening of that timid imitativeness which at present hampers all but our very best artists.

ALAIN LOCKE

The American Negro as Artist (1931)

Between Africa and America the Negro, artistically speaking, has practically reversed himself. In his homeland, his dominant arts were the decorative and the craft arts—sculpture,

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forte, because his chief artistic expression has been in music, the dance, and folk-poetry. One single strand alone has connected the ancestral and the new-world art—the age-old virtuosity in dance and pantomime. Except for this, the American Negro as an artist is completely different from his African prototype.

Why should this be? There is an historical reason. Slavery not only transplanted the Negro, it cut him off sharply from his cultural roots and his ancestral heritage, and reduced him to cultural zero by taking away his patterns and substituting the crudest body labor with only the crudest tools. Thus slavery severed the trunk-nerve of the Negro's primitive skill and robbed him of his great ancestral gift of manual dexterity. Alexandre Jacovleff, the Russian artist whose drawings of African types are to date unsurpassed, has well said of Africa—"A continent of beautiful bodies, but above all of beautiful hands." This fact is really a symbol: with virtuosity of muscle has gone a coordination resulting in great beauty. But the hardships of cotton and rice-field labor, the crudities of the hoe, the axe, and the plow, reduced the typical Negro hand to a gnarled stump, incapable of fine craftsmanship even if materials, patterns, and incentives had been available.

In a compensatory way the artistic urges of the American Negro flowed toward the only channels left open—those of song, movement, and speech, and the body itself became the Negro's prime and only artistic instrument. Greatest of all came the development of the irrepressible art of the voice, which is today the Negro's greatest single artistic asset. Thus the history of generations is back of the present lopsidedness in the Negro's art development, and the basis of his handicap in the graphic, pictorial, and decorative arts explains, as well, his proficiency in the emotional arts. No comment on the contemporary advance of the Negro in the plastic and pictorial arts would be sound without this historical perspective. For in his latest developments in formal fine art, the Negro artist is really trying to recapture ancestral gifts and reinstate lost arts and skill.

Considering this, the early advent of American Negro artists in painting and sculpture was

all the more remarkable. As might be expected, however, this early art was of a purely imitative type, but not without technical merit. The two pioneer instances were Edward M. Bannister of Providence, Rhode Island, a landscapist of considerable talent, and founder, oddly enough, of the Providence Art Club; and Edmonia Lewis, our first sculptor, who studied in Rome in the early seventies and executed many very acceptable portrait busts in the current pseudo-classic style. And another pioneer instance is R. S. Duncanson, of Cincinnati, figure painter, landscapist, and historical painter, who achieved considerable recognition between 1863 and 1866 in London and Glasgow. It is characteristic of this period, 1860 to 1890, that the Negro artists were isolated and exceptional individuals, imitative though, judged by contemporary American standards, not mediocre and almost entirely lacking in race consciousness. They were artists primarily and were incidentally Negroes.

The next generation also lived and worked as individuals, but despite their academic connections and ideals, with a sentimental shadow of race hanging over them. The outstanding talents that matured during this period (1895–1915) were Henry O. Tanner, William Edouard Scott, painters; and Meta Warrick Fuller and May Howard Jackson, sculptors. Of these, of course, Mr. Tanner is by far the best known and recognized. However varied their talents as artists of this transitional generation, they have much in common. All of them products of the best American academics, their talents were forced into the channels of academic cosmopolitanism not merely by the general trend of their time, but also by the pressure and restrictions of racial prejudice. So they not only matured under French instruction and influence—three of them were products of Julian's Academy—but have received their earliest and widest recognition abroad. Instead of being the challenging influence and special interest that it is for the Negro artist of today, race, by reason of circumstances beyond their control, was for them a ghetto of isolation and neglect from which they must escape if they were to gain artistic freedom and recognition. And so, except for

occasional sentimental gestures of loyalty, they avoided it as a motive or theme in their art.

Because of her more completely American experience, May Howard Jackson, the sculptress, was first to break away from academic cosmopolitanism to frank and deliberate racialism. She was followed about 1907 (largely because of her commission to do commemorative Negro historical reliefs for the Jamestown Exposition) by Mrs. Fuller, who has continued since to work in the double vein of her earlier Rodinesque style and a very stylized idealization of Negro types, more exotic and Egyptian than realistically racial. The career of Mr. Tanner, professionally successful as it has been, is in this respect at least typical of the tragedy of this generation of Negro artists. Beginning under the realistic influence of his American teacher, Thomas Eakins, Tanner's early work showed marked interest and skill in painting Negro and Norman and, later, Jewish peasant types. It was the heyday of the regional school and but for his exile and the resentment of race as an imposed limitation, Tanner's undoubted technical genius might have added a significant chapter to the Jules Breton, Joseph Israels school of the half-romantic, half-realistic glorification of peasant life. Instead Tanner's work became more and more academic in treatment and cosmopolitan in theme; while for a treatment of Negro types in the style of this period we have to rely on sporadic canvases by white American painters like Winslow Homer, Wayman Adams, Robert Henri.

But this generation, Tanner especially, did have, after all, a constructive influence upon the American Negro artist though not in the direction of the development of a special province of Negro art. They were inspiring examples to the younger generation and convincing evidence to a sceptical public opinion of the technical competence and artistic capacity of the Negro artist when given the opportunity of contact with the best traditions and academic training. This is taken for granted now, but largely as a result of their pioneer effort and attainment.

But the younger generation of Negro artists since 1915 have a new social background and another art creed. For the most part, the goal of

the Negro artist today projects an art that aims to express the race spirit and background as well as the individual skill and temperament of the artist. Not that all contemporary Negro artists are conscious racialists—far from it. But they all benefit, whether they choose to be racially expressive or not, from the new freedom and dignity that Negro life and materials have attained in the world of contemporary art. And, as might be expected, with the removal of the cultural stigma and burdensome artisticonus of the past. Negro artists are showing an increasing tendency toward their own racial milieu as a special province and in their general work are reflecting more racially distinctive notes and overtones. In 1920, the 135th Branch of the New York Public Library in Harlem, began special exhibits of the work of Negro artists, which, having continued to date, have given showing to over a hundred young artists. In 1927, public-spirited citizens of Chicago pioneered with a special "Negro in Art Week" series of talks and exhibitions of the work of Negro artists, a programme that has been repeated at centers as far south as Atlanta and Nashville, as far north as Boston and Rochester, and as far west as San Diego and Los Angeles. Most influential of all, the Harmon Foundation has, by a five-year series of prize awards for Negro artists, with an annual New York show and extensive traveling exhibition of a considerable section of the same throughout the country, not only stimulated a new public interest in the Negro artist, but incubated more young talent in these last five years than came to maturity in the last twenty. As has been aptly said, "The public consciousness of Negro art has grown to be nation-wide and practically world-wide in the last decade."

And so, at present, the Negro artist confronts an interested public, and that public faces an interesting array of productive talent. Without undue violence to individualities, these contemporary Negro artists may be grouped in three schools or general trends: the Traditionalists, the Modernists, and the Africanists, or Neo-Primitives, with the latter carrying the burden of the campaign for a so-called "Negro Art." Even among the traditionalists, there is

considerable [expectation] of the racial emphasis in subject matter, but without the complementary adoption of any special stylistic idioms, directly racial or indirectly primitive. But conservatism on this point seems doomed, since the young Negro artist has a double chance of being influenced by Negro idioms, if not as a deliberate racialist or conscious "Africanist," then at least at second-hand through the reflected influence of Negro idioms on general modernist style.

Noteworthy among the traditionalists are William Edouard Scott, of Indianapolis, portrait and mural painter; William Farrow, of Chicago, landscapist and etcher; Laura Wheeler Waring, of Philadelphia, landscapist and type-portraitist of considerable distinction; Palmer Hayden, of New York and Paris, marine painter of talent; Albert A. Smith, of New York; and the late Edwin A. Harleston, of Charleston, South Carolina, whose genre studies of Southern Negro peasant types have competently filled an important niche in Negro painting. His prize canvases of *The Bible Student* and *The Old Serrant* are permanent documents by reason of their double artistic and social significance, and it is much to be regretted that his talent expired just at the point of maturity and recognition. The work of four women sculptors, Meta Warrick Fuller, May Howard Jackson, Elizabeth Prophet, and Augusta Savage, despite individual variation in competence and style, would all fall in the conservative category, with a common attitude of heavily idealized and sentimentalized portrayal of racial types and character.

It is this saccharine, romantic quality that has given the younger modernists their foil; they aim at hard realism and verge at times on the grotesque and the satirical. The *Old Snuff-Dipper* of Archibald Motley, or the *Self-Portrait* of Lillian Dorsey, or *Meditation* of Malvin Gray Johnson shows these new notes boldly and unmistakably. In this attitude, they have reinforcement from their young modernist contemporaries, but it represents a peculiar psychological reaction and achievement when a persecuted group breaks through the vicious circle of self-pity or compensatory idealization and achieves

objectivity. Apart from the artistic merit of the work—which is considerable—the social significance of the recent canvases of William H. Johnson tells an interesting story. Born in Florence, South Carolina, this dock-working, night-school student of the National Academy of Design, protégé of Charles Hawthorne and George Luks, disciple of French ultramodernism, with strong influences of Rouault and Soutine, came back from four years in Europe to paint in his home town. The result is a series of landscapes and portrait studies that reek with irony and satire and that probably will not get local appreciation till long after he has put his birthplace on the artistic map. His ironic picture of the town hotel paints the decadence of the old régime, and his quizzical portrait study of *Sonny*, a Negro lad with all the dilemma of the South written in his features, is a thing to ponder over, if one believes that art has anything important to say about life.

The other two modernists of note and promise are Hale Woodruff, of Indianapolis, now painting in France; and James Lesesne Wells, of New York, this year's Harmon award winner. Mr. Woodruff paints landscapes of originality, and his color has a warm beauty that, in spite of abstract formalism, seems characteristically racial. Mr. Wells, on the other hand, has a pronounced mystical lean, which makes his ultra-modern style all the more unusual and attractive. Some of his work has recently been acquired by the Phillips Memorial Gallery, and in terms of accomplishment and promise, Mr. Wells must be rated as one of the most promising of the younger Negro artists.

His work in design and decorative black-and-white media is strong and original. But, as a black-and-white artist, Mr. Wells is a conscious "Africanist." That is, he goes directly to African motives and principles of design for his inspiration. Another of the younger decorative painters, Aaron Douglas, does also; in fact, he has been doing so since 1925 and therefore deserves to be called the pioneer of the African Style among the American Negro artists. His book illustrations have really set a vogue for this style, and his mural decorations for Club Ebony, New York, the Sherman Hotel, Chicago, and the

symbolic murals of the Fisk University Library are things of fine originality. It is in sculpture, though, that the neo-primitivism of an attempted Negro style has to date most clearly expressed itself: in fact it is my opinion that sculpture will lead the way in this direction. So the work of our two younger sculptors, Richmond Barthé and Sargent Johnson, takes on more than individual significance. Both are consciously racial, with no tendency to sentimentalize or over-idealize, and their style emphasizes the primitive. Barthé's *West Indian Girl* has a proud, barbaric beauty that matches Claude McKay's glorification of the primitive in the lines:

To me she seemed a proudly swaying palm
Grown lovelier for passing through
a storm.

Sargent Johnson's bust *Chester* is particularly striking; it has the qualities of the African antique and recalls an old Baoulé mask. It is a long stretch from an isolated Negro sculptor living and working in California to the classic antiques of bygone Africa, but here it is in this captivating, naïve bust for even the untutored eye to see.

Single instances do not make a style, nor can propaganda re-create lost folk-arts, but it is significant that directly in proportion as the younger Negro talent leaves the academic and imitative vein, it becomes stronger; and that the more particularistic and racial it becomes, the wider and more spontaneous is its appeal. And so, the immediate future seems to be with the racialists, both by virtue of their talent and their creed.

However, a truly representative racial style and school of art are as yet only in the making. Reviewing a recent exhibit of the work of Negro artists. Cyril Kay Scott comments on its imitative and derivative character, saying "it is almost purely Parisian and New York art done by Negroes, with almost nothing of the simplicity and directness of folk-art, and little assimilation or use of the African primitive art, which has so profoundly affected the great European modernists." Mr. Scott is right in wishing that some American Negro artists would delve "into the marvelous and beautiful background which is their racial heritage." He is very

probably right in thinking that should they do so, "they could make to their age a contribution that would be unique" and which would "surpass the enthusiastic and conscientious efforts of even the great men of our time who have made such splendid use of the inspiration of Negro art."

But this provocative criticism by the director of the Denver Museum of Art overlooks one explanatory and extenuating fact: the young American Negro artist must evolve a racial style gradually and naturally. A sophisticated or forced exoticism would be as ridiculous at the one extreme as the all too-prevalent servile imitation is at the other. Moreover, most American Negro artists have not yet been exposed to the influence of African art. Their European contemporaries have been, and likewise the European-trained American artist. As recently as 1927, the first attempt was made to bring the Negro artist and the lay public in direct contact with African art. After an exhibition of the Blondian-Theatre-Arts Collection of sculpture and metal work from the Belgian Congo, part of this collection was purchased as the permanent and traveling collection of the Harlem Museum of African Art, organized at that time, and has since been housed in the exhibition rooms of the 135th Branch of the New York Public Library. The project was organized to preserve and interpret the ancestral arts and crafts of the African Negro, and to make them effective as fresh inspiration for Negro art expression and culture in America. Though yet so recent and meagre a contact, the work of several contemporary Negro artists has begun to reflect African influences. There are marked traces in the motives and design structure of the work of Aaron Douglas: reflected idioms—through European exposure—in the work of William Johnson and Hale Woodruff; and definite suggestions, as we have already noticed in the sculptures of Richmond Barthé and Sargent Johnson.

These are good omens for the development of a distinctively racial school of American Negro art. Naturally not all of our artists will confine their talents to race subjects or even to a racial style. However, the constructive lessons of African art are among the soundest and most

needed of art creeds today. They offset with equal force the banalities of sterile, imitative classicism and the empty superficialities of literal realism. They emphasize intellectually significant form, abstract design, formal simplicity, restrained dignity, and the unsentimental approach to the emotions. And more important still, since Africa's art creed is beauty in use, they call for an art vitally rooted in the crafts, uncontaminated with the blight of the machine, and soundly integrated with life.

Surely we should expect the liberating example of such an aesthetic to exert as marked an influence on the work of the contemporary Negro artist as it has already exerted on leading modernists like Picasso, Modigliani, Matisse, Epstein, Lipschitz, Brancusi, and others. Indeed we may expect even more with a group of artists becoming conscious of an historical and racial bond between themselves and African art. For them, rather than just a liberating idiom or an exotic fad, African art should act with all the force of a rediscovered folk-art, and give clues for the repression of a half-submerged race soul.

The younger generation seem to have accepted this challenge to recapture this heritage of creative originality and this former mastery of plastic form and decorative design and are attempting to carry them to distinctive new achievement in a vital and racially expressive art. One of the advances evident in a comparison of the five successful annual shows of the works of Negro artists, sponsored by the Harmon Foundation, along with marked improvement in the average technical quality, has been the steadily increasing emphasis upon racial themes and types in the work submitted. Thus the best available gauge records not only a new vitality and maturity among American Negro artists, but a pronounced trend toward racialism in both style and subject. In this downfall of classic models and Caucasian idols, one may see the passing of the childhood period of American Negro art, and with the growing maturity of the young Negro artist, the advent of a representatively racial school of expression, and an important new contribution, therefore, to the whole body of American art.

ALAIN LOCKE

African Art: Classic Style (1935)

Even to those who have known and appreciated it, African art has been seen through a glass darkly—either as exotic and alien or as the inspiration and source of contemporary modernism. The current exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art, aside from being the finest American showing of African art, reveals it for the first time in its own right as a mature and classic expression. The obvious intent has been to show African art in its own context, and to document its great variety of styles by showing a few pure and classic specimens of each. The whole wide range of extant collections, European as well as American, has been combed for the best examples; of the well-known collections only those of Corail-Stop and the Barnes Foundation are missing, and this wide and

highly selective culling has resulted in an exhibit which is a revelation even to the experts. Something like that change in evaluation which was made necessary when the art world first saw the Greek originals of the already familiar Roman copies, or discovered the firm strength and austerity of archaic and pure Greek art in contrast with the subtle delicacy of this art in its period of maturity and approaching decadence, must be the result of a showing such as this. Among other things, our notion of the exceptionally small scale of African sculpture must be abandoned since item after item proves the existence of a "grand style," with corresponding heroic proportion and simplicity. Seventy-two collections have been the vast reservoir from which a selection of six hundred items has

needed of art creeds today. They offset with equal force the banalities of sterile, imitative classicism and the empty superficialities of literal realism. They emphasize intellectually significant form, abstract design, formal simplicity, restrained dignity, and the unsentimental approach to the emotions. And more important still, since Africa's art creed is beauty in use, they call for an art vitally rooted in the crafts, uncontaminated with the blight of the machine, and soundly integrated with life.

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been chosen, and these range from small private collections of art amateurs to the great state collections at Leipzig, Munich, Berlin, Ter-vueren, the Paris Trocadéro Museum, and our own collections at Chicago, Brooklyn, the University of Pennsylvania, and even Harlem. Mr. James Johnson Sweeney is the presiding genius who has gleaned this vast territory and pressed out the essence, giving America not only its greatest show of African art among the seven that have been held here since the memorable first one of 1914 at "Gallery 291," but a master lesson in the classic idioms of at least fourteen of the great regional art styles of the African continent. Our title, then, is no exaggeration: this is a definitive exhibition of African classics.

Only such a weeding out could have revealed the classical maturity of this native art. As it stands out in a few specimens of pure style rather than the usual jumble of hybrids and second-rate examples, it is only too obvious that, instead of a heightened expression of this plastic idiom, we have in modernist art a dilution of its primitive strength and its classic simplicity. Mr. Sweeney goes further in his preface and argues that the new idiom of modern painting and sculpture was an independent development of European aesthetic that merely happened to be in the direction of the African idioms, and that the adoption of their characteristic Negroid form motives "appears today as having been more in the nature of attempts at interpretation, or expressions of critical appreciation, than true assimilations." Out of this novel thesis that these two movements—the new appreciation of African art and of the Negro plastic tradition, and the working out of the new aesthetic in European art—were coincidental rather than cause and effect, Mr. Sweeney draws deductions leading to the glorification rather than the belittlement of African art. He believes that African art is best understood directly, and in terms of its own historical development and background, and that it should be recognized in its own idiom and right, rather than in terms of its correlation with modern art or its admitted influence upon modern art. The exhibition vindicates this thesis and the claim

that "today the art of Negro Africa has its place of respect among the aesthetic traditions of the world."

Having learned the similarities of African art and modernist art, we are at last prepared to see their differences. The secret of this difference would seem to be a simple but seldom recognized fact. The modern artist, as a sophisticate, was always working with the idea of authorship and a technically formal idea of expressing an aesthetic. The native African sculptor, forgetful of self and fully projected into the idea, was always working in a complete fusion with the art object. Sheldon Cheney is exactly right when he says: "These little idols, fetishes and masks are direct expressions of religious emotion. The sculptor approaches his work in humility, always feeling that he is less important than the figure he is carving. His carving is for itself, out of his emotion." Although its vitality, its powerful simplification, "its unerring emphasis on the essential and its timelessness" were appreciated by the European modernist, and were technically and ideally inspiring, few or no modern artists could be at one and the same time native and masterful, primitive and mature. And so the enviable combination of naïveté and sophistication, of subtlety and strength could not be reacheived but only echoed. Few may be expected to agree until they have seen the exhibit, but few who have seen it may be expected to dissent.

The basis of the display, correctly enough, is regional. One by one the great regional styles are illustrated. However, the museum atmosphere is completely abolished by artful spacing and an effect of outdoor setting. In most instances the items can be examined, as they should be, from all points of view. African art, it must be remembered, is a sculptural art basically, and in addition—something which we have almost completely lost—a tactful art. Apart from texture and feel, I fancy there can be little appreciation of it in anything approaching native terms.

The French Sudan, never very well represented in American collections or exhibitions, has been aptly illustrated, principally from the great French collections; the Carré, Guillaume,

Tzara, Chauvet, and Trocadéro collections have furnished the majority of the forty specimens of this little known style. Its rigid angular simplicity and almost inscrutable force show what powerful originality there was in a purely native idiom, for this Sudanese art has few analogies except with the oldest and earliest of Greek archaics by which no one presumes it to have been influenced. Its traditions of ancestor worship and phallic symbolism are stamped deeply upon it but it is just as obviously pure and not applied art.

French Guinea, the Upper Volta, and Sierra Leone are also represented by a few choice examples. Distinctive though they are, they are obviously intermediate between the Sudanese and the French Ivory Coast idioms. They are seldom seen in the pure forms and older styles, as in this case, and are perhaps least familiar to American eyes. On the whole, we have by accident become familiar primarily with the art forms of the Congo—French and Belgian. We do know the Ivory Coast styles, but usually neither in pure form nor in their rich variety. It was the Barnes Collection that familiarized us with those curiously powerful "Dan" masks, a number of which in this exhibit are included from the collections of Paul Guillaume and Charles Ratton. Beside the more delicate and placid style of the surrounding Ivory Coast types, and the similarly graceful Baoulé style, they suggest some particularly strong ritualistic tradition separate from these. And yet a specimen like No. 101 in the catalogue illustrates not only that these styles are of the same region, but that they can be combined in something both beautiful and congruous. Here again no finer collection of Ivory Coast specimens has ever been displayed in America, whether of the large-scale carvings or of the imitable miniature carving for which the Gold and Ivory Coast is famous.

Naturally no exhibition emphasizing classical African styles would be complete without a good showing of Benin—represented here by well-selected examples of the early and classical bronzes of the non-Europeanized type and period. Side by side are picked specimens of Ifa and Yoruba sculptures; no doubt, to illustrate

Mr. Sweeney's challenging and probably correct hypothesis that the Benin art is a derivative of the classical Yoruban, because Ifa has been indicated as the ancestral source of the Benin religion. Surely the striking similarity of the art motifs seems to substantiate this, and the Ifa style is closest to the oldest and purest specimens of the Benin bronzes.

Dahomey, Ashanti, and the Gold Coast are richly represented in wood, ivory and metal media, and in a variety calculated to show the great technical proficiency of this region. Its stylistic relation to classic Benin and Ifa art is that of a later and somewhat decadent version in which technique has been overemphasized with the original significance apparently lapsing. The Ratton Collection has furnished some massive antique Dahomey metal sculptures, one instance a five-foot statue of the "God of War"; but no less striking and certainly more fascinating is the collection of ivory and metal miniatures. Even if we consider the well-known virtuosity of Oriental art in this field, with these Gold Coast miniature gold masks, ivory talismans and small brass weights of every conceivable variety and technical versatility, Africa enters the lists as a respectable contender in a field that until recently was thought to be an Oriental monopoly.

In the Cameroon section, plastic strength and simplicity have been emphasized rather than the usual grotesqueness or wealth of polychrome surface decoration. One mask (No. 326) from the von der Heydt Collection is exceedingly unusual, and a Cameroon seat with carved pendant figures (No. 336) is particularly fine. This region has been documented in a revealing way.

Similarly, the Gabun, Pahouin, and Mpongwe traditions are splendidly illustrated, the Guillaume Collection carrying most of the burden here. However, one of the most appealing specimens of Bieri (Gabon) head comes from the collection of Madame Helena Rubinstein. There are also three of the rare four-faced moon ritual masks of this district. The art of this region is a mystical art, with a baffling refinement and sophistication which we will not know how to account for until we know more

about the religious thought in which it had its roots.

One would naturally expect a heavy representation of the French and Belgian Congo, and we have it in all its dazzling variety from the pure geometric pattern art of the Bakubas—carving and weaving—to the curiously characteristic Congo figure carving. Beautiful specimens of every well-known type have been selected, but attention must be called to such unusual types as Nos. 465 and 452, and the amazingly delicate calabash fetish with carved female figure (No. 489).

Of the rare art of the Angola district (Portuguese East Africa), and of the famous Vatchivokoe figures, there is a respectable display. But not even this extraordinary collection has been able to get the very best specimens. This is an art idiom with which we have as yet very little acquaintance; it is so profound and strange even among the general profundity of African equatorial art that we may suspect one of the ultimate secrets of African art to lie in this tradition.

This exhibit will probably provoke no new furor of decorative mode or faddist wave of imitation as have previous shows. It presents African art as really too great for imitation or superficial transcription. Its result must surely be to engender respect for the native insight and amazement for the native technique. It even explains that trite commonplace about the decadence of native art in Africa; for although the intrusion of Western civilization did break down the life upon which this art flourished, no art can be expected to retain its classic period indefinitely. Even without external influences, a natural decadence would have set in; and the only reason that it was so long avoided was the simplicity of an art that was essentially anonymous and the profundity of a nature-philosophy that could be maintained almost without change for generations. So we have to deal with a phase of African art that has become classic in this final sense. The Museum of Modern Art has thus rendered again a great service to the contemporary understanding of great art.

JESSIE FAUSET

Henry Ossawa Tanner (1924)

The presence of the great Artist brought to my mind immediately certain felicitous phrases. He is tall and slender with grizzled hair and beard, and he is rather given to wearing grey. Wherefore I thought of "the good grey poet," for the connection was obvious to triteness. But later as I sat there listening to his gentle, courteous voice and noting his fine unaffected gestures, something within me kept saying: "The bravest are the tenderest." I was unable to "get" that at first and then it came to me that a question of superlatives was involved, and that what my sub-conscious was really driving at was some such expression as "The greatest are the simplest."

For Henry Ossawa Tanner is, of all the great men who have achieved, undoubtedly, the least affected and the least conscious of personal

glory. I liked that lack of affectation and understood it. It has always seemed to me to be of the essence of the greatness which is so real that it seeks no extra trappings, no blare of trumpets. It is content to be.

Mr. Tanner did not see his life biographically; so I had to prompt with questions—an easy thing for me to do, for I am ever eager to know what makes the clock go. He had always wanted to paint, he said, frowning a little with the effort, perhaps, to remember if anything else ever had meant a great deal to him. And so in the eighties after his father moved from Pittsburgh, Pa., where the artist was born, he found himself in the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, studying under Thomas Eakins with whom he stayed for four or five years. Here he studied drawing, modelling, and painting.

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I was surprised to learn of the modelling, but the making of portrait busts, he assured me, has long since been with him a favorite method of artistic expression. In those early days he had done a bust of Bishop Daniel Payne, and this field of art still intrigues and engrosses him.

Painting was naturally his forte. He is known internationally now as a painter of religious subjects. But he used to paint landscapes and many marine sketches, and of these he had an exhibit at the Academy of Fine Arts even before 1892. The significance of that "even" will be apparent later. He told me drolly that in those years it was difficult to dispose of a picture and that about this time he had sold one to a dealer for fifteen dollars. Two and a half years later the dealer sold the picture to one of his patrons for two hundred and fifty dollars. Instead of lamenting his luck, the young Artist took this as indicative of his real worth. Five or six years ago Mr. Tanner met the fortunate possessor of that fifteen-dollar picture. The man not only had never bought another "Tanner," but he considered that particular one the best of the artist's works!

It is pleasant to know that a picture painted in Atlantic City—"A Windy Day on the Meadows"—now in the Academy of Fine Arts, brought him not long after this one hundred dollars. This started the Artist's friends and gave him necessary encouragement.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men"—that tide came for Mr. Tanner in 1891. "I had saved a little money," he told me, and I sailed for Europe the end of December and arrived there in January, 1892." He became a pupil of two masters, Benjamin Constant and Jean-Paul Laurens, who conducted a studio together. This gave the student the advantage of a contrast in temperament and technic, in mood and method, from which he doubtless evolved a third, an individual mode, for himself. Mr. Constant remained a faithful and devoted friend of Mr. Tanner and indeed played the part of the Mentor of his studio for many years. His was one of the most important and distinguished figures in the Paris artist world; yet many a morning, Mr. Tanner, gratefully reminiscent, assured me, the great master left his *atelier* to visit with his former pupil.

Paris, toward which the artist had set his face instinctively in 1891, was destined, it turned out, to be his real home. From that time on, although for a period of years he made frequent pilgrimages back to the United States, he never was long from his chosen city. And Paris repaid his fealty. He had by now been exhibiting at the *Salon*, and in 1897 he received the gold medal for his picture, "The Raising of Lazarus," which was subsequently bought by the French Government. This gave him the final lacking fillip of self-confidence. He began turning out with a surer hand and a truer eye those masterpieces which brought him last year the ultimate distinction of being made by France a member of the Legion of Honor.

In 1898 the "Annunciation," which now hangs in Memorial Hall in Fairmont Park, Philadelphia, was added to the Wilstack Collection. Two years later "Nicodemus Coming to Christ" was purchased by the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and hung there. And Mr. Tanner was awarded the Lippincott Prize. The dawn of a new century was at hand—it seemed to the young Artist to presage the dawn of a new era. He married that year in London Miss Jessie Macaulay, and the couple started their life in Paris. Today their son Jesse Ossawa Tanner is a student in Cambridge University, in England.

Recognition of Mr. Tanner's work was now definite and widely spread. He is not a rapid worker; three pictures a year mark his top speed, but when was genius ever prodigal? Because his work has been leisureed, its disposition has been certain. His paintings have found homes in this country in the collection of Andrew Carnegie, in the museums of Pittsburgh, and in the Art Institute of Chicago. For one of these last, the "Two Disciples at the Tomb," Mr. Tanner received the Harris Prize. In 1907 the French government honored him again and bought his "Disciples at Emmaus" for the Luxembourg.

With all his honors and his interest in his art Mr. Tanner had time to help in the Great War. He worked with the Red Cross in Paris and even as far toward the front as Neufchateau. From the time America entered the War up to the time of the Armistice, he was in charge of convalescent camps.

His life holds but three great interests: his wife, his boy, and his art. He and his family live simply in Paris where he has the same studio which was his twenty-five years ago. Their summers are spent at Etaples or rather a brief space away from that "dirty but picturesque town," in a house which the artist has had put up in the forest. It was here that he received word of his greatest honor, that of election to the Legion of Honor. Avidly, my eyes fixed on the bit of ribbon in his buttonhole, I asked for details of this.

He was not sure; he could not quite remember! As he recalled it, some French friends had strolled over to the house in the forest to tell Mrs. Tanner that they had seen a notice in the *Journal Officiel* to the effect that one "Ash O. Tannaire" (H. O. Tanner) had been awarded the Legion of Honor for his work in art. "It said, 'artiste américain'; we thought it must be your husband." A belated letter in the post-office at Etaples revealed the fact that it was indeed her husband. Vainly I asked how the letter read. But this he could not recall!

On this visit he has spent about twelve weeks in America. Most of his time has been passed

in conducting a successful exhibit of his paintings in the Grand Central Palace in New York. America amazes and confuses him. There is too much noise; too much bustle; too much driving to save time and too little sensible expenditure of the time which has been saved. American colored people—his own people—interest and astound him—"they have made great progress and they are becoming a very attractive-looking folk." But "not for all his faith could see" would he exchange Paris, whither he returns March 22, for New York.

He has a nice chuckling sense of humor, this good, grey, courteous, kindly genius. His father was the eminent Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner who died recently, an octogenarian. A man came to the artist not long ago and said: "I want you to tell me the truth of this story. I understand that years ago your father wanted you to be a minister, but that you replied: 'No, father, you preach from the pulpit and I will preach with my brush.' Now is that true?"

"My answer," said the artist, "was: 'That's a pretty story—I won't destroy it.'"

HARRY ALAN POTAMKIN

African Plastic in Contemporary Art (1927)

The painters were the first of contemporary artists to utilize the plastic of the primitive Africans. A number of them, particularly Modigliani, played with its forms in their exercises in sculpture, but these exercises were generally not for the purposes of sculpture but as practice in forms to be carried over into painting. Modigliani was captured by the linear structure of the African masks and statues. In his few sculptures he indicates the detail in the African technique that interested him most, building on the vertical. The face is modelled to the straight line, the nose linear to accentuate the line. Fundamentally, this is more picturesque than sculpturesque and Modigliani carried the linear structure over to his painting. Frivolous

observers will sometimes belittle Modigliani for his limited scope, although he has painted on the elliptical and circular pattern, as well as vertical. But even in the vertical he was able to make variations complete in themselves. This is a greater feat than working in many separate forms. This was Modigliani's idiom, in combination with color, and he worked within the limitations he set himself. Philosophically he was nearer to the African sculptor than any other European artist. His Italian origin is evinced in the slight angles he gave to the heads of his subjects, an Italian grace that goes back to the earliest painters. Also in unblended color is he related to his Italian origins, as contrasted with the color mixtures of a Pascin.

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HARRY ALAN POTAMKIN

African Plastic in Contemporary Art (1927)

The painters were the first of contemporary artists to utilize the plastic of the primitive Africans. A number of them, particularly Modigliani, played with its forms in their exercises in sculpture, but these exercises were generally not for the purposes of sculpture but as practice in forms to be carried over into painting. Modigliani was captured by the linear structure of the African masks and statues. In his few sculptures he indicates the detail in the African technique that interested him most, building on the vertical. The face is modelled to the straight line, the nose linear to accentuate the line. Fundamentally, this is more picturesque than sculpturesque and Modigliani carried the linear structure over to his painting. Frivolous

observers will sometimes belittle Modigliani for his limited scope, although he has painted on the elliptical and circular pattern, as well as vertical. But even in the vertical he was able to make variations complete in themselves. This is a greater feat than working in many separate forms. This was Modigliani's idiom, in combination with color, and he worked within the limitations he set himself. Philosophically he was nearer to the African sculptor than any other European artist. His Italian origin is evinced in the slight angles he gave to the heads of his subjects, an Italian grace that goes back to the earliest painters. Also in unblended color is he related to his Italian origins, as contrasted with the color mixtures of a Pascin.

Modigliani's first paintings from the African are caryatids patterned directly on the Congo stool—and basin caryatids. He later adjusts the technique of the drawn line or the circular pattern to studies of sitting, then reclining, nudes.

The attenuated line supplied the idiom for Wilhelm Lehmbruck, a German sculptor, whose long kneeling figures are modelled on a slow moving line. Other slow moving lines play into the central structural line, even to the lines of the fingers playing into the hand. The structure is something like that of a tree, twigs, branches and boughs flowing into and out of the central trunk. Of course, Lehmbruck establishes definite intervals in his radiations of lines, and this interval of line in variations (in its angle, reference to the mass, etc.) is rhythm.

Among the first to see the possibilities of the African compositions as modern method was Pablo Picasso. Before 1907 Picasso was influenced variously by the Italians, El Greco, Toulouse-Lautrec, Cézanne, and others, who called his attention to the problem of formal design and relationships of fundamental forms. In 1907 he encountered the Negro mask which gave him an immediate direction. The first inferences Picasso drew from the mask indicate his quick grasp of visual essentials, although in his first pictorialization of them he is simply duplicating these essentials, so that his drawings resemble caricatures. Following the progress from these drawings of 1907, one observes the successive developments in the application of these inferences, the new combinations of the essentials, the crossing with the inferences from other plastics, and their induction into the more mathematic cubism. It is wrong to assume that Picasso "outgrew" African art. The assumption is based on snobbery. Picasso is an artist of powerful synthetizing mind and artistry. He does not exclude any contributing experience nor withhold from any aesthetic contact; he fuses his intimacies into an expression upon which he places his personal imprint.

Giorgio de Chirico will use egg-shaped stylized heads (African derivation) upon a mechanistic torso draped in Greek folds. But the parts are not fused as are Picasso's. The separation of entities in Picasso's case has been only one step

in the completion of the painting; the final painting is a re-establishment of a new totality with these separate entities—a fundamental African principle. Chirico's basic technique of disrelation is dogmatic of Italian futurism and French super-realism, but he avoids final disassociation by placing the various parts in a relation to space. Space unites the separate entities by virtue of a common relationship to it. Chirico by this visual factor has been rescued from the anti-plastic of futurism and the indirection of super-realism.

The egg shaped head of a Chirico philosopher is found also in the egg-shaped forms or arc-forms in general of Brancusi who followed the implication of African art to its surd. Constantine Brancusi's conception of pure art is the complete objectivity of the artist. The material shall determine procedure, the artist may not superimpose his idea or purpose upon the material. The artist must call forth the discoverable qualities of the material, the grain in the marble, the lustre, etc., the pure form, which in marble is circular. Brancusi opposes the tenet of transcending the medium (yet he does transcend in many instances); he is a minimizer of the medium; the finished sculpture is never (he would have it) anything else but the medium.

Raymond Duchamp Villon stylized the dissociated bodily parts in curved masses that interrelate into a fluid composition. The feet are solid bases like those of the African sculptures, but by the raising of one leg a delicacy of grace is achieved instead of a stationary solidity. The figure is seated in relaxation, a superb achievement with a stylized, abstract pattern. (It is probably from Duchamp Villon's sculptures that the new store-window lay figures have been taken.)

The principle of formal design as expressed in Negro art has been most emphatically used in sculpture by Jacques Lipschutz. He has made use of the rhythmic alternation of contrasting forms which served so well in the application of the principles of cubism. Lipschutz more than any other sculptor accepted and utilized the surface inscription as part of sculptural design, a device I find unacceptable as sculpture. Today he is modelling sculptures in the flat, not reliefs, for

depth is present in the relationship between the planes, but sculptures, like unleavened bread.

"Relationship between the planes" recalls the development of another relationship, the hollow-ridge formula for forehead and eyes, utilized by numerous sculptors: Jacob Epstein, Pablo Manes, Ossip Zadkine, Chana Orloff, etc. The constructivists, Alexander Archipenko and Rudolf Belling, after utilizing the formula, extend its implication to satisfy their mechanistic concept and excavate the hollow entirely, so that air-space is part of the composition; a sculptural attempt to suggest the fourth dimension, it has been suggested. Belling has followed the stylistic principle to build a human portrait on the basis of machine parts and forms, an amazing performance. Archipenko extended the African composite sculpture (wood and glass, wood and mother of pearl, wood and paint, etc.) in his sculpto-painting. The constructivists and German expressionists have made composite uses of various domestic and other contemporary materials: hair combs and tramway transfers; as well as celluloid and glass sculptures in which the architectural principle and the principle of air as sculptural space are enacted. Among the constructivists, Willy Baumeister builds up his forms (in painting) ovally. But he is not entirely removed from an attempt at resemblances. Chirico's egg-shaped philosopher has his countenance lined abstractly. Baumeister's faces maintain the relationship of features.

Henri Matisse, one of the most important influences on contemporary painting, was himself influenced by the linear stylization of Negro sculpture which, however, served to give exactness to two influences of greater potency with Matisse: Persian caligraphic art, Hindu sculpture. His use of African plastic, working on the caligraphy of Persian art, carries on the tradition of Modigliani. Marie Laurencin further reduces visual depth, making linear statements (see especially her charcoal drawings) after the African. Irene Lagut stylizes her forms linearly, her dog a series of curves like a Dahomey relief.

Ossip Zadkine uses the solid mass in his sculpture, and stylizes the face to the extent of delineating the nose by drawing the line, bringing into sculpture Matisse caligraphy, a

dubious transaction. Chana Orloff undulates the massed thighs once, lightening the solid weight. Otherwise the mass head relates to the mass thigh much as it does in a Zadkine sculpture. There is very little that is organic here.

This brings us to Henri Gaudier-Breszka. I believe Gaudier, who was killed in his early twenties in the War, would, had he lived, have indicated the finest utilization and conversion of the African plastic. Much superior to his elder colleague, Jacob Epstein, he could follow a tendency to its basis and there attack it. The mass structure of African sculpture, delineation, geometric contrasts, he at once apprehended and analyzed. He had come to the conclusion before his death that sculpture—particularly contemporary sculpture—should be organic. It would be worth a great deal to us to know what he would have done in relating the organic of sculpture to the abstract mind.

Perhaps the answer is in the sculpture of Gaston Lachaise, a Frenchman resident in America. Lachaise's bronzes are built with small mass head to large mass body, the dissociated parts—component circles—are joined into a total organism. The dissociation takes place within the already established organism. Soutine effects a similar totality in painting, although less clearly and more thickly than does Lachaise.

African sculpture reached Germany later than it did France. It received its most vivid stimulus in Carl Einstein's collection and book *Negerplastik*, 1915. But the Germans, outside of a Lehmbruck or a Belling, did very little original with it. Karl Schmidt Rottluff, a typical instance, reproduced in wood and painting the raw block form of the least attractive examples of the sculpture. It has served the stolid primitivism of a Kirchner, but whatever of value in African sculpture the Germans found was carried over from the French.

There are others who have made use of the African plastic: Henri Laurens, Leon Borget (an almost unknown French sculptor). John Mowbray-Clarke, André Derain, Marcel Gromaire, Wyndham Lewis, Duncan Grant, Dobson, Bolin, Juan Gris, Fernand Legar, La Fauconnier, Kvapil, etc., the list is indefinite. Derain, a singular artist, employed the elongation of the face and

bodily parts and the reduction to the geometric outline; Gromaire built group portraits on the perpendicular and rectangular: Gris dissociated contributing details in contrast and repetition with exquisite sensitivity; Leger satisfied the dissociation in a unifying mechanico-abstract pattern; etc. Negro plastic enhanced the purist values in the various aesthetic dogmas: Cubism, Purism, Fauvism, Synchronism, Vorticism (Wyn-dham Lewis and Gaudier), Expressionism, Futurism, Dadaism, Superrealism, ad infinitum. It served through the agency of the artists mentioned, Archipenko, Duchamp-Villon, Brancusi especially, to revive the derivative crafts: of the lay figure for store displays, fabrics costumes (Bakst), women's fashions (Paul Poiret), etc.; illustration of books and magazines, caricature (see the work of a Covarrubias), posters. Strangely however the initial stimulator in African art was not carried over to its most obvious uses: the African mask has been little used in the theatre and dance. This is chiefly due to the continual misstatement of the means of the theatre and dance; their practitioners have preferred the oriental mask of characteristic to the African mask of design. Although in at least one foreign school of the theatre, masks have been made on the basis of plastic design from the conventional papier mache used in the typical mask.

The African instinct was most successful in wood. The few examples of stone sculpture show no great understanding of the possibilities of stone. Brass and copper were much better understood by the medieval Jewish craftsman of Russia and Poland who hammered the design into the metal. The Africans cut their masks from the copper, attaching frequently

strips to the outlines of the excavations. Their interest was in the use rather than in the material. Leon Borget is one French artist who has worked in brass (has just begun to do so) from the African method. (Derain's masks are hammered) Borget has attached, in his first experiment, loosely and removably a black sheetiron forehead to the yellow brass of the countenance, accentuating the hollow-ridge contrast.

These notes must not be taken as more than fragmentary. I have sought to isolate a few of the African threads in a few of the artists who have, mainly consciously, worked the threads into their work. I have also wished to indicate how the principles of African plastic served to augment current tendencies and concentrate the aesthetic concern upon the strictly inherent. There have been multitudes of artists working unconsciously with these African forms, some borrowing matter-of-factly from the original contemporary utilizers of this old art. These borrowers have frequently misunderstood the import of the thing they were duplicating, because they could not see the structural basis upon which the final complicated design was built. Contrary to Willard Huntington Wright, it was not the minor artist who was captured by the art of the barbarians, but the major artist who recognized the major argument of his art. I do not believe that much more can be learned from it, but I am certain its possible combinations have not been exhausted. And it will do the artist considerable good to refer to this art directly for its demonstration of an aesthetic enactment, rather than forever record it thrice-removed and inaccurately, like a rumor.

ROMARE BEARDEN

The Negro Artist and Modern Art (1934)

For the moment, let us look back into the beginnings of modern art. It is really nothing new, merely an expression projected through new forms, more akin to the spirit of the times.

Fundamentally the artist is influenced by the age in which he lives. Then for the artist to express an age that is characterized by machinery, skyscrapers, radios, and the generally quickened

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Fundamentally the artist is influenced by the age in which he lives. Then for the artist to express an age that is characterized by machinery, skyscrapers, radios, and the generally quickened

cadences of modern life, it follows naturally that he will break from many of the outmoded academic practices of the past. In fact every great movement that has changed the ideals and customs of life, has occasioned a change in the accepted expression of that age.

Modern art has passed through many different stages. There have been the periods of the Impressionists, the Post-Impressionists, the Cubists, the Futurists, and hosts of other movements of lesser importance. Even though the use of these forms is on the decline, the impression they made in art circles is still evident. They are commendable in the fact that they substituted for mere photographic realism, a search for inner truths.

Modern art has borrowed heavily from Negro sculpture. This form of African art had been done hundreds of years ago by primitive people. It was unearthed by archaeologists and brought to the continent. During the past twenty-five years it has enjoyed a deserved recognition among art lovers. Artists have been amazed at the fine surface qualities of the sculpture, the vitality of the work, and the unsurpassed ability of the artists to create such significant forms. Of great importance has been the fact that the African would distort his figures, if by so doing he could achieve a more expressive form. This is one of the cardinal principles of the modern artist.

It is interesting to contrast the bold way in which the African sculptor approached his work, with the timidity of the Negro artist of today. His work is at best hackneyed and uninspired, and only mere rehashings from the work of any artist that might have influenced him. They have looked at nothing with their own eyes—seemingly content to use borrowed forms. They have evolved nothing original or native like the spiritual, or jazz music.

Many of the Negro artists argue that it is almost impossible for them to evolve such a sculpture. They say that since the Negro is becoming so amalgamated with the white race, and has accepted the white man's civilization he must progress along those lines. Even if this is true, they are certainly not taking advantage of the Negro scene. The Negro in his various

environments in America, holds a great variety of rich experiences for the genuine artists. One can imagine what men like Daumier, Grosz, and Cruickshank might have done with a locale like Harlem, with all its vitality and tempo. Instead the Negro artist will proudly exhibit his "Scandinavian Landscape," a locale that is entirely alien to him. This will of course impress the uninitiated, who through some feeling of inferiority toward their own subject matter, only require that a work of art have some sort of foreign stamp to make it acceptable.

I admit that at the present time it is almost impossible for the Negro artist not to be influenced by the work of other men. Practically all the great artists have accepted the influence of others. But the difference lies in the fact that the artist with vision, sees his material, chooses, changes, and by integrating what he has learned with his own experiences, finally molds something distinctly personal. Two of the foremost artists of today are the Mexicans, Rivera and Orozco. If we study the work of these two men, it is evident that they were influenced by the continental masters. Nevertheless their art is highly original, and steeped in the tradition and environment of Mexico. It might be noted here that the best work of these men was done in Mexico, of Mexican subject matter. It is not necessary for the artist to go to foreign surroundings in order to secure material for his artistic expression. Rembrandt painted the ordinary Dutch people about him, but he presented human emotions in such a way that their appeal was universal.

Several other factors hinder the development of the Negro artist. First, we have no valid standard of criticism; secondly, foundations and societies which supposedly encourage Negro artists really hinder them; thirdly, the Negro artist has no definite ideology or social philosophy.

Art should be understood and loved by the people. It should arouse and stimulate their creative impulses. Such is the role of art, and this in itself constitutes one of the Negro artist's chief problems. The best art has been produced in those countries where the public most loved and cherished it. In the days of the Renaissance

the towns-folk would often hold huge parades to celebrate an artist's successful completion of a painting. We need some standard of criticism then, not only to stimulate the artist, but also to raise the cultural level of the people. It is well known that the critical writings of men like Herder, Schlegel, Taine, and the system of Marxian dialectics, were as important to the development of literature as any writer.

I am not sure just what form this system of criticism will take, but I am sure that the Negro artist will have to revise his conception of art. No one can doubt that the Negro is possessed of remarkable gifts of imagination and intuition. When he has learned to harness his great gifts of rythmn and pours it into his art—his chance of creating something individual will be heightened. At present it seems that by a slow study of rules and formulas the Negro artist is attempting to do something with his intellect, which he has not felt emotionally. In consequence he has given us poor echoes of the work of white artists—and nothing of himself.

It is gratifying to note that many of the white critics have realized the deficiencies of the Negro artists. I quote from a review of the last Harmon exhibition, by Malcolm Vaughan, in *The New York American*: "But in the field of painting and sculpture, they appear peculiarly backward, indeed so inept as to suggest that painting and sculpture are to them alien channels of expression." I quote from another review of the same exhibition, that appeared in *The New York Times*:

"Such racial aspects as may once have figured have virtually disappeared, so far as some of the work is concerned. Some of the artists, accomplished technicians, are seen to have slipped into grooves of one sort or another. There is the painter of the Cézannesque still life, there is the painter of the Gauginesque nudes, and there are those who have learned various 'dated' modernist tricks."

There are quite a few foundations that sponsor exhibitions of the work of Negro artists. However praise-worthy may have been the spirit of the founders the effect upon the Negro artist has been disastrous. Take for instance the

Harmon Foundation. Its attitude from the beginning has been of a coddling and patronizing nature. It has encouraged the artist to exhibit long before he has mastered the technical equipment of his medium. By its choice of the type of work it favors, it has allowed the Negro artist to accept standards that are both artificial and corrupt.

It is time for the Negro artist to stop making excuses for his work. If he must exhibit let it be in exhibitions of the caliber of "The Carnegie Exposition." Here among the best artists of the world his work will stand or fall according to its merits. A concrete example of the accepted attitude towards the Negro artist recently occurred in California where an exhibition coupled the work of Negro artists with that of the blind. It is obvious that in this case there is definitely created a dual standard of appraisal.

The other day I ran into a fellow with whom I had studied under George Grosz, at the "Art Students' League." I asked him how his work was coming. He told me that he had done no real work for about six months.

"You know, Howard," he said, "I sort of ran into a blind alley with my work; I felt that it definitely lacked something. This is because I didn't have anything worthwhile to say. So I stopped drawing. Now I go down to the meetings of The Marine and Industrial Workers' Union. I have entered whole-heartedly in their movement."

We talked about Orozco, who had lost his arm in the revolutionary struggle in Mexico. No wonder he depicted the persecution of the underclass Mexicans so vividly—it had all been a harrowing reality for him.

So it must be with the Negro artist—he must not be content with merely recording a scene as a machine. He must enter whole heartedly into the situation which he wishes to convey. The artist must be the medium through which humanity expresses itself. In this sense the greatest artists have faced the realities of life, and have been profoundly social.

I don't mean by this that the Negro artist should confine himself only to such scenes as lynchings, or policemen clubbing workers.

From an ordinary still life painting by such a master as Chardin we can get as penetrating an insight into eighteenth century life, as from a drawing by Hogarth of a street-walker. If it is the race question, the social struggle, or

whatever else that needs expression, it is to that the artist must surrender himself. An intense, eager devotion to present day life, to study it, to help relieve it, this is the calling of the Negro artist.

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