AFRICAN-AMERICAN WRITERS AND THE LEGACY OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE, 1920-1970

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PREFACE

This study began several years ago in an English graduate seminar on the Harlem Renaissance. It has since evolved into a reinterpretation of this period and its cultural implications for race relations. Past scholarship of the Harlem Renaissance limits it to an artistic movement with little historical consequence. This dissertation challenges the older interpretations and argues that the Harlem Renaissance is significant for its influence on the development of interracial relationships. Black writers and some white social reformers and humanitarians, or Negrotarians, established a cultural bridge which provided an intellectual interracial forum. The bridge represented a recognition of cultural equality and provided strength for many African-American writers of the late 1930s through the early 1950s to criticize the commanding role of white social reformers in the struggle for racial equality. The steps taken by writers such as Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison influenced African-American intellectuals and leaders of the 1960s to claim independence from white dominance and take control of the civil rights movement. This study was written to highlight the significance and historical importance of the Harlem Renaissance and its legacy.

Chapter One discusses the origins of the Harlem Renaissance. Included is an overview of the Great Migration of African Americans to the North in the late Nineteenth century. The effects of the migration on the development of black neighborhoods or ghettos is important to understand why Harlem became the "Negro Mecca." Chapter One also describes the evolution of African-American intellectual history, contrasting the division between Booker T. Washington and his advocation of racial compliance with W.E.B. Du Bois and the black avant-garde's support of integration. Finally, this chapter depicts Harlem in the 1920s--the nightlife, the artists, and the importance of jazz as a cultural bridge between black and white Americans.

Chapter Two focuses on relationships between the most influential Negrotarians and their beneficiaries. The Negrotarians under study are photographer and novelist Carl Van Vechten; publisher Alfred Knopf and his wife, Blanche; political activist Joel Spingarn, his wife, Amy, and brother Arthur; and the socialite Charlotte Osgood Mason. A discussion of the artists who received financial and aesthetic support from the abovementioned patrons includes Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Wallace Thurman, Jean Toomer, and Walter White. Lastly, this chapter will examine the relationship between the Negrotarians and artists to assess the effects of patronization on the cultural exchange.

Chapter Three concentrates on novelist and poet Langston Hughes. Hughes seems to have had a more emotional

attatchment to his patron than did other artists. However, a closer examination of his personal correspondence and works published at the end of the Harlem Renaissance reveals Hughes's skill in subtly ridiculing Negrotarians who unconsciously maintain a racist society by supporting its political and social institutions. This chapter also reviews literature of this period with a theme similar to Hughes's. The literary use of "the art of the trickster" or deception and "passing," or African Americans portraying themselves as white in society, are discussed.

Chapter Four focuses on Richard Wright. Living in New York at the time of the Harlem Renaissance, he began writing in the late 1930s. Wright represents a generation of writers influenced by the cultural movement of the 1920s. His style is different from the earlier generation, overtly reflecting the growing resentment of white patronization. In his novel, Native Son, Wright ridicules and chastises white humanitarians and social reformers and the paradoxes in their concern for racial inequality. Wright is also critical of political and social activists such as white members of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) and their attempts to organize African Americans.

Chapter Five examines the generation of writers following the Harlem Renaissance. This chapter focuses on Ralph Ellison and his response to white humanitarians and the CPUSA taking the role of Negrotarian. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the ordeals of many black intellectuals in the CPUSA created a chasm between black writers and white

social activists. A comparison of Native Son and Invisible Man finds a growing frustration of the writers with the role played by white social activists in the movement for racial equality. However, the two writers differ in their approach to criticize white chauvinism or racial bias in the party. For instance, Ellison in Invisible Man adopts Langston Hughes's method and is more subtle in his criticism than Wright.

The Conclusion analyzes the influence of the Harlem Renaissance generation, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison on the writers of the 1960s. This discussion will focus on writers such as Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and James Baldwin and the relationships between black social reformers and white politicians. A recurring theme emerges in literature from the 1920s through the 1960s in which white paternalism is rejected by some black intellectuals choosing to control their own destiny. This theme is evident in the protest literature of the 1960s and in the reaction of black leaders to political and legal reform. The frustration espoused by some African-American intellectuals in the 1960s indicates that the cultural bridge formed during the Harlem Renaissance created a legacy of greater independence for the African-American intelligentsia.

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The opinions expressed are my own and I take full responsibility for any errors or blunders in the text.

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NOMENCLATURE

LH, JWJ, Beinecke: Langston Hughes Papers, James Weldon Johnson Memorial\Special Collections, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Division, Yale University Library, New Haven.

ZNH, JWJ, Beinecke: Zora Neale Hurston Collection, James Weldon Johnson Memorial\Special Collections, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Division, Yale University Library, New Haven.

JWJ, Beinecke: James Weldon Johnson Memorial\Special Collections, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Division, Yale University Library, New Haven.

CM, JWJ, Beinecke: Claude McKay Collection, James Weldon Johnson Memorial\Special Collections, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Division, Yale University Library, New Haven.

JT, JWJ, Beinecke: Jean Toomer Papers, James Weldon Johnson Memorial\Special Collections, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Division, Yale University Library, New Haven.

RW, JWJ, Beinecke: Richard Wright Papers, James Weldon Johnson Memorial\Special Collections, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Division, Yale University Library, New Haven.

AL, MS, Howard: Alain Locke Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

AS, MS, Howard: Arthur B. Spingarn, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

DW, Radcliffe: Dorothy West Papers, 1911-1985-The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women, Radcliffe College, Cambridge.

CPUSA: Communist Party United States of America

INTRODUCTION

> "I was there. I had a swell time while it lasted. But I thought it wouldn't last long. For how could a large and enthusiastic number of people be crazy about Negroes forever?"[1]

Langston Hughes's often-quoted lament on the Harlem Renaissance reflects a popular interpretation of the historical importance of this cultural movement that white patrons considered African-American art and literature simply a fad during the 1920s. For over a decade, many white socialites became intrigued with black American art. Based on this sentiment, some historians consider this period as *only* an awakening of art and literature. For instance, Cary Wintz asserts that the Harlem Renaissance was "a psychology, a state of mind or an attitude, shared by a number of black writers and intellectuals who centered their activities around Harlem in the late 1920s and early 1930s."[2] Superficially, the Harlem Renaissance embodied both a black artistic awakening and white discovery of black artists. However, a thorough and critical analysis finds that the Harlem Renaissance also created a bridge between black and white cultures.

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[1] Langston Hughes, The Big Sea: An Autobiography (New York: Hill and Wang, 1940), 228.

[2] Cary Wintz, Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance (Houston: Rice University, 1988), 2.

During the Harlem Renaissance a cultural transference or exchange made a recognition of racial equality possible. For many white Americans, this period represents a challenge to racial stereotypes. Some white people, drawn to the artistic energy of the movement, helped erect a cultural bridge or interracial forum. Most times, the cultural bridge gave white humanitarians or "Negrotarians" an opportunity to fraternize with African Americans.[3] Before the Harlem Renaissance, few northern white humanitarians and intellectuals ever encountered or understood African-American culture. The bridge opened African-American culture to many white Americans, and a universal quality of racial equality emerged in the music and the words of the writers.[4] Few white Americans understood and accepted African-American culture. However, some Negrotarians recognized the universal quality of black culture, that African Americans were not inferior in intellect, physiology, or creativity to white Americans.[5]

The term Negrotarian was first used by Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale Hurston in reference to white patrons of the arts. In this study, the term is expanded to

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[3] The term appears in David Levering Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1981), 193.

[4] Samuel Floyd, "Music in the Harlem Renaissance: An Overview," in his Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 4-5; and Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue, 152.

[5] Eugene Levy, James Weldon Johnson: Black Leader, Black Voice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 320; Floyd, "Music in the Harlem Renaissance," 2.

include white social reformers and social activists such as the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA).[6] The word Negrotarian is comprised of the root word *'Negro'*; a term used in the pre-World War II era as a racial designation for African-Americans. The suffix *-arian* describes people who "support, advocate or practice a doctrine, theory, or set of principles associated with the base word."[7] In this study, the term Negrotarian denotes white humanitarians, benefactors, and political activists interested in racial equality and bettering social and economic conditions for African-Americans between 1920 and 1970.

Many white humanitarians who became familiar with African-American artists and their culture often sustained these relationships through financial patronization. As time passed, some African-American intellectuals resented the increasing economic and social dominance of Negrotarians. Harold Cruse described the problem with Negrotarian patronage:

> There was nothing morally or ethically wrong in accepting patronage on the outset. The problem was that the pattern was accepted [by both black and white Americans] as a permanent modus operandi in interracial cultural affairs.[8]

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[6] When the Harlem Renaissance ended black intellectuals became involved in the CPUSA hoping to gain social and economic equality.

[7] Webster's College Dictionary, McGraw-Hill Edition (New York: Random House, 1991), 74.

[8] Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York: Morrow Publishers, 1967), 38.

Several of the Harlem Renaissance writers dealt with conflicting emotions of both love and hate for their patrons.[9] The attitudes of some black writers publishing between 1920 and 1960 reflects a growing hostility toward Negrotarians.

Beyond the confines of an art and literary movement existed an association of black intellectuals and Negrotarians. Harold Cruse argues that:

> The Harlem intellectuals were so overwhelmed at being "discovered" and courted that they allowed a *bona fide* [sic] cultural movement, which issued from the social system as naturally as a gushing spring, to degenerate into a pampered and paternalistic vogue.[10]

Some black artists viewed white patronage as oppressive. However, most realized the need for financial and aesthetic support.

Tension between black intellectuals and Negrotarians escalated as sponsorship continued into the late 1930s and 1940s through organizations such as the CPUSA. After the Harlem Renaissance, some black writers attacked both social reformers and social activists. Langston Hughes's The Ways of White Folks, Richard Wright's Native Son, and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man provide excellent examples of the black writers resentment. Hughes's The Ways of White Folks

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[9] Hughes, The Big Sea, 316. As Nathan Huggins wrote in an interview, prior to Langston Hughes's death, the Hughes still refused to mention his patron Charlotte Osgood Mason by name and continued to refer to her as Godmother.; See Nathan Huggins, Harlem Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), note #25, chapter 3.

[10] Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 52.

(1934) is a compilation of short stories that provides a starting point for protest literature, drawing attention to the problematic relationship between the white benefactor and the black beneficiary.[11] Richard Wright's Native Son (1940) reflects the growing disillusionment of black intellectuals with both socialites and the CPUSA. Wright's theme reappears in Ellison's Invisible Man (1952).[12] Ellison echoes Wright's objection to white social activists who used black civil rights to advance their political agenda. Like Wright, Ellison emphasizes the blindness of white Americans to racial injustice, poverty, and ignorance.[13]

The Harlem Renaissance is important in the context of twentieth century United States cultural history, as well as African-American history, because it represents a vital stage in the development of race relations. The Harlem Renaissance's historical significance extends beyond the confines of African-American history. The cultural bridge established interracial relationships which influenced later generations of black intellectuals and white social

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[11] Waters E. Turpin, ed., "Four Short Fiction Writers of the Harlem Renaissance: Their Legacy of Achievement," CLA Journal 11 (Summer 1967): 64; and Peter Bruck, "Langston Hughes: The Blues I'm Playing," chap. in The Black American Short Story in the 20th Century: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. (Amsterdam: Greener Publishing, 1977), 74.

[12] Richard K. Barksdale and Kenneth Kinnamon, eds. Black Writers of America (New York: MacMillan, 1972), 683-687.

[13] In Richard Wright's Native Son, Mrs. Dalton, a white, wealthy, humanitarian, is blind and ignorant of interracial problems in society, and in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man the Narrator, like black America, remains unseen by white America.

reformers. Recent historians note the importance of this period in African-American history but often fail to synthesize it into United States history. Since the 1960s, scholars of black history have tried to fit African-American history into sub-divisions of United States history. Nathan Huggins concludes:

> Historians of the Afro-American experience must reach beyond ethnic history by choosing topics which have historical significance beyond narrow bounds of race, by developing the implications of their work for the general history, and by raising through their work general questions.[14]

An analysis of the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance and an examination of the relationships between the artists and their patrons highlights the importance of this period as a cultural movement.

Black nationalism, reemerging in the 1930s and continuing through the 1960s, reflected the deteriorating relationship between black artists and white intellectuals at the end of the Harlem Renaissance. The deterioration of these types of interracial relationships continued with some black intellectuals and white members of the CPUSA. The recognition of racial equality by some Negrotarians inspired African-American intellectuals to voice their criticism of the inherent racial inequalities generally found in American society. Their literature and poetry included criticism of Negrotarian attempts to establish integration which often

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[14] Nathan Huggins, "Integrating Afro-American History into American History," in Interpretations of American History, ed. Darlene Clark Hine (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1986), 160.

resulted in social dominance. Subsequent generations of black writers and intellectuals continued this theme of dissatisfaction with racial inequality in the United States. Finally, the disillusionment and frustration expressed by black writers in the 1930s and 1940s culminated in a racial division among activists in the civil rights movement during the 1960s. The festering resentment of many African-American intellectuals became vocalized in the protests of black militant leaders. By the 1960s the continuous presence of white social reformers in the movement for racial equality led to a division between white and black social activists. This racial tension among African-American intellectuals and their white counterparts is rooted in the 1920s.

Since the flourishing of historiography in the study of African-American history during the 1960s, many historians have debated the success or failure of the Harlem Renaissance in terms of the role of white sponsors. Some historians believe that white benefactors tainted the movement. For example, Nathan Huggins in Harlem Renaissance questioned the definition of the "New Negro". Huggins interpreted the Renaissance as a failure because black Americans integrated into society by creating art for a white market.[15] He added that the sponsorship of black artists by white socialites further corrupted the movement. David Levering Lewis in When Harlem Was in Vogue and Cary

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[15] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 305.

Wintz in Black Culture and The Harlem Renaissance argued that the movement provided financial and aesthetic markets for black artists that otherwise would not have existed. Recently, Steven Watson in The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920-1930 supported Lewis's and Wintz's interpretation and notes the importance of the period's multiculturalism.[16] George Hutchinson in The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White advanced this argument through his literary criticism which focused on modernism in popular journals of the Harlem Renaissance.[17] Hutchinson wrote that white patronage did not corrupt the movement, rather "its accomplishments owe much to its interracial character and its related interracial diversity."[18] Hutchinson believes that the Harlem Renaissance represented a "meeting of black and white intellectuals on the grounds of American cultural nationalism was a development with long-lasting and generally positive results."[19]

This dissertation expands recent scholarship in theorizing that the Harlem Renaissance created a cultural bridge which provided an interracial forum for racial discourse. The bridge allowed for cultural transference

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[16] Steven Watson, The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920-1930 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995); Also, see Watson for an overview of white patrons not discussed in this study.

[17] George Hutchinson, The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 1995).

[18] Ibid., 16.

[19] Ibid., 2.

exposing many white Americans to African-American music, art, literature, painting, sculpting, and poetry. For Negrotarians, the bridge represented a recognition of the racial equality of African Americans. However, a paradox existed for both black intellectuals and Negrotarians because outside the confines of their interracial relationships existed a prejudicial and racist white dominated society.

The effects of white influences and patronage on black intellectuals during the Harlem Renaissance is not easily defined. Eventually, most artists became financially independent. Only Langston Hughes appears to have suffered some emotional stress in realizing that his patron Charlotte Osgood Mason's interest was in his "primitivism" and not his artistic maturation.[20] Regarding other Negrotarians, there existed a genuine support and concern for the social, political, and artistic development of African Americans, and this sustained the cultural bridge. Carl Van Vechten is a prime example of a Negrotarian who accepted and understood African-American culture. Likewise, some black intellectuals criticized without fear of retribution or loss of sponsorship Van Vechten's insights in his novel Nigger Heaven.[21]

Nathan Huggins proposes that "white commerce had

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[20] Hughes, The Big Sea, 325.

[21] The criticism of Nigger Heaven by black intellectuals is discussed in Chapter 3.; Carl Van Vechten, Nigger Heaven (New York: Grossett and Dunlop Publishers, 1926).

determined what was to be considered successful business, industry, and art. A white establishment had really defined art and culture."[22] His argument is correct, in so far as it was true that the popular standards existing to evaluate art were those of a white society. Nonetheless, the influence of Negrotarians and their monetary support of black artists does not cheapen the achievements of the renaissance. While the Harlem Renaissance did not create significant political and social gains for black Americans, it did foster a working relationship between African-American artists and Negrotarians. For the most part, the Harlem Renaissance provided a cultural exchange between many black intellectuals and whites in which African-American writers expressed criticism of racial inequalities.

Harold Cruse charges that the Harlem Renaissance failed because "a cultural renaissance that engenders barriers to the emergence of the creative writer is a contradiction in terms, an emasculated movement."[23] However, he correctly surmises that "Negroes had to see whites without the awe of love or the awe of hate and themselves truly, without myth or fantasy, in order that they could be themselves in life and art."[24] What is missing from previous studies, including Cruse's, of the Harlem Renaissance are the cultural and historical implications of the interracial

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[22] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 305.

[23] Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 37.

[24] Ibid., 307.

relationships experience. Past studies of the Harlem Renaissance failed to examine the intangible benefits that many black artists received from the Negrotarians' recognition of equality in African-American culture and art.

The explosion of African-American culture expressed itself through music, art, and literature. Certain black artists and writers believed enough in themselves to allow white Americans to experience this cultural expression. Some Negrotarians such as Carl Van Vechten appreciated this gesture and developed healthy relationships with the writers. Many writers then exposed the inherent racial inequalities of American society through the social and economic limitations placed on black Americans.

As the Harlem Renaissance ended, many black writers, hoping to end racial injustices in the United States, became affiliated with the CPUSA. The positive responses of white patrons to black culture encouraged black artists to move ahead. When the cultural exchange did not result in racial equality, many black intellectuals turned to the CPUSA. The CPUSA seemed to foster an environment for the African-American intellectuals' maturation and independence from the constraints of white financial patronage. Thus, many historians emphasize the benefits that black Americans derived from their association with the CPUSA, including the strengthening of civic organizations.[25] A closer look at

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[25] Mark Naison, Communists in Harlem during the Depression (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Philip S. Foner and Herbert Shapiro, eds. American Communism and Black Americans (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Earl

African-American intellectuals writing during this period gives an alternative view.

Coinciding with the political support of the CPUSA by African-American intellectuals emerged black social protest literature. For instance, Langston Hughes wrote social protest poetry, which led to his estrangement from his patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason.[26] The protest literature of Hughes and others reflected resentment of the inability of many Negrotarians to grasp the depth of racial problems and the unwillingness of liberal and radical politicians to make race relations a viable political issue. Importantly, these black intellectuals drew on their personal and collective strength to criticize economic and social inequalities based on race. Their strength emanated from the independence they gained through their prior interracial relationships with the Negrotarians of the Harlem Renaissance.

Many African-American intellectuals gained enough confidence and mastery of self-expression during the Harlem Renaissance to voice an independence of thought later. Although African-American artists accepted the financial assistance of white patrons, the relations sometimes resulted in mixed emotions. A few white patrons were

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Ofari Hutchinson, Blacks and Reds: Race and Class in Conflict, 1919-1990 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995).

[26] A discussion of Langston Hughes's break-up with his patron Charlotte Osgood Mason appears in Chapter 3.

judgmental and non-supportive when the art was not what they thought it should be. For example, Charlotte Osgood Mason never understood the art from the artists' perspective. The writers's reliance on racial experiences were sometimes unintelligible to the Negrotarian. Therefore, in literature the cultural transference was not as pervading as in other areas of art.

In music a more complete transference of black culture to white Americans occurred.[27] The music was beyond words and therefore race was not a barrier. White musicians playing jazz learned another language through black music, and this contributed to the over-all explosion in creativity.[28] Many white jazz musicians crossed the bridge and experienced black culture. In literature, most patrons and writers met in the middle of the bridge. Some black writers crossed over into mainstream white culture. Few Negrotarians crossed over into the African-American culture. Nonetheless, during the Harlem Renaissance the literature provided access and understanding of African-American culture for the Negrotarian. Today it endures as a cultural artifact which provides insights into some black writers's views of African-American culture, interracial relationships, and race relations.

This cultural bridge erected by the Harlem Renaissance, contributed to a movement from separateness to inclusive

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[27] Floyd, "Music in the Harlem Renaissance: An Overview," 5.

[28] Ibid., 3.

diversity that contributed to the development of multiculturalism. Although there existed opposition to diversity from some whites, an explosion of pride occurred among many African Americans. African Americans were no longer waiting for white approval. Most artists gladly accepted accolades and praise from white Americans, but this recognition was not vital to the artists' perception of their culture. Recognition from the black community was also important but not an overwhelming concern because among most African Americans recognition always existed. For instance, because of a lack of money, books became very precious in the black community.[29] The keeping of cultural records, such as novels, poems, and music grew organically out of the culture. African American identified with the literature and the music. They recognized the importance of the era as an opportunity to being seen and heard in the white community. Jazz music carried black culture to the white audience and white America's embracing of jazz supported the rest of the artistic and cultural movement.[30]

The language of the Harlem Renaissance grew from a very old foundation in the African-American community. Perhaps the first Negrotarians, abolitionists, hid fugitive slaves during the antebellum period to protect them. Black

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[29] Zora Neale Hurston informed Langston Hughes that she read his poems aloud to the black Americans she met throughout the South. The rural African Americans enjoyed his poems and shared the copies she loaned them. Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 10 July 1928. LW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[30] Floyd, "Music in the Harlem Renaissance," 2.

Americans also hid things themselves, through their language, for the protection of future generations. During the Harlem Renaissance this language was thrown into the light. Early intellectuals, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and the African-American avant-garde, feared risking the culture by exposing the hidden language. They believed that some aspects of the culture viewed within the constraints of white American society would be misunderstood and undercut the validity of black culture. Many of the avant-garde discouraged the use of black dialects. They hoped to highlight what the considered the finer aspects of culture: sculpting, painting, literature, theater. DuBois and some others refused to support jazz because they found it rough and unrefined.

Negrotarian Carl Van Vechten captured some of the unsophisticated aspects of black culture and the "street slang" in his 1926 novel Nigger Heaven. His insights into African-American society in Harlem overwhelmed, frightened, and offended some African Americans. Criticism of the novel came from the fear of exposing the less refined aspects of black culture to white Americans. However, Langston Hughes welcomed Van Vechten's perception and frankness.[31] Hughes, unlike DuBois and others, wished to make available all of African-American culture. In his poetry Hughes used the dialect of black Americans to celebrate the language.

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[31] Langston Hughes wrote Carl Van Vechten that he enjoyed the book.; Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten, 4 September 1930. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

Many black writers involved with Negrotarians continued using this hidden language when criticizing the problematic aspects of racial inequality in the United States. The number of Negrotarians who crossed the cultural bridge was small. Additionally, these Negrotarians still lived in and unconsciously supported prejudicial institutions. Therefore, black writers veiled their criticism. In the 1930s Langston Hughes sometimes applied the "art of the trickster." In the 1940s Richard Wright, on the other hand, did not take precautions and purposely dropped the hidden language.[32] Professionally and personally, African-American intellectuals feared criticism in exposing this hidden language. This fear was well-founded as illustrated when Wright became a target of both black and white criticism once he refused to follow over three-hundred years of protocol.[33]

Most African Americans in the early decades of the twentieth century developed a willingness to make their culture visible. The mood of the 1920s supported this endeavor. The presence of Progressive idealism and Wilsonian principles of self-determination and the desire of Americans, in general, to celebrate and experience life following the devastation of the First World War encouraged

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[32] A discussion of Wrights refusal to conceal his frustration with white social reformers is discussed in Chapter 5.

[33] Criticism of Wright's novel Native Son came from both white and black African-American members of the CPUSA.

black Americans.[34] In the South, African-American culture was traditionally passed on and protected through a hidden language. In the North, where for centuries, black Americans had received protection from slavery a cultural transference occurred. African Americans associated abolition, emancipation, "free soil", reconstruction, civil rights, and voting rights with white Northerners. Blacks artists migrated north to leave behind patterns of oppression and live in an environment that supported their artistic energy. Harlem with its proximity to the publishing houses and art world made it a likely place for the cultural transference to occur.

The importance of the Harlem Renaissance is that for the first time in United States history black Americans opened their culture for white Americans to experience. Few whites actually understood the importance of this action. Once exposed to the black culture and language, some white Americans understood that black Americans were in no way inferior to whites.[35] This universal quality, recognized by some Negrotarians, empowered African-American intellectuals with self-confidence and carried forward into the civil rights movements of the 1960s. Black intellectuals became comfortable with their voice and the tradition of a hidden language and the trickster became

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[34] Allan H. Spear, "Introduction," in The New Negro: An Interpretation, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968).

[35] See Floyd, "Music in the Harlem Renaissance."

obsolete. Survival of the black American culture depended upon the acceptance of the of equality, and it still does. This legacy of the Harlem Renaissance is evident today in a revival of Afro-Centrism, a Black Arts Movement. and an adherence to multiculturalism and diversity.

CHAPTER I

ORIGINS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

The origins of the Harlem Renaissance are found in the development of black ghettos in the urban North, African-American intellectual history, and the evolution of Harlem as the "Negro Mecca." The study of modern African-American history dates from the end of Reconstruction in 1877. During this period, the constitutional rights of African-Americans became increasingly limited nationwide. Because they associated the tradition of abolition and emancipation with the North, many black Americans migrated to northern urban cities seeking refuge from Jim Crow laws.[1] Additionally, economic opportunities growing from industrialism in the North attracted African Americans.[2]

New York City became a popular destination for African Americans, including intellectuals, artists, and entertainers. New York City served as a cultural center for white Americans, and its central location in the northeast also drew black scholars. New York City was also home to non-profit foundations which supported African-American

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[1] See C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the Old South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); and idem, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

[2] Gilbert Osofsky, Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 2d ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 23.

education in the South. Organizations such as the Board of Trustees for Tuskegee Institute and the Armstrong Association, which supported Hampton Institute, made New York City "the center of Negro philanthropy."[3] The congregating of African-American intellectuals, scholars, and artists with white socialites, humanitarians and social reformers created a forum for discourse on social and racial inequalities.

In analyzing the Harlem Renaissance, its origins and chronology in African-American history become vitally important. Between 1877 and 1920, political, economic, and social issues affecting black Americans laid the foundation for the Harlem Renaissance. Following Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws in the South increased legal restrictions and economic inequality for African Americans while providing white southerners with racial and social control.[4] Southern black Americans migrated North searching for economic opportunity, enfranchisement, and social freedom. In urban centers, the concentration of African-Americans through segregated housing created racially homogeneous neighborhoods.

New York City became a popular destination for many African-American migrants. The black neighborhood Tenderloin, known as the "Negro Bohemia," attracted many

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[3] Ibid., 32.

[4] Ibid., 22; ; See also Woodward, Origins of the New South; and idem, The Strange Career of Jim Crow.

African-American intellectuals, artists, and entertainers.[5] The influx of black artists and entertainers into Harlem resulted in an expression of African-American culture. African-American intellectuals and leaders viewed this expression as an opportunity to gain recognition and appreciation for their culture from the dominant white society. Black intellectuals also used this opportunity to engage white social reformers in a discourse on social and racial inequalities in American society. Ultimately, they were successful in establishing an interracial movement and bi-racial organizations to deal with issues of racial inequality.

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The development of African-American ghettos in the North relates to the origins of the Harlem Renaissance. At the turn of the century, almost every United States city developed a black ghetto independent of each other. Although each ghetto grew at a different rate, they developed for similar reasons. Poverty, racial nationalism, lynchings, Jim Crow, and white-imposed segregation became the main reasons for ghettoization.[6] While most European

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[5] Osofsky, Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 15.

[6] See Osofsky, Harlem: The Making of a Negro Ghetto; August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, From Plantation to Ghetto: An Interpretive History of American Negroes, 2d ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963; Allan Spear, Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); David Katzman, Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); Kenneth Kusmer, A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); Thomas Holt, African American History

immigrants eventually emigrated out of their neighborhoods, most blacks living in northern cities remained within the confines of their neighborhood.[7]

The black migration to the urban North reflected the growing racism and economic problems in the South during the era of Jim Crow. Many African Americans headed for New York City because it provided black Americans both economic and social opportunities. Eventually, Harlem became the "Negro Mecca," establishing that "the way Harlem goes (or doesn't go) so goes Black America."[8] Harlem offered more than a typical ghetto. By the 1920s, white Americans flooded its nightspots to experience African-American culture. Harlem's attraction to both white socialites and black artists led to the birth of an artistic, literary, and cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance.

Prior to the outbreak of the First World War black migration to the North increased steadily. Between 1910 and 1920 the number of southern born African Americans living in the North increased by about 7% (see Table 1). The percentage of African Americans living in northern cities increased from 1.1% in 1900 to 6.0% in 1930.[9] The greatest

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(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

[7] Stephan Thernstrom theorizes that, unlike white European immigrants, black migrants to Boston were unable to overcome racial prejudices, which ultimately impeded their economic development. Stephan Thernstrom, The Other Bostonians (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1978).

[8] Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 12.

[9] Ibid.

increase occurred between 1910 and 1920. Following the First World War, many European immigrants moved westward, while many black Americans, inspired by the myth of a "northern promise land," continued migrating north.

The changing mood of the nation in the late nineteenth century encouraged the early stages of black migration from the South. African Americans remained a minority in society and became increasingly marginalized during the era of Jim Crow (see Table 2). The United States Supreme Court decisions in the Slaughterhouse Cases (1873) upholding states rights, the 1883 restriction of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 (which had recognized "equality of all men before the law" prohibiting segregation in places of accommodation and entertainment), and the infamous Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) "separate but equal" doctrine decreased the legal and constitutional rights of African Americans throughout the United States. Additionally, the culture of racism extended to the government's foreign policy of imperialism in the Caribbean and the Pacific, which endorsed the theory of the "White Man's Burden."

African Americans began migrating north out of "a desire for expanded opportunities," and an escape from increasing oppression in the South.[10] Many black migrants

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[10] Osofsky, Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 22; See also, Joel Williamson in After Slavery; The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965); and August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, Along the Color Line (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

TABLE 1

INCREASE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS BORN IN THE SOUTH AND MIGRATING NORTH, 1880-1930[11]

1880-1890	1.7%
1890-1900	5.1%
1900-1910	1.1%
1910-1920	8.0%
1920-1930	6.0%

[11] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Negro Population, 1790-1915 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 66; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935), 9, 21.

were encouraged to move North by friends and relatives living above the Mason-Dixon line. The economic and social clustering of blacks in U.S. cities evolved into structured ghettos. Although there are differences in chronological development and the degree of intensity, it is apparent that similar causes and effects were present in almost every city. In general, social, economic, and racial issues led to African American self-exile, segregation, and self-sufficiency within the boundaries of urban neighborhoods. However, the impact of social, economic, and racial influences on ghettoization, remain different and measurable for each city.[12]

New York became a popular destination for black Americans migrating north (see Table 3). Prior to the turn of the century, most African Americans in New York City lived in the areas known as Tenderloin and San Juan Hill in what is present-day midtown.[13] Harlem remained a white neighborhood until 1905, when Philip A. Payton, the owner of the Afro-American Realty Company, purchased an apartment building in the heart of Harlem and soon rented it to several black tenants.[14] The all-white Property Owners

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[12] See Osofsky, Harlem: The Making of a Negro Ghetto; Meier and Rudwick, From Plantation to Ghetto: An Interpretive History of American Negroes; Spear, Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920; Katzman, Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century; Kusmer, A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930; and Holt African American History.

[13] Osofsky, Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 12.

[14] Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue, 25.

TABLE 2

AFRICAN-AMERICAN POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES 1880-1930[15]

1880	1.5%
1890	1.3%
1900	1.3%
1910	1.2%
1920	1.1
1930	1.1%

[15] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932, 1.

Protective Association of Harlem tried in vain to stop the flow of African Americans into the neighborhood. In 1916 the white residents conceded, posting a notice on a tenement announcing "We have endeavored for some time to avoid turning over this house to colored tenants, but as a result [of] rapid changes in conditions...this issue has been forced upon us."[16] At this time, white Harlemites relocated to upper Manhattan.[17]

The Afro-American Realty Company advertised cheap rentals in southern newspapers and encouraged black migration. Soon, issues of housing and employment found black Americans at odds with Italian and Irish immigrants and first generation Americans. The African-American population of New York increased by 108% between 1920-1930. White Americans, however, still maintained a majority statewide (see Table 3). Between 1890 and 1910 the African-American population of New York City increased approximately by thirty-thousand each decade. Harlem became the common destination for African Americans entering the city, but it maintained a segregated existence from the rest of Manhattan (see Table 4). A prevailing racial crisis concerning the housing of blacks and whites evolved into self-segregation. Thus, "the ghetto was primarily the product of white hostility" and black self-preservation.[18]

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[16] Ibid., 26.

[17] Osofsky, Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 13.

[18] Ibid., Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 26.

The success of African-American neighborhoods depended upon economic nationalism, support of black merchants and cultural cohesion. In Harlem, economic success depended upon entrepreneurial ventures such as Philip Payton's Afro-American Realty Company and Madame C.J. Walkers's million dollar cosmetic company. In Chicago, young black leaders advocated segregation and attempted to create a black Chicago equal in every way to white Chicago.[19] However, the co-operative businesses established suffered from a lack of both white and black patronage.

The creation of white private schools, private clubs, and increasingly restricted and discriminating social circles contributed to residential segregation. In Cleveland, as in Harlem and Chicago, black leaders initially practiced interracial co-operation. With the influx of black southern migrants, the white upper class and geographically mobile middle class simultaneously and consciously distanced themselves from African Americans.[20] In Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., African Americans

> converted abandoned warehousing districts to residential use, moved through working class and middle class districts, and later even spilled beyond municipal boundaries."[21]

Black neighborhoods occupied abandoned white neighborhoods

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[19] Spear, Black Chicago, 54.

[20] See Kusmer, Black Cleveland.

[21] Richard Wade, "The Enduring Ghetto: Urbanization and the Color Line in American History," Journal of Urban History 17 (November 1990): 8.

TABLE 3

AFRICAN-AMERICAN POPULATION

OF NEW YORK STATE, 1880-1930[22]

1880	1.3%
1890	1.2%
1900	1.4%
1910	1.5%
1920	1.2%
1930	3.4%

[22] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Negro Population, 1790-1915, 43; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932, 7, 9.

TABLE 4

AFRICAN-AMERICAN POPULATION

OF NEW YORK CITY, 1890-1930[23]

1890	1.6%
1900	1.8%
1910	1.9%
1920	2.7%
1930	4.7%

[23] Ibid., 101, 62; Osofsky, Harlem the Making of a Ghetto, 205-206.

because of an industrial decline.[24]

The creation of the black ghetto in northern cities coincided with urban segregation. In the decades prior to the Harlem Renaissance, many leaders in the African-American community sought to establish financial and political independence from white businesses. For some, urban segregation increased feelings of racial solidarity. For others, urban segregation reflected racial self-preservation. Nonetheless, by the 1920s most African-American leaders and intellectuals supported integration. Black leaders and intellectuals seeking recognition of racial equality supported a cultural exchange between the races. Intermingling with white socialites and patrons of the arts, African-American intellectuals endeavored to create the "Negro Renaissance": an integration of culture and expression of racial equality through black American literature, art, and poetry.

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Since the end of Reconstruction in 1877, the development of African-American intellectual history has consisted of conflicts over accommodation, assimilation, and nationalism as the means to achieve racial, social, economic, and cultural equality.[25] Black leaders such as

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[24] Stephanie Greenberg, "Neighborhood Change, Racial Transition, and Work Location: A case Study of an Industrial City, Philadelphia, 1880-1930," Journal of Urban History 7 (May 1981): 270; James Borchert, Alley Life in Washington (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 55.

[25] Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 564.

Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey, became spokesmen for the different factions. A brief overview and analysis of black intellectual history explains the development of these schools of thought and how integrationalism became the basis for the Harlem Renaissance.

In the 1880s, an interest in black history encouraged some African-American leaders to advocate racial nationalism and self-determination. August Meier explains:

> Generally in periods of discouragement Negroes have adopted doctrines of self-help, racial solidarity, and economic development as a better technique for racial advancement than politics, agitation, and the demand for immediate integration.[26]

In the absence of political power, black leaders organized African Americans to publicize social inequality. Episcopalian minister Alexander Crummell and Marxist T. Thomas Fortune were early supporters of self-help and an end to racial exploitation.[27] In 1890, Fortune founded the National Afro-American League in Chicago. The league strived to secure voting rights, anti-lynching laws, and racial equality in state funding for public education. The league also sought to abolish prison chain gangs and eliminate discrimination in public transportation and public

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[26] August Meier, Negro Thought in America 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), 24.

[27] Ibid.

accommodations.[28] Black leaders such as Crummell and Fortune viewed racial solidarity as the best means for securing civil rights. Their movement failed, however, because most African Americans were uncommitted to self-determination and as consumers continued supporting the white economy.[29] Additionally, without a political power base black leaders were unable to pressure white politicians to pass civil rights legislation.

During the Gilded Age, an increasing number of African-American leaders moved away from racial solidarity towards the goal of an integrated society. While most black leaders favored integration, they became divided over the approaches of assimilation and accommodation. In the late 1880s, Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist and former slave, began supporting interracial political, social, and economic interaction. Booker T. Washington, also a former slave, took a different approach and advocated an idea earlier espoused by white politicians such as Thaddeus Stevens.

Washington encouraged African Americans toward "settling quietly down, getting money and property and acquiring character and education."[30] Washington, the author of Up From Slavery (1900) and born just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, supported vo-technical education.

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[28] Harold Cruse, Plural But Equal: A Critical Study of Blacks and Minorities and America's Plural System (New York: Morrow and Co., Inc., 1987), 9.

[29] Meier, Negro Thought in America, 24.

[30] Ibid., 82

He believed that,

> the student shall be so educated that he shall be enabled to meet conditions as they exist *now* [sic], in the part of the South were he lives--in a word, to be able to do the thing which the world wants done."[31]

Washington became the leading spokesperson for racial accommodation.

August Meier believes that Washington is significant because he proposed an idea popular with whites and used this popularity to gain power and prestige in the black community. Meier believes that "Booker T. Washington became great and powerful not because he initialized a trend, but because he expressed it so well."[32] Meier concludes that Washington never publicly agitated for civil rights because he assumed that black ownership of industry would lead to egalitarianism.[33] Washington, the founder of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, became an advisor to President Theodore Roosevelt. While Washington's backing of accommodation won him the praise of white politicians, some black intellectuals criticized his approach.

W.E.B. Du Bois challenged Washington's assumption and his authority. Du Bois, born in 1868 and raised in Massachusetts, attended Harvard University. In 1895 he became the first African American to receive a Ph.D.

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[31] Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1901; repr., New York, Gramercy Books, 1993), 227.

[32] Meier, Negro Thought in America, 99.

[33] Ibid., 103.

Originally, Du Bois had supported Washington, and many black leaders considered him Washington's protege. The two split over ideological differences regarding economic and social equality for African Americans. Du Bois believed that "Mr. Washington represents in negro thought the old attitude of adjustment at such a peculiar time as to make his program unique."[34] In criticizing Washington, Du Bois charged:

> His doctrine has tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders and stand aside as critical and rather pessimistic spectators; when in fact the burden belongs to the nation, and the hands of none of us are clean if we bend not our energies to righting these great wrongs.[35]

In 1903, Du Bois published The Souls of Black Folk, calling for integration through interracial efforts. Du Bois's book was a response to Washington's autobiography Up From Slavery, which called for racial or black accommodation.

Coinciding with the debates over accommodation and assimilation, at the turn of the century, emerged "The New Negro".[36] In simple terms, the New Negro comprised the second generation of African Americans since Emancipation "with education, class, and money."[37] Alain Locke, the first African-American Rhodes Scholar and a "midwife" to the Harlem Renaissance, elaborated:

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[34] W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (n.p. 1903; repr., New York: Gramercy Books, 1994): 39.

[35] Ibid, 45.

[36] The term "The New Negro" first appeared in the June 28, 1895 Cleveland Gazette.

[37] Wintz, Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance, 29.

> The Negro today wishes to be known for what he is, even in his faults and shortcomings....He resents being spoken [of] as a social ward or minority, even by his own, and to being regarded [a] chronic patient for the sociological clinic, the sickman of American democracy....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 recognized on the other.[38]

Locke believed that the New Negro, like each generation...will have its creed, and that of the present is the belief in the efficiency of collective effort, in race cooperation."[39] Most importantly, the New Negro strived for racial, social, and economic equality.

With the emergence of the New Negro, W.E.B. Du Bois envisioned a black avant-garde, the Talented Tenth, an elite group of African Americans responsible for leading the black masses. Du Bois and the Talented Tenth advocated interracial cooperation, enfranchisement, and higher education. The Niagara Movement, conference held in Buffalo, New York, in mid-July 1905, solidified and publicized the ideals held by Du Bois and the Talented Tenth. During the conference, Du Bois called for universal manhood suffrage, militant civil rights organizations, and the abolition of racial and class distinctions.[40] The

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[38] Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in The New Negro: An Interpretation (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925; repr., New York, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 10.

[39] Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue, 121; and Locke, The New Negro, 11.

[40] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Address to the Country," in W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: Henry Holt Co., Inc., 1995), 367-369.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909 as a bi-racial organization, supported these same principles.

The NAACP worked in areas of civil rights, attempting to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, affording African Americans citizenship, protection under the constitution, and the right to vote. In 1915, the NAACP challenged an Oklahoma Grandfather Law which prevented African Americans from voting. The Supreme Court of the United States struck down the law in Guinn v. the United States, and the NAACP achieved its first legal victory. However, success was short-lived. The organization would spend nearly fifty years fighting to secure voting rights for all African Americans.[41]

In addition to the NAACP, the Talented Tenth and white social reformers established other institutions to assist black Americans in areas of racial equality. Housing, employment, and militancy became the most important issues facing these urban race leaders. Historians believe that an increased black migration from the South to northern urban centers created racial tension furthering the development of segregation.[42] The Urban League, founded in 1911 as an interracial organization, assisted migrating southern

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[41] The 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Voting Act of 1965 insured African Americans federal protection of their voting rights.

[42] Meier, and Rudwick, From Plantation to Ghetto: An Interpretive History of American Negroes, 189.

African Americans in areas of employment, health and welfare, and housing. The League grew out of the Committee on Urban Conditions, a bi-racial commission established to address the concerns of city officials with the mass migration of black Southerners to northern cities.

The end of World War I in 1918 and the international recognition of self-determination contributed to a growing movement for racial segregation among a minority of black Americans. The United States's involvement in World War I prompted Joel Spingarn, a white founder of the NAACP, and W.E.B. Du Bois to encourage African-American men to enlist in the United States military. Spingarn and Du Bois hoped to foster pride in citizenship among African Americans and increase the respect of white Americans for black Americans. Unfortunately, racism existed in the segregated armed forces, which prohibited black soldiers from engaging in major military operations. Only under the command of French officers did African-American soldiers engage in significant combat. Following the war, black soldiers returned to a segregated society, a racially prejudicial judicial system, and economic inequalities.

In the African-American urban communities, frustrations with racial discrimination prompted discussions of racial separateness. The "Back to Africa" movement, initiated by Marcus Garvey in 1917, represented a radical reaction to issues of social inequality and attracted working class

African Americans.[43] Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association arrived from Jamaica in 1916. Within a year, Garvey began publishing the Negro Year, which called for a return to Africa. Garvey had become convinced that American society would never fully integrate.

Marcus Garvey believed that a return to Africa was the only salvation for black Americans.[44] In 1920 the United Negro Improvement Association met in Harlem and established the Black Star Shipping Line as a business enterprise to offset the cost of immigrating to Liberia. Garvey secured permission from the Liberian government to establish an African-American colony. By 1923, Garvey could boast of six million members in his organization.[45] However, that same year the United States Attorney General indicted Garvey for mail fraud. He was found guilty and spent several years in the Atlanta Penitentiary before being pardoned by President Calvin Coolidge and deported to Jamaica in 1927.[46]

Marcus Garvey and black nationalism received opposition from many African-American leaders and intellectuals. Leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois criticized and denounced Garvey while continuing to support political and cultural

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[43] See Cary Wintz, "Introduction," in African-American Political Thought, 1890-1930 (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1996).

[44] Marcus Garvey, "The Negro's Greatest Enemy," in African-American Political Thought, ed. Cary Wintz, 171.

[45] Ibid., 176.

[46] George Brown Tindall, America: A Narrative History (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 1003.

racial unity.[47] Marcus Garvey and the Back to Africa Movement represented the nationalistic fervor of the common black Americans. Du Bois and the black avant-garde believed that a "Negro Renaissance" would create an integrated society and culture.[48] Geographically, Harlem became the focus of African-American intellectual stimulation because it provided the best area for a cultural exchange with white intellectuals and humanitarians. For Du Bois and other black leaders, the cultural renaissance exemplified the increasing integration and recognition of African-American culture while exposing racial and social inequalities and American society.[49]

The African-American avant-garde created and supported journals as a forum for discussing problems of racial inequality in American society. In 1910 the NAACP established Crisis with Du Bois as its editor. Crisis reported on violence against African Americans. Articles on lynching and civil rights legislation concerned its editor and readers. Annually, Crisis offered the Spingarn Medal, which awarded money to an African American who best advanced his or her race. The Urban League began publishing Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life in 1923 with Charles S.

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[47] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 44-45; Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue, 37; Wintz, Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance, 150; and Lawrence W. Levine, The Unpredictable Past (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 133-134.

[48] The term Negro Renaissance was used frequently during this time period.

[49] Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 192.

Johnson as its editor. Johnson, a sociologist and future president of Fisk University, focused on "scholarly studies" and "black achievements rather than black problems."[50] Opportunity offered various grants including the Van Vechten Award, a two hundred dollar prize given for the best poem, essay, or short story. These three journals contributed greatly to exposing African-American culture to white society.

In addition to the efforts of many black leaders and intellectuals, politically active left-of-center African Americans became involved in the movement for social equality. The Messenger, founded in 1917 by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owens, advocated equality through militancy. It criticized the integrationalist attitudes of Crisis and Opportunity.[51] The Messenger, backed by the Socialist party, focused on social and labor issues. However, in 1926 Langston Hughes asked Wallace Thurman, the managing editor of the Messenger, exactly what type of magazine it was; Thurman replied that "it reflected the policy of who-ever paid off the best at that time."[52] Because of its political affiliations, The Messenger was not as popular as Crisis or Opportunity and lacked their readership.

In the two decades prior to the 1920s, the

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[50] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 28, 5.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Hughes, The Big Sea, 223.

establishment of organizations such as the NAACP and periodicals such as Crisis, helped to keep the issue of social and economic equality for black Americans alive. Interracial discourse on racial equality flourished. African-American intellectuals and leaders received support and assistance from a number of white Americans who favored a racially integrated society. The bi-racial membership of the NAACP and UL gave black Americans an opportunity to voice their opinions on social and economic inequalities affecting African Americans. Most importantly, African-American intellectuals decided that exposing white Americans to black culture would reveal its equality. A movement of artistic, literary, and cultural expression seemed the best way to accomplish this task. By the mid-1920s, white Americans flocked into Harlem to experience African-American culture, and "the Negro was in vogue."

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As previously discussed, Harlem became a popular destination for migrating African Americans including artists and entertainers. In general, the number of African-American entertainers and artists throughout the nation increased during this period (see Table 5). The influx of black artists and entertainers into Harlem consisted of painters, sculptors, writers, poets, actors, and musicians. The poet, Langston Hughes, wrote "Esthete Harlem" to describe his view of Harlem:

> Strange,
> That in this nigger place
> I should meet life face to face;

When, for years I had been seeking
Life in places gentler-speaking,
Until I came to this vile street
And found Life stepping on my feet![53]

In Harlem, black artists also found a place to fraternize and network. A'Lelia Walker, heiress to her mother's cosmetic fortune, established the "Dark Tower," a salon for black writers, artists, and poets to gather and intermingle.

The African-American artists and performers provided an oasis of entertainment for curious whites. White Manhattanites, fascinated by the events in Harlem, flooded cabarets, theaters, and minstrel shows to catch a glimpse of black culture. Nathan Huggins refers to this as the "white hunter in New York's 'heart of Darkness'."[54] He and other historians view the search as "therapy for deeper white needs: sex, drugs, and alcohol."[55] He believes that white Americans searched for the primitivism and the freedom that constricted them in their own society. While this may have applied to some whites, most came for the entertainment and the new experiences. For example, Eugene O'Neill's all black production of Emperor Jones (1920) was very popular and appealed to white theater patrons. These white consumers also provided a market for black literature and the arts. The "negro was in vogue" because many white

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[53] Langston Hughes, "Esthete in Harlem," in The Book of American Negro Poetry, ed. James Weldon Johnson (San Diego: HBJ Books, 1950), 239.

[54] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 90.

[55] Ibid., 91; See also Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual; and Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue.

TABLE 5

AFRICAN AMERICANS EMPLOYED IN THE ARTS[56]

1890-1930

	ACTORS	ARTISTS	MUSICIANS	AUTHORS
1890	1,490	150	1,881	0
1900	2,020	236	3,915	0
1910	3,088	329	5,606	27
1930	4,130	430	10,583	49

[56] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Negro Population, 1790-1915, 525-526; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932, 324. The occupational designation of "Author" was not used in the 1890 through 1910 census. Occupational information for the 1920 census is not available.

Americans were interested in absorbing black culture.

Music represented an area of cultural exchange not hindered by the paradoxes found in the relationships between white patrons and African-American artists. Other than music, black intellectuals sought to develop the literature, poetry, and art of African Americans. Most of the black avant-garde did not support African-American music. Nathan Huggins argues that the black intelligentsia "crippled art" because it was looking for something civilized; thus, it ignored jazz and dance.[57] On the contrary, these intellectuals did not "cripple art." However, they certainly were more interested in expressions of what they considered to be refined culture: theater, painting, sculpting, poetry, and literature. The songs of this period often discussed social taboos subjects such as sex, alcoholism, drug addiction, and gambling. But the music was still vitally important in its contribution to the cultural exchange

Nathan Huggins believes that "only Langston Hughes took jazz seriously."[58] Since Huggins believes that jazz was "the only really creative thing that was going on," he is surprised that only Hughes took note of jazz.[59] Hughes's poem "Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret" recognizes and describes the universal language of jazz music and its roots

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[57] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 198.

[58] Ibid., 10-11.

[59] Ibid.

in African-American culture:

> Play that thing,
> Jazz band!
> Play it for the lords and ladies!
> For the dukes and counts,
> For the whores and gigolos,
> For the American Millionaires,
> And the school teachers
> Out for a spree.
> Play it,
> Jazz band!
> You know that tune
> that laughs and cries at the same time.
> You know it.
> May I?
> Mais oui.
> Mein Gott!
> Parece una rumba.
> Play it Jazz band!
> You've got seven languages to speak in
> And then some,
> "Even if you do come from Georgia,
> Can I go home wid yuh, sweetie?"
> "Sure."[60]

In the poem, Hughes expresses the universal enjoyment of jazz. This is important since jazz is part of the African-American musical traditions.

Contrary to Huggins's view, not all black intellectuals ignored jazz. Alain Locke believes that while "jazz is basically Negro" it is "fortunately, also human enough to be universal."[61] J.A. Rogers theorizes:

> 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* [sic], the dance of the whirling dervish, the hula, hula of the South Seas, etc....[62]

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[60] Langston Hughes, "Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret," in The Book of American Negro Poetry, 239-240.

[61] Alain Locke, The Negro and His Music (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 72.

[62] J.A. Rogers, "Jazz at Home," in The New Negro, ed. Alain Locke, 217.

Alain Locke reasoned that the popularity of jazz reflected the recognition of its universal qualities of rhythm. Locke hoped that appreciation for jazz would lead to an appreciation for black culture.

The interracial character of music reflects its importance as a vehicle for expressing the equality of African-American culture. The involvement of white musicians in African-American music dates to the period of ragtime. Alain Locke describes the relationship between jazz and ragtime: "Jazz was carried in the bosom of ragtime" but, African-American musicians "were too close to the subject to sense its originality and its financial prospects."[63] Scott Joplin, the black composer and performer, began performing at the turn of the century and is credited with introducing ragtime to American music lovers. Soon, white performers set their lyrics to the adopted rhythm. The popularity of Tin Pan Alley and the cake-walk furthered the enthusiasm of whites for black music.[64] Popular dances also expressed the universal appeal of African-American music. The Charleston, "which originated in Harlem, [had] as its most famous performer not a Negro, but two white dancers, Fred Astaire and Ann

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[63] Locke, The Negro and His Music, 70; 61.

[64] Originally, Tin Pan Alley referred to the songwriting business in New York City. The term now denotes the entertainment business between the 1880s through the 1950s.

Pennington."[65] As with music, white performers and spectators adopted African-American dances and became increasingly familiar with black culture.

Black musicians such as Duke Ellington became rich and famous, and gained an entre into white society through their music. Pianist, composer, and bandleader, Ellington made his debut at the Cotton Club in 1927. Originally from Washington, D.C., Ellington gathered a respectable following in Harlem and became the headliner at the Cotton Club. Duke Ellington was not the only successful black entertainer during this period. Fletcher Henderson, "Father of the Big Band," packed music halls and nightclubs. Actor and singer Ethel Waters drew crowds to the theater in 1927 to see her debut in the all-black musical revue, "Africana." Waters is best known for her rendition of the popular song, "Stormy Weather." Ivie Anderson became the first black woman to sing with a white orchestra, led by Anson Weeks, and continued to tour through the late 1940s. Florence Mills, considered one of the most popular entertainers of the 1920s, was both a singer and dancer. Mills and vocalist Josephine Baker got their start in the 1921 production of the all-black musical "Shuffle Along."

Even with the growing popularity of African-American entertainers, most theaters, cinemas, and night clubs remained segregated. The few night spots that did not

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[65] Leon Coleman, "Carl Van Vechten Presents the New Negro," in The Harlem Renaissance Reexamined, ed. Victor A. Kramer (New York: AMS Press, 1987), 115.

discriminate, such as the Lincoln and Lafayette theaters, became favorites among many African Americans. In the mid-1920s the Alhambra theater dropped its policy of an all-white audience and became a popular night spot for African Americans.[66] However, these theaters still catered to predominantly white audiences, and the majority of plays written about African Americans were authored by white Americans. In the 1920s, New York city theaters produced nineteen plays about African-Americans that "focused only on the sensational aspects of black life." Only four were authored by black playwrights.[67] The African-American theater community responded by establishing small playhouses and theater groups. As part of the Harlem Renaissance legacy these groups of black playwrights and actors served as "prototypes" for those which emerged in the 1930s and through the 1960s.[68]

Night spots such as the Cotton Club, Jones's Supper Club, and Barron's Exclusive Club remained primarily segregated but still gave white Americans an opportunity to observe African-American culture through music and entertainment. The Cotton Club hired African-American servers and entertainers but allowed few black customers.[69]

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[66] John G. Monroe, "The Harlem Little Theater Movement, 1920-1929," Journal of American Culture 6:4 (Winter 1983): 63.

[67] Ibid., 63-64.

[68] Ibid., 69.

[69] Jim Haskins, The Cotton Club (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1994), 47.

However in 1928, in response to Ellington's popularity at the Cotton Club, the management "agreed to relax the 'whites only' policy."[70] Like most night spots, the Cotton Club offered a floor show every evening with dancing and singing. Most musical revues included "exotic entertainment, a chance to participate without crossing, to any appreciable degree, the color line, a chance to be in but not of Harlem."[71] But the color line was not definitively black and white. Clubs catering to white audiences hired only light-skinned or "high yallers" as female dancers. Dark-skinned entertainers had a difficult time finding employment.

The policy of most night spots was "Cater primarily to whites and give them everything they want."[72] The Cotton Club, the most popular night spot in Harlem, belonged to a syndicate of illegal clubs violating the Eighteenth Amendment's prohibition of the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcohol. Like the Cotton Club, many night spots opened in response to Prohibition. Initially, the access to liquor drew many white customers. But other whites continued to venture into Harlem for the "exotic" entertainment. At the Cotton Club, white owner Owen Madden supplied boot-legged liquor while appealing to white "slummers" with the club's "jungle motif." He hoped to accentuate the "primitiveness" of the African-American

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[70] Ibid., 57.

[71] Ibid., 23.

[72] Ibid.

entertainers.

In the 1920s, jazz became the most popular and recognizable form of black American culture among white Americans and a prime area for a cultural exchange between races. News of Duke Ellington's popularity "reached the ears of downtown white musicians, who traveled to Harlem to see what the talk was all about."[73] Alain Locke explained:

> There is no more interesting feature of this movement than the way in which white musicians studied jazz, and from a handicap of first feeble imitation and patient hours in Negro cabarets listening to the originators finally became masters of jazz, not only rivaling their Negro competitors musically but rising more and more to commercial dominance of the new industry.[74]

The popularity of jazz initially made white musicians dependent on black musicians for their education.[75] However, social and economic inequality allowed most white musicians to earn more money and move on to bigger venues and limited black musicians, with few exceptions, to Harlem night clubs.

Several popular white musicians trained under black artists and serve as examples of the cultural exchange. Irving Berlin, a Russian-Jewish immigrant, learned to play ragtime from African-American pianist Lukie Johnson.[76] In

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[73] Ibid., 47.

[74] Locke, The Negro and His Music., 82.

[75] Samuel Charters and Leonard Kunstadt, Jazz: A History of the New York Scene (New York: Double Day and Co., Inc., 1962), 76.

[76] Ann Douglas, Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1930s. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 357.

Chicago, a young Benny Goodman picked up pointers from notable black New Orleans natives, Joe "the King" Oliver and Louie "Satchmo" Armstrong. Goodman moved to New York in 1928 and began "jamming" with some of the best and most popular black jazz musicians.[77]

Although white and black musicians "jammed" together privately, the night club stages remained segregated through the mid-1930s. African-American and white musicians seldom played publicly or professionally together. Occasionally, a fair-skinned African American might pass as a white musician. For instance, in 1920, the comedian and pianist Jimmy Durante assembled a group of white musicians to play jazz at the Alamo Cabaret. Unbeknown to Durante, his band included a "light skinned Creole Negro" who was "already a mature jazz musician."[78]

The color line was finally broken in 1936 when African-Americans Teddy Wilson and Lionel Hampton joined Benny Goodman's band. The Benny Goodman Quartet, featuring Wilson, Hampton, Goodman, and another white musician, marked the first professional interracial group.[79] Goodman later remarked, "When we played, nobody cared much what colors or races were represented just so long as we played good music.

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[77] Studds Terkel, Giants of Jazz (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1957).

[78] Charters and Kunstadt, Jazz: A History of the New York Scene, 76.

[79] Terkel, Giants of Jazz, 113.

That's the way it should be."[80] Benny Goodman's sentiments on the interracial elements of jazz reflect its importance to the overall cultural success of the Harlem Renaissance. By the late 1930s, black and white American musicians throughout the nation effected the integration of music halls, dance clubs, restaurants, and cabarets by their willingness to share the stage.[81]

White musicians transcended the boundaries of race and, more than any other group, crossed the cultural bridge.[82] Among musicians a cultural integration occurred. Alain Locke concluded that such a strong cultural transference was possible because,

> Jazz, in spite of its racial origins, became one great important interracial collaboration in which the important matter is the artistic quality of the product and neither the quantity of the distribution nor the color of the artist.[83]

The universal appeal of jazz attracted both white musicians and white enthusiasts.

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The Harlem Renaissance grew out of a period of great expansion for African Americans. Prior to World War I, thousands of southern, black Americans migrated North and many settled in Harlem. With the arrival of African-American intellectuals, scholars, artists, and entertainers,

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[80] Ibid., 114.

[81] Floyd, "Music in the Harlem Renaissance," 23.

[82] Ibid., 21-22.

[83] Locke, The Negro and His Music, 82.

African-American culture became concentrated and accessible to white Northerners for the first time in United States history. Some black scholars and intellectuals began thinking differently about the struggle against racial inequalities prevalent in American society. These African-American leaders challenged the prevailing assumptions of social and economic equality through racial accommodation. They argued that integration and bi-racial reform movements could better fight legal and economic inequalities than racial solidarity and nationalism.

The black avant-garde agreed that integration was possible through a recognition and acceptance of African-American culture by white Americans. The bi-racial organizations developed at this time and the interracial attempts at securing constitutional rights are just two examples of interracial cooperation during the struggle for integration. In general, the cultural transference of music reflects the most obvious example of success and the cultural bridge. Although the cultural exchange between black writers and white socialites is not as pervading it has an important historical significance. These interracial relationships profoundly affected future generations of black intellectuals and white social reformers.

TABLE 6

TIME LINE TO THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE[84]

1881	Tuskegee Institute in Alabama opens, providing secondary education for African Americans.
1883	Civil Rights Act of 1875 is ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.
1895	Booker T. Washington makes his "Atlanta Convention" speech, calling for racial accommodation.
1896	In Plessy v. Ferguson the U.S. Supreme Court establishes the "separate but equal" doctrine.
1900	W.E.B. Du Bois is elected Vice-President of the first Pan-African Congress which calls for self determination and opposition to U.S. imperialism.
1905	The Niagara Movement, led by W.E.B. Du Bois, assembles to discuss racial inequalities.
1909	The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded as a bi-racial organization promoting civil rights.
1910	Crisis, the NAACP journal, is established with W.E.B. Du Bois as its editor.
1911	The National Urban League is founded to deal with the problems facing African Americans migrating to northern cities.
1917	The U.S. Supreme Court rules that it is unconstitutional to force black and white Americans to live on separate streets.
1919	The U.S. Supreme Court rules that African Americans must be allowed to serve on juries.

[84] Tindall, America: A Narrative History; Alfred H. Kelly, The American Constitution (New York: W.W. Norton Co., Inc., 1991); Tom Cowan ed., Timelines of African-American History (New York: The Roundtable Press, 1994).

CHAPTER II

NEGROTARIANS AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATI

The integration which occurred between Negrotarians and African-American writers is problematic in comparison to the cultural exchange between white and black musicians. One paramount problem, not present among musicians but prevalent in the relationships of Negrotarians and black writers, was financial patronage. Many African-American artists accepting support from white patrons often found themselves in overtly dependent positions. The motivations of Negrotarians ranged from genuine interest and friendship to social control.

Until the 1920s, most black writers and artists did not experience white patronage. During the Harlem Renaissance, Negrotarians became the primary financial and aesthetic maintainers of the literary and art movement, leading to a cultural exchange between the races. For some, a genuine cultural transference occurred through friendships. Like all human relationships those between the Negrotarian and artist were not perfect and always balanced. Financial arrangements often caused resentment among black intellectuals.

During the 1920s literature and art provided a cultural meshing among a few persons from both races. White

financial patronage served to sustain the Harlem Renaissance and provided access for whites into black culture.[1] Nathan Huggins criticized the movement and questioned: "Whose sensibilities, tastes, and interests were being served by such art, the patron or the patronized?"[2] Huggins doubts the value or merit of the art in his discourse: "When it is racial, there is, at first, the suspicion that the patron values Negro-ness, not the art."[3] Although many African-American artists unconsciously and consciously produced art for the commercialization and entertainment of white consumers, the Harlem Renaissance provided a legitimate entre for some black Americans into a white-dominated society. Richard Wright affirmed this view in 1960: "Whether the Negro artists and intellectuals, profess to or not, they are regarded by the dominant white society as spokesmen for their people."[4] Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, and most members of the black avant-garde understood their position and used it to advance the struggle for social equality.

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In literary analysis, the Harlem Renaissance marks a transition in the style and content of African-American

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[1] Hughes, The Big Sea, 334.

[2] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 128

[3] Ibid., 192.

[4] Lecture by Richard Wright, "The Position of the Negro Artist and Intellectual in American Society," 8 November 1960. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

poetry and literature. Prior to World War I, African-American poets such as James Weldon Johnson wrote about the social progress made by black Americans, its historical consequences, and the need to continue the struggle for racial equality. Johnson, a black founder of the NAACP, poet, and novelist, is the composer of the song "Lift Every Voice and Sing," also known as the "Negro National Anthem." The second stanza of the song expounds,

> Stony the road we trod,
> Bitter the chastening rod,
> Felt in the days when hope unborn died;
> Yet with steady a beat,
> Have not our weary feet
> Come to a place for which our fathers sighed?
> We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
> We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
> Out from the gloomy past,
> Till now we stand at last
> Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.[5]

Likewise, Johnson's "Fifty Years (1863-1913)," written on the fiftieth anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, chronicles the slow progress made by African Americans towards racial equality. Johnson writes,

> Think you that John Brown's spirit stops
> That Lovejoy was but idly slain?
> Or do you think those precious drops
> From Lincoln's heart were shed in vain?
> That for which millions prayed and sighed,
> that for which tens of thousands fought,
> For which so many freely died,

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[5] Eugene Levy, James Weldon Johnson: Black Leader Black Voice, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 71-72.

God cannot let it come to naught.[6]

Johnson was quick to warn later generations that the fight continued.

According to Johnson, after the First World War African-American poetry changed dramatically. African-American poetry in the 1920s,

> Involved a revolt against the traditions of Negro dialect poetry, against stereotyped humorous - pathetic patterns, against sentimental and supplicatory moods; it involved an attempt to express the feelings of disillusionment and bitterness the American Negro was then experiencing, and out of it there came a poetry of protest, rebellion, and despair.[7]

Poets such as Langston Hughes criticized social inequalities within American society and the unrecognized contributions of African-American culture. Johnson believed that race "motivated" Hughes professionally but not personally.[8] Hughes's poems deal with social issues and situations unique to African-American culture.

Like poetry, African-American literature had a long tradition prior to the post World War I period. James Weldon Johnson "cared little for the term 'Negro Renaissance' because it implied previous years of inactivity."[9] The first African American to publish a

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[6] Elijah Lovejoy, publisher of an abolitionist newspaper was killed by a pro-slavery mob while defending his printing press in Illinois.; James Weldon Johnson, excerpt from "Fifty Years (1863-1913)," in The Book of American Negro Poetry (San Diego: HBJ Book, 1950), 130-133.

[7] Johnson, ed. The Book of American Negro Poetry, 5.

[8] Ibid., 234.

[9] Levy, James Weldon Johnson, 308.

novel did so in London in 1853. William Wells Brown's work, Clotel, or The President's Daughter, recounted the tale of a mulatto woman believed to be the child of President Thomas Jefferson and his slave Sally Hemmings. In 1858 Brown, an abolitionist, became one of the first black American playwrights with the publication of "The Escape, or the Leap to Freedom." Harriet Wilson published Our Nig in 1859, considered to be the first novel written by an African-American woman. Sutton Griggs in 1899 published Imperium in Imperio, describing a fictional state in the United States governed by African Americans. Griggs also published non-fiction material discussing the economic and social inequalities facing black Americans. In 1900 Charles W. Chestnutt published The House Behind the Cedar, depicting miscegenation and the precarious place of the mulatto in southern society. Some of the Harlem Renaissance writers also published in the early years of the century (see Table 7).

The writers who appeared in the 1920s differed from their predecessors. One great difference was the financial and aesthetic support they received from Negrotarians. Joel and Amy Spingarn, Arthur B. Spingarn, Alfred and Blanche Knopf, Carl Van Vechten, and Charlotte Osgood Mason were the most prominent of the many Negrotarians financially maintaining the Harlem Renaissance. Many historians debate the success of the literary and artistic aspects of the movement because of its dependence on white money, but note the important role Negrotarians played in providing a market

TABLE 7

SELECTED LIST OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WORKS

BEFORE THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE, 1890-1919[10]

1890 The House of Bondage, Ovctavia Victoia Rogers Albert.

1893 Oak and Ivy, Paul Laurence Dunbar

1896 The Suppression of the African Slave Trade, W.E.B. Du Bois

1897 Echoes from the Cabin and Elsewhere, James E. Campbell.

1900 Up From Slavery, Booker T. Washington

1903 The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B. Du Bois

1904 Lyrics of Life and Love, William S. Braithwaite

1908 The House of Falling Leaves, William S. Braitwaite

1911 Songs of Jamaica and Constab Ballads, Claude McKay

1912 The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, James Weldon Johnson

1917 Fifty Years and Other Poems, James Weldon Johnson

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[10] This list provides additional information. The list does not include all major works written by African Americans between 1890 and 1919.; Wintz, Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance, 156; and Cowan, Timelines of African American History.

for the art.[11]

The white patrons of the black artists varied in their background and motivation for supporting the young African Americans. In addition to art patronage, both Joel and Arthur Spingarn were founding members of the NAACP. Joel, a professor of Comparative Literature at Columbia University, served as the chairman of the board of the NAACP, 1911-1919. His brother Arthur, a lawyer, was NAACP vice-president and chairman of the Legal Committee, 1911-1940, and president 1940-1966. Alfred Knopf published many black writers between 1920 and 1960. Carl Van Vechten, a writer and a photographer, was a patron and was considered a close acquaintance of many black writers from the period. Charlotte Osgood Mason, a wealthy Manhattan socialite, interested in promoting "primitive" cultures provided financial resources to Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston.

A white founding member and chairman of the NAACP, Joel Spingarn, contributed greatly to the literary movement as both an editor and financial supporter of several black artists.[12] Spingarn, in association with Harcourt-Brace, published the works of Claude McKay, Arna Bontemps, Sterling Brown, W.E.B. Du Bois, and James Weldon Johnson. It is doubtful that Spingarn regarded African Americans as

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[11] See, Huggins, Harlem Renaissance; Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue; and Wintz, Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance.

[12] See Joyce B. Ross, J.E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP (New York: Atheneum, 1972).

enthralling or was fascinated by their alleged primitivism. As a literary critic, he was primarily interested in publishing creative writing. As a social reformer, Spingarn was concerned with political and social issues affecting black Americans. During the 1912 presidential election, he resigned from the Republican party because it did not have any black delegates. Spingarn then made an unsuccessful attempt to have the "Bull Moose" Progressive party denounce racial discrimination in politics.[13]

Arthur Spingarn, in addition to devoting eighty percent of his time to fighting the NAACP's legal battles, was a patron of the arts.[14] Spingarn, acquainted with many of the Harlem Renaissance artists, served as liaison between Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston during their falling-out over the authorship of the play, "Mule Bone."[15] Spingarn, a confidant and legal advisor to Langston Hughes, sympathized with the writer following Hughes's break with "the old lady of Park Avenue," Charlotte Osgood Mason.[16] As an art patron, Spingarn collected literary works by African-American writers because he believed that "the

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[13] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 51.

[14] Francis H. Thompson, "Arthur Barnett Spingarn: Advocate for Black Rights," Historian 50 (November 1987): 56.

[15] In this incident, Hurston accused Hughes of giving co-authorship to his stenographer Louise Thompson; Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten, 20 January 1931. ZNH, JWJ, Beinecke; and Langston Hughes to Arthur Spingarn, 21 January 1931, ZNH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[16] Arthur Spingarn to Langston Hughes, 6 August 1941. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

ignorance in this country...concerning the cultural achievements of the Negro is profound."[17] In 1948, Spingarn gave over five thousand items authored by black writers to Howard University.[18] In 1964 Langston Hughes nominated Arthur Spingarn to Ebony magazine's list of the ten living whites who accomplished the most for African-Americans.[19] Two years later, at the age of eighty-seven, Spingarn resigned as the NAACP's president.

Alfred Knopf became the publisher for Walter White, James Weldon Johnson, Nella Larsen, and Langston Hughes (see Table 8). Knopf and his wife Blanche "depended on their own tastes and enjoyed helping authors get started."[20] Knopf published Walter White's The Fire in The Flint in 1924 on the advice of H.L. Mencken after several firms rejected the material due to the portrayal of graphic racial violence in the South. Walter White, the Assistant Secretary of the NAACP and member of the black avant-garde, spent most of his adult life fighting alongside Arthur Spingarn for anti-lynching legislation. Fair-skinned, light-haired, and blue-eyed, White went undercover in the deep South to investigate lynchings.[21] White used his personal experiences in Fire

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[17] Lecture by Arthur B. Spingarn, n.d. AS, MS, Howard.

[18] Francis H. Thompson, "Arthur Barnett Spingarn," 64.

[19] Ibid., 65-66.

[20] Hutchinson, The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White, 363.

[21] Edward E. Waldron, Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1978), 3.

in the Flint. Carl Van Vechten was so impressed with White's novel that he asked Knopf to introduce him to the author.[22] White then introduced Van Vechten to Harlem's culture. The two went "everywhere-parties, lunches, dinner," where Van Vechten met "everyone who mattered in Harlem."[23]

Carl Van Vechten, a New York socialite and writer, is the most notable Negrotarian of the Harlem Renaissance and best described as a "teacher, guide, and judge."[24] Through Walter White, Van Vechten met James Weldon Johnson. He wrote an introduction to a reprint of Johnson's The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man in 1927. Van Vechten, always honest in his literary criticism, previously informed Johnson,

> You have said everything there was to say and said it without passion. The book lacks, I think, sufficient narrative interest; the hero might have had more personal experiences, but after all you were chiefly concerned with presenting facts about Negro life in an agreeable form, through the eyes of a witness who had no reason personally to be disturbed.[25]

Although Van Vechten was blatantly critical, he and Johnson developed a strong and lasting friendship. So strong was their friendship that Van Vechten established an extensive memorial collection at Beinecke Library, Yale University, in

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[22] Ibid., 27.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance 129.

[25] Carl Van Vechten to James Weldon Johnson, 23 March 1923. JWJ, Beinecke.

TABLE 8

MAJOR HARLEM RENAISSANCE WORKS

PUBLISHED BY ALFRED P. KNOPF INC.

1920-1935

Rudolph Fisher
1928 The Walls of Jericho
1932 The Conjure Man Dies

Langston Hughes
1926 The Weary Blues
1929 Fine Clothes to the Jews
1930 Not Without Laughter
1934 The Ways of White Folks

James Weldon Johnson
1927 The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man
1929 God's Trombone
1930 Black Manhattan

Nella Larsen
1928 Quicksand
1929 Passing

Carl Van Vechten
1926 Nigger Heaven

Walter White
1924 The Fire in the Flint
1926 Flight
1929 Rope and Faggot

his friend's honor. The collection includes manuscripts and professional and personal correspondence from the most eminent writers, intellectuals, and civic activists from the period.

One of Van Vechten's most important contributions to the period is the 1926 publication of Nigger Heaven.[26] During the 1920s, Van Vechten became close friends with Langston Hughes and was acquainted with Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay. Van Vechten and his wife, Fania Marinoff, held many parties allowing the young black artists to mingle with wealthy white Manhattanites. The publication of Nigger Heaven sent many of Van Vechten's black and white friends and acquaintances into a frenzy for different reasons. It became a best seller, creating controversy within the Harlem community because of its portrayal of black Americans and the use of the word "Nigger" in its title. Many of the African-American avant-garde felt betrayed by Van Vechten's characterization of African Americans.

However, James Weldon Johnson wrote that the "dissolute modes of life in Nigger Heaven" were based on truth.[27] Van Vechten lamented to Johnson that,

> The New York News (an African-American newspaper) says that anyone who would call a book Nigger Heaven would call a Negro a Nigger. Harlem it appears is seething in controversy. Langston [Hughes] the other night suggested to a few

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[26] Waldron, Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance, 27.

[27] James Weldon Johnson, Along This Way (New York: Viking Press, 1933), 381.

> knockers that they might read the book before expressing their opinion, but this advice seems to be regarded as supererogatory.[28]

Johnson agreed with his friend. He believed that most critics never bothered to read the novel and reacted negatively to its title.[29]

Criticism of Nigger Heaven is important for several reasons. The overt negative response to Nigger Heaven and Van Vechten's characterizations denotes the equality that the black avant-garde possessed in their relationship with the author. African-American intellectuals and artists felt sufficiently comfortable in their personal and professional relationships to castigate a white author, socialite, and financial patron. Finally, the exchanges between the African-American avant-garde and Van Vechten regarding Nigger Heaven exemplified an honest, interracial discourse made possible by the cultural bridge.

What upset most black intellectuals were Van Vechten's vivid details of an unseemly Harlem nightlife and social scene. For example, the title refers to an utterance by Ruby, a black female character, who explains to her lover that "Dis place, where Ah met you--Harlem. Ah calls et, specherly tonight, Ah calls et Nigger Heaven! I jes' nacherly think dis heah is Nigger Heaven!"[30] The main

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[28] Carl Van Vechten to James Weldon Johnson, 7 September 1926. JWJ, Beinecke.

[29] Johnson, Along This Way, 381.

[30] Carl Van Vechten, Nigger Heaven (New York: Grossett and Dunlop Publishers, 1926), 15.

character Byron, a struggling young African-American writer, also uses the term "Nigger Heaven." But, for Byron, "Nigger Heaven" reflects his pessimism regarding the fascination of whites with African Americans. Byron grumbles:

> Nigger Heaven! That's what Harlem is. We sit in our places in the gallery in this New York theater and watch the white world sitting down below in the good seats in the orchestra. Occasionally they turn their faces up towards us, their hard cruel faces, to laugh or sneer, but they never beckon. It never seems to occur to them that Nigger Heaven is crowded, that there isn't another seat, that something has to be done. It doesn't seem to occur to them either that we sit above them, that we drop things down on them and crush them, that we can swoop down from this Nigger Heaven and take their seats. No, they have no fear of that! Harlem! The Mecca of the New Negro! My God![31]

In affect, Van Vechten chided white socialites who befriend black intellectuals and artists for the novelty of their color. He adopts African-American "slanguage," referring to the white Americans who seek the company of black Americans as "Jig-Chasers"[32] (see Table 9).

Nigger Heaven made Van Vechten "white America's guide through Harlem."[33] White socialites and literati devoured the novel and rushed to Harlem in search of the personalities described by Van Vechten. Rich white Manhattanites called on Van Vechten to escort them through

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[31] Ibid., 149.

[32] Ibid., 286. Van Vechten includes a glossary of terms defining black language and phrases. This glossary is similar to Zora Neale Hurston's anthropological study of language among African Americans. Hurston's glossary is more descriptive (see Table 10).

[33] Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue, 183.

TABLE 9

CARL VAN VECHTEN'S NIGGER HEAVEN

GLOSSARY OF NEGRO WORDS AND PHRASES[34]

arnchy:	a person who puts on airs.
August Ham:	watermelon.
Aunt Ann:	a white woman
bardacious:	marvelous.
berries, the:	an expression of approbation.
blue:	A very black Negro. Not to be confused with the Blues, Negro songs of disappointment in love.
Blue Vein Circle:	after the Civil War the mulattos organized themselves into a guild from which those who were black were excluded. This form of colour [sic] snobbery persists in many locations.
Bolito:	see Numbers.
boody:	see hootchie-poo.
bottle it:	equivalent to the colloquial English *shut up*. [sic]
buckra:	a white person.
brick-presser:	an idler; literally one who walks the pavement.
bulldiker:	Lesbian
charcoal:	Negro
C.P.T.:	coloured [sic] peoples's time, *i.e.*, late.
Counsellor:	a title often given to lawyers among coloured people.
creeper:	a man who invades another's marital rights.
daddy:	husband or lover.
dichty:	swell, in the slang sense of the word.
dinge:	Negro.
dogs: feet.	Not to be confused with hot-dogs, frankfurters inserted with mustard between two-halves of a roll.
Eastman:	a man who lives on a woman.
fagingy-fagade:	a white person. This word and the corresponding word for Negro are theatrical hog Latin.
happy dust:	cocaine.
high yellow:	mulatto or lighter.
hoof:	to dance A hoofer is a dancer, and hoofing is dancing.
hootchie-pop:	see boody.

[34] Ibid., 285-286.

TABLE 9
(continued)

jig:	Negro.
jig-chaser:	a white person who seeks the company of Negroes.
kinkout:	hair-straightener.
kopasetee:	an approbatory epithet somewhat stronger than *all right*.
mama:	mistress or wife.
Miss Annie:	a white girl.
Mr. Eddie:	a white man.
monk:	see monkey-chaser.
monkey-chaser:	A Negro from the British West Indies.
mustard-seed:	see high yellow.
Numbers:	a gambling game highly popular in contemporary Harlem. The winning numbers each day arrive from the New York Clearing House bank changes and balances as they are published in newspapers, the seventh and eight digits, read from the right, of the exchanges, and the seventh the balances. In Bolito one wages on two figures only.
ofay:	a white person.
papa:	see daddy.
passing:	*i.e.* passing for white.
pink:	a white person.
pink-chaser:	a Negro who seeks the company of whites.
punkin-seed:	a high yellow.
scronch:	a dance.
shine:	Negro.
smoke:	Negro.
snow:	cocaine.
spagingy-spagade:	Negro
struggle-buggy:	Ford
unsheik:	divorced.

Harlem. But many of the black avant-garde were angry.

Van Vechten expected some controversy over Nigger Heaven. Prior to its publication, he wrote Alfred Knopf asking that the publisher advertise the novel's up-coming release. Van Vechten wrote,

> It is necessary to prepare the mind not only of my own public, but of the new public which lies outside of New York. If they see the title, they will ask questions, or read "The New Negro" or something, so that the kind of life I am writing about will not come as a complete shock.[35]

However, many of the black avant-garde found Nigger Heaven shocking and issued negative reviews. W.E.B. Du Bois castigated Van Vechten in Crisis, declaring that the author insulted both blacks and whites with his degrading portrait of African Americans. Furthermore, Du Bois charged that the book was an "affront to the hospitality of blacks and the intelligence of whites."[36]

Van Vechten also anticipated criticism for using the term 'Nigger'. Early in the novel in a footnote, Van Vechten explains:

> While the epithet is freely used by Negroes among themselves, not only as a term of opprobrium, but also actually as a term of endearment, its employment by a white person is always fiercely resented. The word negress is forbidden under all circumstance.[37]

Van Vechten's use of black vernacular and both refined and

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[35] Carl Van Vechten to Alfred Knopf, 20 December 1925. JWJ, JWJ, Beinecke.

[36] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Review of Nigger Heaven," by Carl Van Vechten, In Crisis (December 1926): 81.

[37] Van Vechten, Nigger Heaven, 26.

unrefined characters indicates his comprehension and recognition of the equality of African-American culture. However, African-American "leadership was vested in the upper class."[38] They endeavored to reveal the more tasteful aspects of African-American culture than those portrayed by Van Vechten in his novel. These same leaders reacted with similar pronouncements against Claude McKay's Home to Harlem (1928).[39] Du Bois complained that McKay's depiction of the unseemly side of Harlem made him nauseous.[40]

Nigger Heaven occupies an interesting place among the literature of the Harlem Renaissance. Actually, it is never included in anthologies or on lists of period works. Although the novel aptly covers the social scene and is similar in description and tone to works by African-American writers, such as Claude McKay's Home to Harlem, it is continuously ignored. Historians and literary critics recognize Nigger Heaven only for the furor it created among the black avant-garde. James Weldon Johnson believed that criticism, such as Du Bois's, indicated the avant-garde's attempts to hide, what they deemed, improper culture and an

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[38] Dorothy West, "Elephant's Dance," chap. in The Richer, The Poorer: Stories, Sketches, and Reminiscences (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 220.

[39] Tyrone Tillery, Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 87.

[40] W.E.B. DuBois, "Review of Home to Harlem," by Claude McKay, In Crisis (September 1928); 202.

invasion of white America.[41] Black leaders feared that exposing all aspects of African-American culture, including what they considered to be unrefined, could possibly undermine racial equality.

Criticism of his novel did not affect Van Vechten's commitment to supporting the cultural movement or his friendships with the artists. Wallace Thurman negatively reviewed Nigger Heaven in the November 1926 issue of Fire!!, the first and only publication of "A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists" (see Tables 13 and 14). Ironically, Thurman called the novel a "pseudo-sophisticated, semi-ludicrous effusion about Harlem," although Van Vechten is cited as a contributor to the magazine.[42] Regardless of professional criticism, many artists maintained their friendship with Van Vechten. Thurman, in his The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life (1929), expressed his own views of the Negrotarian. Thurman wrote,

> Campbell Kitchen, along with Carl Van Vechten, was one of the leading spirits in this "Explore Harlem; Know the Negro Crusade." He unlike many others, was quite sincere in his desire to exploit those things in Negro life which he presumed would eventually win for the Negro a comfortable position in American life...It was he who sponsored most of the young Negro writers, personally carrying their work to publishers and editors. It wasn't his fault entirely that most of them were published before they had anything to say or before they knew how to say it.[43]

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[41] Johnson, Along This Way, 381.

[42] Wallace Thurman, "Fire Burns," in FIRE !! (November 1926); 47.; Ibid., i-ii.

[43] Wallace Thurman, The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life (New York: The Macauley Company, 1929), 218.

Undaunted by criticism, Van Vechten remained an influential Negrotarian, continuing to serve as a literary critic for many African-American writers.

Novels like Nigger Heaven and Home To Harlem incurred debates between black intellectuals and artists over the proper way of depicting African-American culture. Some younger writers, like Langston Hughes, accepted Nigger Heaven as an accurate portrayal of their society. Langston Hughes believed,

> Van Vechten became the goat of the Negro Renaissance...and to say that Carl Van Vechten has harmed Negro creative activities is sheer poppycock. The bad Negro writers were bad long before Nigger Heaven appeared on the scene. And would have been bad anyway, had Mr. Van Vechten never been born.[44]

Hughes wrote Van Vechten that he enjoyed the book. Regarding the criticism from The New York Times, Hughes sympathetically offered, "The guy must not like you--or else he was from Boston. It sounded like some of the colored papers on my book of poems."[45] Regarding Home to Harlem, Hughes wrote Alain Locke that "it is the best low-life novel I have ever read...the flower of the Negro Renaissance, even if it is no lovely lily."[46]

Nathan Huggins writes that the "Negro's subject matter permitted an easier entry for Americans into sordid

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[44] Hughes, The Big Sea, 271-272.

[45] Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten, 4 September 1926. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[46] Langston Hughes to Alain Locke, 1 March 1928. AL, MS, Howard.

and realistic subjects than could any possible white counterpart."[47] Huggins thinks that white Americans craved the "primitiveness" of black culture that they lacked in their own society. Huggins's premise was true of some white Americans. For some whites, black culture became a novelty, an alternative, or an education. As a result, some of the black avant-garde questioned the motivations of the Negrotarians. Regarding Carl Van Vechten, Jessie Fauset confided to Langston Hughes, "I don't know what his motives may be for attending and making possible these mixed parties. But we know that the motives of some of the pale-faces [Negrotarians] will not bear inspection."[48]

Carl Van Vechten was sensitive to what he referred to as "our race problem" and had a genuine interest in helping black artists.[49] Van Vechten, in forwarding a letter to James Weldon Johnson from his brother, a musician in Chicago, apologized for his brother's language. Van Vechten wrote Johnson: "Know that in the circumstance, you will pardon the 'Niggers,' which is certainly not intended offensively."[50] Van Vechten placed quotation marks around the word "Nigger" throughout his brother's letter. Jessie Fauset remarked to Langston Hughes that although she found

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[47] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 294.

[48] Jessie Fauset to Langston Hughes, Tuesday, circa 1925. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[49] Carl Van Vechten to James Weldon Johnson, 16 August circa 1930. JWJ, Beinecke.

[50] Carl Van Vechten to James Weldon Johnson, 19 November 1925. JWJ, Beinecke.

Van Vechten a bore, "he seems sincerely interested in you however, and suppresses, it seems to me, a genuine wish that you should not consider his interest in your behalf as patronizing."[51] She encouraged Hughes to befriend Van Vechten. Fauset wrote Hughes,

> He [Van Vechten] said, as much as he liked you, he would never have attempted to do anything for you if he had not found you worthy. Perhaps he has already written you asking you to come up and be his guest for a few days. If he does and it is possible I think it would be a fine thing for you to accept--some valuable contacts would arise--and above all you would be surrounded by beauty.[52]

Importantly, Fauset understood the importance of networking with the Negrotarians. She realized that Van Vechten's contacts and aesthetic and financial support could enhance Hughes's professional success.

Van Vechten recognized the problematic nature of interracial interaction. In Nigger Heaven, the frustration of African Americans with the swarms of white Americans in Harlem showed the potential weaknesses in the cultural bridge under construction. For instance, two black characters in the novel debating where to go for a night on the town reflect the saturation of whites in Harlem. Ruby asks "Winter Palace?" Toly responds "Too many ofays and jig-chasers. Bowie Wilcox's is dichty. Too many monks. Atlantic Joe's? Too many pink-chasers."[53] Likewise, the

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[51] Jessie Fauset to Langston Hughes, 15 June 1925. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Van Vechten, Nigger Heaven, 9.

young, black professionals discuss the state of Harlem:

> Howard: It isn't so bad for us as it was for those who came before. At least we have Harlem.
>
> Sill snickered: The Mecca of the New Negro! The City of Refuge!
>
> Olive argued: I don't know that we have Harlem. So many white people come up here to the cabarets. Why, in one place they've actually tried to do some Jim Crowing.
>
> Howard: It isn't that we want to mingle with the whites-I mean that we don't want to much more than we already are compelled to-but it is a bore to have them all over our places while we are excluded from their theaters and restaurants merely on account of our colour, theaters and restaurants which admit Chinese and Hindus.[54]

During the Harlem Renaissance, the material found in the novels, poems, songs, and plays written by African-American writers gave white Americans a glimpse of black culture. Van Vechten's novel reflects the Negrotarian's understanding of the implications on African-America culture from a spectating dominant white society.

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As did Van Vechten, some black artists ridiculed white socialites who chased after African-American artists. Wallace Thurman's 1932 publication of Infants of the Spring coined the phrase "Niggerarti Manor" to define a rooming house occupied by young and undiscovered Harlem artists.[55] Many white socialites frequently visited the Manor to

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[54] Ibid., 45-46.

[55] The term "Niggerarti" was used during the period to describe the African-American literati.; See Lewis, When the Negro was in Vogue.

fraternize with the artists. Thurman writes that,

> During this period, [Harlem] attained international fame, deservedly, Raymond [a black writer] thought. But he was disgusted with the way everyone sought to romanticize Harlem and Harlem Negroes. And it annoyed him considerably when Stephen [Raymond's white friend] began to do likewise.[56]

Thurman indicates that the black artists differentiated between white socialites, like Carl Van Vechten, with whom they had genuine relationships and others who related only to their 'vogueness'.

Unlike the white voyeurs in Thurman's Infants of the Spring, the socialite Charlotte Osgood Mason, a wealthy and matronly New York socialite, was in the business of developing and fashioning the "primitiveness" of young black artists during the renaissance. Her "purse strings...were like tentacles. They gave reign to young black writers [but] they could strangle."[57] Mason's wealth came through marriage to a surgeon, Rufus Osgood Mason. She is characterized in several works from the time period, as Agatha Cramp in Rudolph Fisher's The Walls of Jericho and Mrs. Dora Ellsworth in Langston Hughes's "The Blues I'm Playing," in his The Ways of White Folks.[58]

Charlotte Osgood Mason demanded more control in her

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[56] Wallace Thurman, Infants of the Spring (New York: Macauley, 1932; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1975), 36.

[57] Victor Kramer, ed. The Harlem Renaissance Revisited (New York: AMS Press, 1987), 96.

[58] Arnold Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes: I, Too Sing America, 1902-1941, vol. 1, (New York: Oxford University, 1986), 282.

relationships with the artists than most Negrotarians. Mason preferred that the young artists think of her as their "Godmother" and required them to call her by that name.[59] She often referred to Locke as "My brown Boy," and Hughes as "My dear child" or "My dear boy."[60] She had a history of supporting "causes." Previously, she concerned herself with the heritage of Native Americans, collected a book of Plains Indian folklore, and then quickly diverted her attention to black Americans.[61] Regarding Native Americans she wrote Hughes that,

> The primitive element still flaming in a people who have known nothing from civilization but misunderstanding our own annihilation. While they went through the process of being made over into white indians-into white Negroes.[62]

Mason's manner and her relationships with the black artists indicated her commitment to what she perceived was their "primitive nature."

Through the assistance of Alain Locke, Charlotte Osgood Mason attempted to cultivate some of the most famous black

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[59] The artists always refered to Mason as "Godmother" in their correspondence and she refers to herself in the same way.; See illustration on page 93.

[60] Letters written by Charlotte Osgood Mason to Alain Locke can be found in the Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. Mason's letters written to Langston Hughes are found in the Langston Hughes Papers, James Weldon Johnson Memorial\Special Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

[61] Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography (New York: J.P. Lippincott, Inc., 1942; repr., New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 128-129.

[62] Charlotte Osgood Mason to Langston Hughes, 19 June 1927. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

artists of the period. At one time or another, Mason supported some of the most successful artists associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Mason informed Locke that "great achievements awaited, provided he obeyed her instructions."[63] According to David Levering Lewis, Locke used "Mason's money to prove how "well-bred intelligent African Americans were...like well-bred, intelligent whites."[64] Locke prodded Langston Hughes to introduce Paul Robeson to Godmother for the actor's financial aid.[65] In 1929, Locke wrote Mason asking her to consider supporting Richard Barthe, who became the first African-American sculptor in the National Academy of Arts and Letters. Locke wrote:

> Dear Godmother,
>
> This is Richard Barthe of whom you already know something, but whom I am happy to have your permission to send to you for his share of the guidance and inspiration which to me has been the greatest revelation of my life.
> With gratitude for what you mean to all of us,
>
> Alain. [66]

There is little doubt that Locke was interested in spreading Mason's money around to whomever was willing to take it.

African-American artists also turned to Alain Locke for assistance in obtaining financial support from other

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[63] Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue, 152.

[64] Ibid., 154.

[65] Alain Locke to Langston Hughes, 6 December 1929. AL, MS, Howard.

[66] Alain Locke to Charlotte Osgood Mason, 12 February 1929. AL, MS, Howard.

Negrotarians. In 1922 Jean Toomer sought Locke's advice in securing a patron. Toomer wrote Locke:

> I have no money, so I must raise it: from five hundred to a thousand....I've been thinking of Mrs Elbert. You know her. What do you think of my writing her? Mrs. Elbert occurs to me because the proposition would hardly appeal to one from a purely business point of view. Vision, and a literary interest are necessary. She fits the bill better than any I can call to mind.[67]

Locke responded to Toomer: "With regard to the suggestion of New York and Mrs Elbert I rather have my doubts knowing her psychology. However, it should be done through some channel in justice to your talents."[68]

Regardless of Locke's intentions and plans for Mason's money, many artists lacked respect for him. Zora Neale Hurston informed Langston Hughes that:

> Al approves everything that has already been approved [by Mason]....The trouble with Locke is that he is intellectually dishonest. He is too eager to be with the winner, if you get what I mean. He wants to autograph all success, but is afraid to risk an opinion.[69]

Although Hurston criticized Locke, she did so out of Mason's hearing.

More than any other benefactor, Mason was the most interested in controlling her beneficiaries. Hurston explains:

Godmother could be as tender as mother-love when

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[67] Jean Toomer to Alain Locke, 1 October 1922. JT, JWJ, Beinecke.

[68] Alain Locke to Jean Toomer, 17 October 1922. JT, JWJ, Beinecke.

[69] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, n.d., (circa 1929). LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

> she felt that you had been right spiritually. But, anything in you, however clever, that felt like insincerity to her, called forth her well-known "That is Nothing! It has no soul in it! You have broken the law!" Her tongue was a knout, cutting off your outer pretenses, and bleeding your vanity like a rusty nail. She was merciless to a lie, spoken, acted, or insinuated.[70]

Mason was at times over-bearing and critical, alienating many of the young artists. When Aaron Douglas's paintings insulted Mason's sense of "proper negro art," he accepted a fellowship at the Barnes Institute in Pennsylvania to free himself from her influence.[71] She often complained about the artists' living expenses. Mason nagged Alain Locke about Paul Robeson's food and clothing allowance.[72] At other times Godmother became insensitive, complaining about the high cost of Robeson's medical bills[73] and questioning Locke "What in God's name is the reason that every time any of you step out to do anything you put on slavery's ball and chain?"[74]

Beginning in 1927, Zora Neale Hurston acquired Mason's financial support for her research.[75] Godmother gave Hurston two-hundred dollars a month for two years while

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[70] Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, 129.

[71] Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue, 152.

[72] Charlotte Osgood Mason to Alain Locke, n.d. AL, MS, Howard.

[73] Charlotte Osgood Mason to Alain Locke, (circa July 1929). AL, Howard.

[74] Charlotte Osgood Mason to Alain Locke, (circa June 1929). AL, MS, Howard.

[75] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 21 September 1927. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

Hurston studied "negro" folktales. Hurston felt comfortable in her role as Mason's protegee, explaining that "there was and is a psychic bond between us. She could read my mind, not only when I was in her presence, but thousands of miles away.[76] Louise Thompson recalled that Hurston enjoyed entertaining her white audiences, including Mason, by telling "darky" stories and then winking at her black friends to "show that she had tricked them [whites] again."[77]

The novelist Wallace Thurman parodied Hurston in Infants of the Spring as Sweetie May Carr:

> A great favorite among those whites who went in for negro prodigies. Mainly because she lived up to their conception of what a typical Negro should be. It seldom occurred to any of her patrons that she did this with tongue in cheek.[78]

In the novel, Sweetie May adamantly explains her behavior. "I have to eat. I also wish to finish my education. Being a Negro writer these days is a racket and I'm going to make the most of it while it lasts."[79]

Mason attempted to exert control over Hurston both financially and professionally. Hurston, an aspiring anthropologist who studied under Franz Boas at Barnard College, once offered Langston Hughes some of her own material because Mason asked her not to publish at that

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[76] Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road , 128.

[77] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 130.

[78] Thurman, Infants of the Spring, 229.

[79] Ibid.

time.[80] Hurston even needed Mason's permission to return to Florida and continue her study of black dialect and language and later to stay longer than anticipated.[81] Hurston confided to Hughes that her study was nearly done, but she hesitated to inform Mason and Locke because "Locke would hustle out a volume right away."[82] Godmother also dictated the material that Hurston could use in her published study. Referring to her research on African-American "slanguage," the brazen Hurston told Hughes that Godmother "says the dirty words must be toned down. Of course I knew that, but first I wanted to collect them as they are"[83] (see Table 10).

Langston Hughes reports that the first time he met Mason, she gave him "a gift for a young poet," fifty dollars.[84] Their relationship began in late 1927.[85] Mason provided Hughes with money, clothes, and encouragement to continue his writing while he attended Lincoln University and until he finished his first collection of poems, The

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[80] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 8 March 1928. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[81] Zora Neale Hurston to Alain Locke, 15 October 1928. AL, MS, Beinecke; Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 22 November 1929. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[82] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 12 April 1928, LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[83] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 15 October 1929. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[84] Hughes, The Big Sea, 313.

[85] Langston Hughes to Charlotte Osgood Mason, 1 November 1928. LH, JWJ, Beinecke. Hughes writes, "Today, one year ago we began our adventure in finance."

TABLE 10

HARLEM SLANGUAGE[86]

Sugar Hill:	Southern slang referring to the black red light district. District in North referring to the nicer Black neighborhood for professionals.
Scooter-Pooker:	sex pro. [professional]
Scooter-Pooking:	sex
Jelly:	sex
Jelly Bean:	male pimp
P.I.:	pimp
Sweet-Back:	pimp
Reefer:	marijuana
Drag:	marijuana cigarette
Bull-Diker or flatter:	lesbian
Scrap Iron:	cheap likker [liquor]
Conk Buster:	cheap likker [liquor]
Monkey Chaser:	West Indian
Miss Anne:	white woman
Mister Charlie:	white man
Ofay:	white person
A Pan Cake:	humble Negro
Jar Head:	Negro
Smokin or Smoking over:	looking someone over
Solid:	perfect
Cut:	doing something well
Georgia Jumping Root:	male sex organ

[86] This draft is in the Zora Neale Hurston Collection, James Weldon Johnson Memorial\Special Collection at Beinecke Library, Yale University.

Weary Blues. Hughes desperately wanted to attend Lincoln and accepted financial aid from several patrons to finish his college education. In late 1926 he received three hundred dollars as a Christmas present to put towards his Lincoln tuition.[87] In July of the same year, Amy Spingarn sent him two hundred dollars.[88] During the Fall semester of 1930 she forwarded one hundred and fifty dollars and promised to send four hundred to cover his room and board expenses and offset his brother's education expenses.[89] Mason also contributed to Hughes's brother's education.[90]

Both Hurston and Hughes appear emotionally attached to Godmother. The relationships were genuine but less than perfect. The two writers exhibit what seems to be a co-dependent relationship with Mason. For instance, Hughes wrote Godmother,

> I love you. I need you so much. I cannot bear to hurt you....I cannot stand to disappoint you either....You must not let me hurt you again....I am sorry that I have not changed rapidly enough into what you would have me be.[91]

Emotionalism aside, both Hughes and Hurston understood the delicate nature of their financial agreement with Mason.

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[87] Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten, (circa 1926). LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[88] Amy Spingarn to Langston Hughes, 14 July 1926. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[89] Amy Spingarn to Langston Hughes, 3 September 1930. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[90] Charlotte Osgood Mason to Alain Locke, 22 February 1928. AL, MS, Howard.

[91] Langston Hughes to Charlotte Osgood Mason, draft, 23 February 1929. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

Hurston wrote Hughes, "I know that you tell me things to guard against my relations with Godmother."[92] Later, Zora Neale Hurston informed Langston Hughes that he was quite a sensation in the South among the rural African Americans who read his poetry in A Fine Clothes for a Jew. Hurston reported that the people loved the poems and put Hughes's words to music. Hurston warned Hughes, however, that "I wanted to let your publishers know what a hit you are with the people you write about, but Godmother doesn't want me [sic] to say anything at present. But I shall do it as soon as this is over."[93]

The best example of Hughes and Hurston walking on Godmother's tight-rope involves Hurston's need for a new automobile. Hurston wrote Hughes,

> Now I need you. I am simply wasting away with fear. You see, I had to have a new car. Just HAD [sic] too. I had mentioned the matter to G. [Godmother] once and she simply exploded. You can see how I felt for the insinuation was that I was extravagant or took her for a good thing. Neither was soothing to my self-respect.
>
> So this time when I found I must spend about $95 to put the old bus in shape I just took it upon myself to go and dicker for one and keep my big mouth shut. The company, however wrote to see if my references were right, so she learned of it. She wrote to me a letter that hurt me thru and thru. She asked "Why couldn't Negroes be trusted?" But she later sent the $400 to pay for the car.[94]

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[92] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 10 December 1929. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[93] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 10 July 1928. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[94] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, n.d., (circa 1930). LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

The car died before 100 miles. Hurston traded the car and put the value towards a down payment on a new car. She informed Hughes:

> Now I can pay (the balance) out of my allowance. I am just praying that she won't find out what I have done. I don't feel that I have done wrong for nobody knows what inconvenience I have suffered fooling with old cars.
>
> I just feel that she ought not to exert herself to supervise every little detail. It destroys my self respect and utterly demoralizes me for weeks. I know you can appreciate what I mean. I do care for her deeply, don't forget that. That is why I can't endure to get at odds with her. I don't want anything but to get at my work with the least possible trouble.[95]

Experiences, such as Hurston's attempt to purchase a new car with Godmother's funds, led many historians to criticize the interracial relationships of the Harlem Renaissance. Harold Cruse charged that,

> The price was that in exchange for the patronage gained from Carl Van Vechten and others among the downtown white creative intellectual movement, the Negro's "spiritual and aesthetic" materials were taken away by many white artists who used these allegedly to advance the Negro artistically but actually more for their own self-gratification.[96]

Zora Neale Hurston offers some insight into the African-American artists' precarious relationships with some white patrons. She wrote to Langston Hughes:

> It makes me sick to see how these cheap white folks are grabbing our stuff and ruining it. I am almost sick--my one consolation being that they never do it right and so there is still a chance for us.[97]

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[95] Ibid.

[96] Cruse, Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 35.

[97] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 20 September 1928. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

Like Hughes and Hurston, Claude McKay needed financial support from art patrons. Unlike most artists, McKay "maintained a much better rapport with the whites if only because they seemed to have more to offer him personally and literally."[98] Harold Cruse believes that

> McKay himself, wary of wholehearted commitment to anything but his own art, was blatantly attempting to "playball" with white radicals, the NAACP, the Harlem Renaissance *literati* [sic] and all the rich white patrons he could locate.[99]

McKay's biographer, Tyrone Tillery reports that the patrons McKay associated with, "he privately held in contempt."[100] McKay wrote Walter White that "Most patrons are typical Americans. I have no sentiment for them, I just take their money. I love it."[101] However, Tillery adds that, like most artists, McKay was obliged to keep such sentiments to himself."[102]

Some artists, like Wallace Thurman, were more overtly critical of Negrotarian financial support than others. Thurman's black artist Ray, in Infants of the Spring laments:

> My generation...is tired of being patronized and patted on the head by philanthropists....We don't always have to beg and do tricks. We want to lose our racial identity as such and be acclaimed for

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[98] Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 48.

[99] Ibid., 48.

[100] Tillery, Claude McKay, 126.

[101] Claude McKay to Walter White, 4 December 1924. NAACP files, cited by Tyrone Tillery, Claude McKay, 126.

[102] Ibid.

> our achievements, if any.[103]

Ray describes a patron as a:

> Misfit white tryin' to become a latter day ab'lishionist...making a career of Negroes...he knows so much more 'bout what we ought to do an' feel cause he's white an' he's read sushology [sic].[104]

A Negrotarian responds to Ray "You Negroes, you don't know a friend when you have one. You don't know how to treat decent white people who mean you good."[105] As Thurman's characters explained, white financial support of black art was problematic for both the artist as well as the patron, even if the Negrotarian, unlike Charlotte Osgood Mason, did not attempt to control the personal and professional lives of the artists.

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The Negrotarians provided the finances and the social recognition needed to maintain the Harlem Renaissance, and some historians believe that this tainted the movement. In critiquing political and cultural advances of the movement, Nathan Huggins "challenges the success of the 'Renaissance' in delivering what it claimed for itself."[106] In this vein, Huggins concludes that the renaissance failed as a cultural movement because the black intelligentsia sought recognition based on the norms of white society.

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[103] Thurman, Infants of Spring, 200.

[104] Ibid., 137.

[105] Ibid., 138.

[106] Huggins, Voices from the Harlem Renaissance, 4.

Conversely, the renaissance succeeded because the black avant-garde encouraged the cultural, spiritual, and political development of blacks.

African-American leaders hoped to convince whites of black Americans' equality through African-American art. Ultimately, white patronage of the renaissance was inevitable, unavoidable, invaluable, and problematic. The renaissance succeeded because some white Americans embraced black American culture. Additionally, in several instances, between some black and white musicians, social reformers, and patrons and artists, a cultural exchange occurred.

TABLE 11

TIME LINE OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE[107]

1920	James Weldon Johnson becomes the first black executive secretary of the NAACP.
1921	A race riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma, leaves approximately 30 people dead.
	Sixty-four lynchings of African Americans are recorded in the United States.
1922	The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill dies in Congress. This bill would have made lynching a federal crime.
1924	The Democratic National Convention is held in New York, integrating all black Americans in attendance.
	African Americans attending the Republican National Convention are segregated.
1925	A. Philip Randolph organizes the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.
1927	The U.S. Supreme Court finds prohibiting African Americans from voting in primary elections unconstitutional in Nixon v. Herndon.
1928	Oscar DePriest, a Republican from Chicago, is elected the first African American from the North to serve in the U.S. Congress.
1929	The stock market crash occurs, beginning the end of the Harlem Renaissance
1930	Langston Hughes is elected president of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, founded by the Communist Party of the United States.
1934	W.E.B. Du Bois resigns form Crisis following his call for voluntary segregation.

[107] Tindall, America; a Narrative History; Alfred H. Kelly, The American Constitution; and Cowan, Timelines of African-American History.

TABLE 12

MAJOR WORKS PUBLISHED

DURING THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE[108]

Countee Cullen	1925	Color
	1927	Copper Sun, Ballad of the Brown Girl
	1929	The Black Christ and Other Poems
	1932	One Way to Heaven
	1935	The Medea and Some Poems
Jessie Fauset	1924	There is Confusion
	1929	Plum Bun
Langston Hughes		
	1926	The Weary Blues
	1927	Fine Clothes to the Jew
	1930	Not Without Laughter
	1932	The Dream Keeper and Other Poems
	1934	The Ways of White Folks
Zora Neale Hurston		
	1934	Jonah's Gourde Vine
	1937	Their Eyes were Watching God
James Weldon Johnson		
	1927	The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, God's Trombones
	1928	Fifty Years and Other Poems
Nella Larsen	1928	Quicksand
	1929	Passing
Claude McKay	1922	Harlem Shadows
	1928	Home to Harlem
	1929	Banjo
	1932	Gingertown
	1933	Banana Bottom
Wallace Thurman		
	1929	The Blacker the Berry
	1932	Infants of the Spring
Jean Toomer	1923	Cane
Walter White	1924	The Fire in the Flint
	1926	Flight
	1929	Rope and Faggot

[108] Wintz, Black Culture, 164-165.; and Cowan, Timelines of African-American History.

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Happy Easter to
my dear Yayo Ruth
"
GG "

CHAPTER III

LANGSTON HUGHES AND "THE WAYS OF WHITE FOLKS"

During the Harlem Renaissance money was not the only thing exchanged between the Negrotarian and the artist. In accepting financial assistance, African-American artists exhibited their culture to white Americans. Some Negrotarians considered themselves honored recipients.[1] The Negrotarians' recognition of cultural equality exemplified the creation of a cultural bridge. The cultural bridge gave black intellectuals opportunities to discuss relevant issues regarding social inequality. The discourse between the African-American avant-garde, white humanitarians, and social reformers strengthened the resolve and increased the independence of the black intellectuals. In effect, the financial and aesthetic dependency of the artists and patrons evolved into an independence for some black intellectuals from the constraints of white dominated social activism.

Even with the creation of a cultural bridge, nationwide segregation, racism, and prejudice rendered most African-American writers incapable of overtly expressing their

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[1] Carl Van Vechten to James Weldon Johnson, 25 February 1934. JWJ, Beinecke.

frustration with continued racial injustices.[2] Many black writers became increasingly disillusioned with Negrotarians who often unwittingly supported racist social and political institutions such as segregation in housing, education, and accommodations, unfair employment practices, and unequal wages. Some writers and patrons, like James Weldon Johnson and Carl Van Vechten, freely discussed social inequalities.[3] However, many writers, such as Langston Hughes, used humor and guile in their literature to deal with the problematic interracial relationships in both their personal and professional lives. "The art of the trickster" and "passing" (for white) were two ways African-American writers dealt with racial inequalities in society and the paradox of the artist-patron relationship.

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In 1950, Langston Hughes described the "art of the trickster" or the ability of African Americans to beguile white Americans. He wrote:

> I do not believe civil rights should encroach on personal privacy or personal associations. But health, wealth, work, the ballot, the armed services, are another matter. Such things should be available to whites and Negroes alike in this American Country.... But, because our American whites are stupid in so many ways, racially speaking, and because there are many things in this U.S.A. of ours which our Negroes may achieve only by guile, I have great tolerance for persons of color who deliberately set out to fool our

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[2] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 10 July, 1928. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[3] Carl Van Vechten to James Weldon Johnson, 30 October 1925. JWJ, Beinecke.; Carl Van Vechten to James Weldon Johnson, 16 August, circa 1930. JWJ, Beinecke.

white folks.[4]

In 1950, Langston Hughes believed that "Humor is what you wish in your secret heart were not funny, but it is, and you must laugh. Humor is your own unconscious therapy.[5] Recently, Maya Angelou spoke of humor as a "balm" for African Americans because "laughter is the sweetest revenge."[6]

For centuries, folktale, humor, and verbal banter helped slaves, and later free black men, deal with racism. During the ante-bellum period, the "Brer' Rabb't" stories portrayed slaves as tricksters, outwitting their masters to gain special privileges or undermine the slaveholders' authority. Slave songs, proverbs, aphorisms, and jokes provided slaves an outlet for their frustration with white oppression.[7] Lawrence Levine explains that black folklore often differs in the presence of white Americans because African Americans "got one mind for white folks to see,

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[4] Langston Hughes, "Fooling our White Folks," Negro Digest, April 1950, 82.

[5] Langston Hughes, The Book of Negro Humor (New York: Dodd and Meade, 1966), vii.

[6] Address by Maya Angelou, 23 September 1996. Langston University, Langston, Oklahoma.

[7] Lawrence Levine challenges Gunnar Myrdal's claim that black life was "devoid of cultural distinctiveness." Levine believes that the importance of researching folk culture is recognizing that in the slave society, folk lore helped slaves emotionally and psychologically escape bondage while strengthening communal ties.; Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 442, 8.

'nother for what I know is me."[8] Levine argues that this type of thought outlived slavery and persisted into the modern age. In the post-Reconstruction years, self-directed humor relating to tardiness, laziness, 'uppity blacks', regional differences, and racial injustices effectively "exposed the absurdity of the American racial system and released pent up black aggression towards it."[9]

During the Harlem Renaissance, although some artists resented depending on the white aesthetic market, they understood the economic reasons for accepting white patronage. When black artists received financial assistance from white socialites, some adopted the ways of their grandparents in dealing with racial biases. Langston Hughes, in his 1934 short story, "Slave on the Block," satirized white socialites and patrons of the arts who saw black Americans as "primitive". Hughes depicted these types of Negrotarians as "people who went in for Negroes."[10] Hughes, writing from his personal experiences during the 1920s and early 1930s, best reflects the growing chasm

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[8] Ibid., xiii; Levine challenges previous theories of slave culture.; see Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944); Stanley Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life, 2d. ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); E. Franklin Frazier "The Negro's Vested Interest in Segregation."; and Eugene Genovese, Roll Jordan Roll: the World the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.

[9] Ibid., 335.

[10] Langston Hughes, "Slave on the Block," chap. in The Ways of White Folks (New York: Alfred Knopf 1934; repr., New York: Alfred Knopf, 1947), 19.

between the black intellectuals and the Negrotarians in his collection of short stories The Ways of White Folks. These stories contained deal with the paradoxes found in interracial relationships.

Three of the short stories contained in The Ways of White Folks explicitly convey the developing disillusionment of Hughes and other African-American intellectuals with Negrotarians.[11] However, Hughes's criticism is subtle. "Slave on the Block" details the fascination of a white artist and her musician husband with their African-American gardener. "The Blues I'm Playing" depicts the unraveling relationship between a black pianist and her white patron. Finally, "Poor Little Black Fellow" describes the life of a black orphaned boy adopted by his parents' wealthy white employers.

Alain Locke, in a 1934 review of The Ways of White Folks, applauded Hughes's stories and "their sociological significance" as well "as their literary value."[12] Locke wrote that the stories explained "the growing resentment and desperation which is on the increase in the Negro world today."[13] In each of the three stories Hughes magnified

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[11] Arnold Rampersad compared Hughes's The Ways of White Folks with an earlier novel Not Without Laughter. Hughes's later work "is far more adult and neurotic, more militant and defensive, and thus more modern and accurate as a description of the Afro-American temper as it was emerging."; Arnold Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, vol. 1, (New York: University Press, 1986), 290.

[12] Alain Locke, review of The Ways of White Folks, by Langston Hughes, In Survey Graphic 23 (November 1934): 565.

[13] Ibid.

the naivete of the Negrotarians, ridiculing them for failing to recognize that their humanitarian endeavors could not solve racial problems rooted in political, economic, and social inequality. When their altruism became patronizing, Negrotarians unintentionally contributed to their own estrangement from African-American intellectuals.

"Slave on the Block" "asks for understanding based on mutual interest and honesty."[14] As Hughes wrote in the story, "nothing is gained by loving the Negro race undiscriminatingly."[15] Hughes wrote "Slave on the Block" while in Moscow in 1933, and it appeared in Scribner's Magazine that same year. It depicts the relationship between the Carraways, white socialites, and Luther, their black gardener. The Carraways (Michael, a composer, and Anne, an artist) "saw no use in helping a race that was already too charming and naive and lovely for words."[16] Michael and Anne are interested in neither race relations nor civil rights. However, they are fascinated by Luther's "primitiveness," which stems, for the Carraways, from his African heritage. For instance, the Carraways never hold Luther to his responsibilities in tending to their garden because they did not intend that he work for them. Rather, Anne asks Luther to pose barechested for her painting, and

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[14] Donald C. Dickerson, "Slave on the Block," chap. in A Bio-Bibliography of Langston Hughes, 1902-1967 (Hamden, CT.: Archon Books, 1972), 72.

[15] Hughes, "Slave on the Block," 19.

[16] Ibid.

Michael encourages him to sing spirituals around the house.

To the Carraways, like Hughes's patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason, African Americans represented a "primitiveness" not available in white society. For example, Luther becomes involved with Mattie, the Carraways' middle-aged cook. When Anne and Michael discover the two in bed, Anne comments, "it's so simple and natural for Negroes to make love."[17] In another instance, Anne wishes to paint Luther in a natural state, because he "is the jungle [and] so utterly Negro."[18] In September of 1960, Hughes, referring to the Carraways, admitted that he "knew a couple in Greenwich village who gushed over Negroes too much--beyond the call of duty."[19] Hughes implies that "the call of duty" included the Negrotarians' enthusiasm and artistic interest in the "primitiveness" of African Americans.

Hughes had a relationship with Charlotte Osgood Mason similar to the one between Luther and the Carraways. The allure of the "primitiveness" in Langston Hughes, expressed in his poetry and his prose, attracted Mason's interest. Hughes, in the first draft of a letter to his biographer, James Emanuel, wrote, "I am Luther."[20] In the final draft, Hughes changed his wording to "the object of over much

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[17] Ibid., 27.

[18] Ibid., 21-22.

[19] James A. Emanuel, Langston Hughes (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), 56.

[20] Langston Hughes to James Emanuel, 19 September 1961. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

attention by white friends, racially [sic] speaking, as in 'Slave on the Block,' I am in part Luther."[21]

Like Luther and the Carraways, Hughes endeavored to keep Godmother comfortable in her position as patron, all the time believing that he was in control of the situation. In a letter to Mason, Hughes wrote apologetically,

> I had been terribly worried because Zora and I both felt that you had been displeased, or hurt in some way about her work, since you scolded her so last Wednesday (or so it seemed to Zora who has been miserable about it, too).[22]

Meanwhile, Hughes warned Hurston to give Godmother information on a need-to-know basis.[23]

During the summer of 1930 Hughes attempted to break with Mason. However, the more he insisted on his freedom, the more money she sent. In June 1930 Mason wrote Hughes:

> Your letter stating your desires, describing your feeling of restraint has come to us. Dear child, what a hideous specter you have made for yourself of the dead thing money! If you go back in your mind Langston you will remember that you wanted very much to try the plan of allowance and accounting through which you know many of the other Godchildren have succeeded joyfully in saving income toward a difficult time or a flamming [sic] need. As it was not established in a binding way Langston I must have seemed dull to you that I did not guess what was the matter. So there is no question, you see, of "releasing" you from accounts.[24]

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Langston Hughes to Charlotte Osgood Mason, n.d., (circa 1930). LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[23] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, n.d., (circa 1930). LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[24] Charlotte Osgood Mason to Langston Hughes, 6 June 1930. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

Enclosed in this letter was a two-hundred and fifty dollar check. Six months later Godmother sent Hughes three hundred dollars, informing him "'keeping accounts' has nothing to do with your failure to do creative writing."[25]

The breakdown of Hughes's patron-artist relationship is evident in his short story, "The Blues I'm Playing." [26] Hughes wrote "The Blues I'm Playing" in September 1933, and in May 1934, Scribner's Magazine published the piece. In "The Blues" Mrs. Dora Ellsworth, a wealthy white patron of the arts, brings a young black pianist under her wing. The young woman, Osceola Jones, does not trust the interest of Mrs. Ellsworth in her music career as humanitarian because "just to be given things for art's sake seemed suspicious to Osceola."[27] Eventually, Mrs. Ellsworth moved Osceola out of Harlem, paid all her expenses, and hired her instructors in classical music. Unlike Mrs. Ellsworth, Osceola did not get a spiritual lift from classical music.[28] Rather, Osceola enjoyed playing jazz and the blues and leading the church choir in spirituals; she believed that "music

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[25] Charlotte Osgood Mason to Langston Hughes, 12 February 1931. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[26] Robert Bone, Down Home: A History of Afro-American Short Fiction from Its beginning to the End of the Harlem Renaissance (New York: Putnam, 1975), 256.; Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, vol. 1, 282; and Emanuel, Langston Hughes, 140.

[27] Langston Hughes, "The Blues I'm Playing," chap. in The Ways of White Folks (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1933; repr., New York: Alfred Knopf, 1947), 100.

[28] Ibid., 111.

demanded movement and expression, dancing and living to go with it."[29]

Hughes explained that the short story, "The Blues I'm Playing," "came partly out of my own experiences with patrons."[30] He explained that "the object of interference by patronage with my objectives as in 'The Blues I'm Playing' I am in part Osceola."[31] However, he later added that "it was a compilation of cases of which I am aware. This could have happened with my own patron. It did not happen, but it could have."[32] In "The Blues I'm Playing," the relationship between the Negrotarian and her beneficiary became tense when Osceola decided to marry a young man studying medicine in Atlanta. Mrs. Ellsworth tries unsuccessfully to dissuade Osceola from marrying Pete, telling the young woman that "he'll take all the music out of you."[33] Charlotte Osgood Mason reacted similarly upon hearing that Zora Neale Hurston had married a medical student at the University of Chicago.[34]

Like Hughes's attempts to break with Mason and Hurston's confrontation over purchasing a new car, Mrs.

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, vol. 1, 140.

[31] Langston Hughes to James Emanuel, 19 September 1961. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[32] Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, vol. 1, 140.

[33] Hughes, "The Blues I'm Playing," 119.

[34] Zora Neale Hurston to Dorothy West, 22 May 1927. DW, Radcliffe.

Ellsworth became resentful of her investment in Osceola. Upon hearing the young woman play the blues and jazz, her patron asks, "Is this what I've spent thousands of dollars to teach you?"[35] Hurston once confided to Langston Hughes, "Yesterday I had a long session with Godmother and received some kind absolution after much confession and postwhipping."[36] Hughes also felt Godmother's wrath. He received a similar reaction after Godmother read his poem, "Advertisement for the Waldorf Astoria," in Crisis. Langston Hughes's biographer, Arnold Rampersad believes that "his appearance in such a radical journal at this time, was probably a clandestine challenge to Godmother who abominated socialism.[37]

Langston Hughes found his relationship with Mason increasingly uncomfortable as his interests moved away from African themes to those of social criticism. Hughes believed that Mason's search for the primitive was futile because it did not exist in Harlem. Hughes lamented, "I was only an American Negro who had loved the surface of Africa and the rhythm of Africa--but I was not Africa."[38] Hughes wrote in his autobiography, The Big Sea, that life in Harlem contradicted his financial arrangement with Mason. These differences evolved into an interest in the social and

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[35] Hughes, "The Blues I'm Playing," 119.

[36] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 9 December 1930. AL, MS.

[37] Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, vol. 1, 161.

[38] Hughes, The Big Sea, 131.

political plight of the urban black. The author found it difficult to accept presents and money, attend plays and dinners, and then return to his humble abode in Harlem.[39] His poem, "Advertisements for the Waldorf-Astoria," was a reaction to the social and economic stratification of New York City and satirized the irony of a posh hotel surrounded by homeless people:

ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE WALDORF-ASTORIA
Fine living a la carte!!
LISTEN HUNGRY ONES!

Look! see what *Vanity Fair* says about the
new Waldorf-Astoria:
"All the luxuries of private home...."
Now, won't that be charming when the last flop-
house has turned you down this winter?
Furthermore:
"It is far beyond anything hitherto attempted
in the hotel world...." it cost twenty-
eight million dollars. The famous Oscar
Tschirky is in charge of banqueting. Alexandre
Gastaud is distinguished chef. It will be
a distinguished background for society.
So when you've got no place else to go,
homeless and hungry ones, choose the
Waldorf as a background for your rags--
(Or do you still consider the subway after
midnight good enough?

Hughes reports that upon reading the poem Mason declared, "It's not you. It's a powerful poem! But it's not you."[40]

Historians debate what actually led to Hughes's final break with Mason. Cary Wintz believes that it was Louise Thompson, the future wife of Wallace Thurman, who prompted

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[39] Ibid., 317.

[40] Ibid., 321.

Hughes to shed the patronage of Mason.[41] Hughes first met Thompson when she was employed by Mason as his typist. Thompson dissolved her bond with Mason, resenting Godmother's demand that her artists retain their "primitiveness". Alain Locke and Zora Neale Hurston also attributed Hughes's independence to his friendship with Thompson and her interest in communism. Nathan Huggins concludes that it was Mason's displeasure over Hughes's "Waldorf-Astoria" poem that severed their relations[42]. David Levering Lewis argues that the "Waldorf-Astoria" poem was published in the December 1931 issue of New Masses, a year after the end of Hughes and Mason's relationship. Lewis believes that the December 1930 publication of Hughes' "Merry Christmas" in New Masses is what really "riled the old lady."[43]

Hughes's desire to shed Mason's patronage is evident in 1930, prior to the publication of "The Waldorf-Astoria" and "Merry Christmas." Beginning in the Spring of 1930, Hughes attempted to extricate himself from his financial arrangement with Godmother. Hughes decided to travel to Washington and feared Mason's reaction. Apologetically, he wrote,

> I am terribly sorry about everything. You have been more beautiful to me than anybody in the world....I did not want to hurt you. I wanted

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[41] Wintz, Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance, 180-183.

[42] Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 135.

[43] Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue, 258.

> only to be true to your love for me....Here is my love and faith and devotion to all that you have taught me...of your spirit live with me always in light and beauty, that is why I cannot bear for anything else between us.[44]

In less than a month, Hughes became more adamant about ending his relationship with Mason. He wrote to Godmother:

> In all my life I have never been free. I have never been able to do anything with freedom, except in the field of my writing. With my parents, with my employers in my struggle for food, in all the material circumstances of life, I have been forced to move this way and that--only when I sat down for a moment to write have I been able to put down, to say, what I've wanted to say, when and where I choose....As long as I worked on my novel, [Not Without Laughter] dear Godmother, I think we were one--we both wanted it finished soon; we both agreed about what was being done.
>
> But when you told me that I should have begun my writing again after I returned from Cuba--I must disagree with you. I must never write when I do not want to write. That is my last freedom and I must keep it for myself....Then when you tell me that you give me more than anybody ever gave me before-($225.00....)--and that I have been living in idleness since the first of March--I must feel miserable and ashamed. I must feel that I have been misusing your kindness and that it would be wrong for me to take your help any more when I cannot do what you believe I should be doing--when I am afraid of making you unhappy because you have been good to me--and when I know that I cannot write on any sort of prearranged schedule....I must tell you the truth so that there will be no wall between us.[45]

Hughes wanted to be honest with Mason because he did value her friendship and appreciated her generosity.

Nine days later, Hughes tried another tack--ending his financial arrangement with Godmother so they could remain

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[44] Langston Hughes to Charlotte Osgood Mason, draft 25 May 1930. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[45] Langston Hughes to Charlotte Osgood Mason, draft 6 June 1930. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

friends. He wrote Mason:

> I was afraid it was happening all over again this time between us--the old things about--'I have given you this-now you must do that.' The old words that I knew long ago and that cut deeper than all the others because the knife is kindness. I could not have bourne them--because I love you-and I did not want to lose you--and I was afraid. That is why I said, if we get rid of the things between us, it will surely be all right. I could still come to see you--and maybe we wouldn't have to talk anymore about accounts and money and gifts and gratitude--and I would still love you as deeply as ever because you are more beautiful to me than anybody else in the world.
>
> I can't get rid of the feeling of my father and his eternal bookkeeping--he had nothing that anybody wanted--except money and land."[46]

Hughes became physically ill and depressed over the loss of his friendship with Mason. He described these feelings in his autobiography:

> I couldn't, for the life of me, tell the doctor about Park Avenue, or why I was ill....At the very thought, nausea swept over me! I thought she liked me, *my patron*. But I guess she only liked my writing, and not even that any more.[47]

Mason lashed out at Hughes for failing to produce what she considered art when he published "Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria." Like many young artists, Hughes measured his creativity and self-worth against Mason's standards and felt he had disappointed her when Godmother severed their relationship.

Hughes and Mason's break-up over money and artistic license illustrates the complexity of the interaction between Negrotarians and black artists. Without Mason's

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[46] Langston Hughes to Charlotte Osgood Mason, 15 June 1930. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[47] Hughes, The Big Sea, 316.

patronage, Hughes's poems may have gone unpublished. Moreover, his cultural and intellectual exchange with Mason stimulated his development both as an artist and intellectual. Mason's relationship with Hughes also reflects the paradox facing the Negrotarian. Sometimes the white patron felt that the artist took advantage of their good will and good fortune.

The resentment caused by the Negrotarians' perception of a lack of appreciation from their black protegees and their sometimes possessive behavior towards their black beneficiaries was further displayed in Hughes's story, "Poor Little Black Fellow." Hughes wrote "Poor Little Black Fellow" in March 1933. The American Mercury published the story in November of the same year. This story involves an orphaned black child adopted by the Pembertons, blue-blood old Yankees for whom his parents worked. The Pembertons agreed "to keep Arnie, poor little black fellow, [because] it is our Christian duty to keep it, and raise it up in the way it should go."[48]

Arnie grows up in a small, wealthy New England town very content until his teenage years. When Arnie becomes a teenager, the Pembertons realize that his social life cannot be that of his white friends. Dating, school dances, and attending the same universities as his classmates are not possible for Arnie. Although the town of Mapleton accepted

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[48] Langston Hughes, "Poor little Black Fellow," chap. in The Ways of White Folks (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1934; repr., New York: Alfred Knopf, 1947), 130, 131.

Arnie, allowing him to attend church and school, as he matured, both the Pembertons and the town "found themselves beset with a Negro problem."[49]

The Pembertons' answer to their "problem" emphasizes their ignorance of racial class distinctions. For instance, the Pembertons send Arnie to an overnight summer camp, attended by the intercity youth of Boston. They believe that it will allow Arnie to interact with other African-American teenagers. However, Arnie is miserable at camp. The Pembertons fail to realize that he is accustomed to their upperclass and small town background. Consequently, he is uncomfortable with the low income and urban-bred children at the camp. The Pembertons then decide that Arnie must attend Fisk University "to find his place in the world, poor little black fellow."[50]

Before Arnie leaves for Fisk, the Pembertons take Arnie to Europe for his summer vacation. While in Paris the young man is befriended by several African-American expatriates. Arnie's acquaintance with the black Americans is a cultural revelation. When he is befriended, Arnie thinks to himself, "For the first time in his life...somebody had offered him something without charity, without condescension, without prayer, without distance, and without being nice."[51]

Arnie enjoys the comradery of the musicians living

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[49] Ibid., 133.

[50] Hughes, "Poor Little Black Fellow," 137.

[51] Ibid., 142.

abroad, especially with his new friend Vivi, a young white Rumanian woman. Arnie hoped to introduce Vivi to the Pembertons "to show them that there actually was a young girl in the world who didn't care about his color."[52] Innocently, the young man brings his new friend to meet his guardians at dinner:

> The Pembertons looked up and saw Arnie coming, guiding Vivi by the hand. Grace Pemberton gasped and put her spoon back in the soup. Emily went pale. Mr. Pemberton's mouth opened. All the Americans stared. Such a white girl and such a black, black boy coming across the diningroom floor. They refused to shake her hand and Grace told Arnie, "I'm sorry but there's room for only four at our table."[53]

To Arnie's surprise, the Pembertons forbid him to associate with Vivi because she is white. They assume that Vivi must be a prostitute. Why else would "so lovely a white girl go out with a strange Negro?"[54] Arnie responds by defying his guardians and declares that he will remain in Paris. The Pembertons are mystified because they took him to the races, and they bought him half a dozen French ties from a good shop, and they treated him better than if he were their own."[55] They promptly disown him as Emily Pemberton exclaims, "You little black fool!"[56]

James Emanuel surmised that many white humanitarians

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[52] Ibid., 149.

[53] Ibid., 150.

[54] Ibid., 151.

[55] Ibid., 148.

[56] Ibid., 154.

during the 1920s and 1930s failed to grasp the ramifications of their patronage of the black race. Emanuel believed that,

> The Pembertons, then, like nearly all liberals, not to mention others, seemingly are prevented by some complex yet thin-fibered inner obstruction from knowing how to be genuine toward colored people."[57]

The Negrotarians' attempts to alleviate racial differences increasingly isolated African Americans from society when white social reformers failed to overcome their own prejudices. For instance, Hughes wrote in "Poor Little Black Fellow" that Arnie "could feel" his white, adoptive father, Mr. Pemberton, thinking "nigger" when Arnie sassed Grace Pemberton.[58]

There is evidence that some Negrotarians did indeed "know how to be genuine" towards black Americans; Carl Van Vechten is but one of several examples. Van Vechten served as more than a literary critic, publisher liaison, and patron. For many Harlem Renaissance writers, Van Vechten was a friend. Although Van Vechten received criticism from some of the African-American vanguard following his publication of Nigger Heaven, many black intellectuals continued to maintain a high opinion, both personally and professionally, of this Negrotarian. Dorothy West states that "much that I have learned, I have learned from Carl Van

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[57] Emanuel, Langston Hughes, 61.

[58] Hughes, "Poor Little Black Fellow," 154.

Vechten."[59] Van Vechten's good friend, James Weldon Johnson, referred to him as "one of the most vital forces bringing about the artistic energy of Negro America."[60] Van Vechten encouraged the African-American artists to reflect their heritage in their art so that the average white American could become familiarized with black culture. Van Vechten did this because he believed that white America's racial unconsciousness hindered racial harmony.[61]

Hughes's The Ways of White Folks never became a best seller, but it is an important work. In 1934, Alfred Knopf wrote to Hughes:

> Book sales are pretty sad these days and it doesn't look as either of us would make anything out of The Ways of White Folks. But...it has not done badly for a book of stories and it has certainly solidified your reputation.[62]

Van Vechten agreed with Alfred Knopf. He informed Blanche Knopf that the short stories in The Ways of White Folks were Hughes's "best work up to date" and were "written from a new formula, the complications that ensue between black and

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[59] Dorothy West, Interview by Gail Guinier, 6 May 1978, and 29 September 1978, transcript, The Black Women Oral History Project, The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass.

[60] Bruce Kellner, Carl Van Vechten and the Irrevant Decades (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 233.

[61] Carl Van Vechten, "Comments to Dorothy West," chap. in Voices From the Harlem Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 392; and Leon Coleman, "Carl Van Vechten Presents the New Negro," 117.

[62] Alfred Knopf to Langston Hughes, 14 August 1934, LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

white lives, from the colored point of view."[63]

Langston Hughes wrote The Ways of White Folks to express his own misgivings about the interaction between many Negrotarians and their black beneficiaries. Additionally, Hughes's short stories express another aspect of the "New Negro"--an assertiveness in demanding intellectual, artistic, and cultural equality in their ambiguous and sometimes problematic relationships with Negrotarians. Some critics argue that Hughes's The Ways of White Folks emphasizes the "absurd behavior and notions" of the Negrotarians.[64] Although Hughes's short stories reflect the growing disillusionment of black intellectuals, they are not hostile. Although satiric, moreover, they do not resonate with the same intense anger towards the Negrotarians that the next generation of writers espoused.[65] Hughes stated that he felt "as sorry for [whites] as I do for the Negroes usually involved in hurtful...situations."[66] He adds that in each short story one character underwent the difficulties that whites face in

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[63] Carl Van Vechten to Blanche Knopf, 14 December 1932. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[64] See Waters E. Turpin, "Four Short Fiction Writers of the Harlem Renaissance," 64; and Peter Bruck, "Langston Hughes: The Blues I'm Playing," 74.

[65] Following Hughes's lead the next generation of black writers, such as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, published literature magnifying the potentially destructive sociological effects of white liberal patronization of black Americans.

[66] Langston Hughes to James Emanuel, 19 September 1961. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

interracial relationships.[67] Thus, Hughes recognized the problematics of interracial relationships for both blacks and whites.

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Because the cultural bridge was limited to some black artists and Negrotarians, most African Americans did not benefit from the racial equality it provided. A way in which African-Americans dealt with racial and social injustices was through "passing" as white in society. Some African Americans, due to their light pigmentation, crossed into white society, pretending to be white. For some, passing was only an infrequent but accommodating fact of life. Passing became a popular theme in literature from the period. Two of Carl Van Vechten's characters in Nigger Heaven "pass": Olive Hamilton "was seven-eights white" and Richard Fort Sill "was so white that, like Olive, below the line (white Manhattan) he was never taken for a Negro.[68] Nella Larsen's character, Irene Redfield, in Passing sometimes pretends to be white in order to secure tickets to a play, catch a taxi, or enter a posh restaurant for a cup of tea. Other African Americans, like the narrator in James Weldon Johnson's The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, pass for love. Johnson's narrator is believed to be Mediterranean and marries into white society.

Passing for opportunity, and bearing their secret,

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[67] Emanuel, Langston Hughes, 176.

[68] Van Vechten, Nigger Heaven, 40.

became a difficult ordeal for many African Americans. Irene, in Passing, feels guilty for misrepresenting herself only to have lunch in an up-scale Manhattan restaurant. Irene believes herself to be a traitor because her husband and one son are very dark and could never pass.[69] Some women, like Irene's childhood friend, Clare Kendry, pass for a better life and later regret their decision. Clare marries a wealthy white man, never letting him know that she is black, and forsakes having children lest her secret be known. Her husband affectionately refers to her as "Nig."[70] He explained:

> When we first were married, she was white as--well, as white as lily. But I declare she's gettin' darker and darker. I tell her if she don't look out she'll wake up one of these days and find she's turned into a nigger.[71]

Some African Americans believed that the separation from their old lives was worth the benefits they received in white society. The African Americans passing in Carl Van Vechten's Nigger Heaven are interested in securing good employment. The character Richard Fort Sill explaines:

> Think how much easier it is to get a job if you don't acknowledge your race. Why, even in the Negro theater they won't engage dark girls....Olive, You don't think for one moment that you'd be engaged as a private secretary if you were black?[72]

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[69] Nella Larsen, Passing, in An Intimation of Things Distant, ed. Charles Larsen (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 198.

[70] Ibid., 200.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Van Vechten, Nigger Heaven, 48.

Langston Hughes's narrator, a young African-American, in the short story "Passing" explains that "Where I work, the boss is a Southerner and is always cussing out Negroes in my presence, not dreaming I'm one. It is a laugh!"[73]

There remained among African Americans an unspoken rule regarding passing. If one was light enough, then one should try. Langston Hughes's narrator in "Passing" thanks his mother for encouraging him to pass. He tells her,

> I'm going to marry white and live white, and if any of my kids are born dark I'll swear they aren't mine. I won't get caught in the mire of color again. Not me. I'm free, Ma free![74]

Richard, in Nigger Heaven, to the surprise of his friends, announces that he plans to pass permanently. Richard decides that he would "like to start a movement for all...near whites to pass. In a short time there wouldn't be any Negro problem.[75] Olive is horrified by Richard's flippancy and tells him that she would never pass intentionally because she is loyal to her race. Richard responds, "What race?...What's the coloured [sic] race ever done for you?[76]

In general, a black American who chose to pass knew that his secret would remain safe. In Nigger Heaven Olive tells her friends that a mutual acquaintance is passing.

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[73] Langston Hughes, "Passing," chap. in The Ways of White Folks (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1934; repr., New York: Alfred Knopf, 1947), 49.

[74] Ibid., 51-52.

[75] Van Vechten, Nigger Heaven, 50.

[76] Ibid.

Olive reports that Buda Green "was with a white man and she tipped me a wink. Later, she called me up and told me all about it. You can't blame her."[77] In Larsen's Passing, Clare's friends never let on to her husband that they, too, are black even when he refers to Clare as "Nig" in their presence. In Langston Hughes's "Passing," the narrator apologizes for his aloof behavior. He writes his mother,

> I felt like a dog, passing you downtown last night and not speaking to you. You were great, though. Didn't give a sign that you even knew me, let alone I was your son.[78]

Passing for white had varying results and implications. Zora Neale Hurston confided to Langston Hughes that "I have been through one of those blue periods when I can't make myself white. But you understand, since you have 'em [sic] yourself."[79] Clare Kendry, Nella Larsen's character in Passing, begins to miss her old acquaintances. Her attempt at a dual lifestyle in both white and black society leads to her destruction.[80]

Walter White "passed" to fight racial discrimination and inequality. White took advantage of his light complexion to travel through the South to document lynchings. Once, he was almost accepted into the Ku Klux Klan when he applied to gather information. White contacted

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[77] Ibid., 47.

[78] Hughes, "Passing," 49.

[79] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 10 July 1928. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[80] Larsen, Passing, 275.

a Klansmen, Edward Young Clarke, and solicited the necessary membership applications and questionnaires. White wrote that Clarke "became convinced that I could be useful to the Klan."[81] Clarke asked White to serve as a Klan organizer in New York. The charade was short-lived and White soon received anonymous death threats. However, he handed over the information he gathered from Clarke to the United States Justice Department.

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In his writing, Langston Hughes drew attention to the potential problems of white patronization of blacks.[82] He recognized the Negrotarians' paradoxical situation in attempting to bridge the cultural, racial, and class chasm between themselves and their African-American beneficiaries. Hugh Gloster explains Hughes's role:

> By reexamining the black-white relationship of the 1920s and by unmasking the falseness of the enthusiasm of whites for the 'New Negro', clarified for the Negro audience their own strength and dignity and...supplied the white audience with an explanation of [how] the Negro feels and what he wants.[83]

Hughes's short stories and he, himself, served as a bridge between African-American writers of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and those who emerged from the Great Depression

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[81] Walter White, A Man Called White: An Autobiography (New York: The Viking Press, 1948), 54.

[82] See Langston Hughes, The Book of Negro Folklore (New York, 1958; and Langston Hughes, The Book of Negro Humor (New York, 1966).

[83] Hugh M. Gloster, Negro Voices in American Fiction (New York: Russell and Russell, 1948), 80.

of the 1930s.

TABLE 16

LANGSTON HUGHES CHRONOLOGY[84]

1902	February 1, born James Mercer Langston Hughes in Joplin, Missouri.
1920	Writes "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," published in Crisis the following year.
1922	Moves to Harlem, N.Y.
1924	Meets Carl Van Vechten.
1926	Enters Lincoln University. Publishes first book of poetry, The Weary Blues.
1927	Meets Charlotte Osgood Mason and begins receiving her financial aid for his studies and writing. Publishes Fine Clothes to the Jew.
1929	Graduates from Lincoln University.
1930	Publishes first novel, Not Without Laughter.
1932	Invited to Moscow to work on script for communist film "Black and White and Red." Book of poetry, Dream Keepers and play, Scottsboro Limited published.
1934	Publishes collection of short stories The Ways of White Folks.
1936	Meets Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison.
1940	Publishes first autobiography, The Big Sea.
1941-1954	Continues to publish books poetry and novels.

[84] Onwucheka Jemie, Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), xxiii-xxxii.; Jessie Fauset to Langston Hughes, 15 June 1925. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.; Langston Hughes to Charlotte Osgood Mason, 1 November 1928. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.; Ralph Ellison to Langston Hughes, 7 July 1936. LH JWJ, Beinecke.; Carl Van Vechten to Langston Hughes, 16 October 1959. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.; Langston Hughes to Michel Fabre, 25 April 1963. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

TABLE 16
(continued)

1955	Publishes non-fiction, First Book of Negro Jazz and Negro Music Makers.
1956	Publishes second autobiography, I Wonder as I Wander.
1958	Meets Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones).
1958-1967	Continues to publish until his death on May 22nd.

CHAPTER IV

RICHARD WRIGHT'S PROTEST LITERATURE

The interests of many black intellectuals shifted from financial and aesthetic patronage to economic and social reform during the Great Depression. A growing chasm between white patrons and black artists' reflected the African Americans' growing disillusionment with white dominated political and social institutions. Economic and social inequalities between black and white Americans were highlighted during the Great Depression. President Franklin D. Roosevelt promised a New Deal, which seemed to exclude African Americans. The majority of black families living in Harlem accepted financial 'relief' from New Deal programs because 'Negro Work' or menial labor positions as cooks, waiters, and maids were filled by whites.[1] A frustration with growing black unemployment and social injustices attracted some of the renaissance writers to the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA).

In the 1930s, many black Americans believed that the CPUSA party offered the best solutions for economic and social reform. Some popular Harlem Renaissance writers (for example, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, and Louise Thompson)

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[1] Roger Biles, A New Deal for the American People (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1991), 173.

identified the CPUSA as the best hope for alleviating social, racial, and economic inequalities in the United States. Some of the black avant-garde became increasingly critical of the white patrons and social reformers from the renaissance because they seemed out of touch with many black intellectuals' increasing desire for ending economic, racial, and social inequalities in the United States.[2] Most of the generation of writers following the Harlem Renaissance also reacted to the dominating presence of Negrotarians in social reform. Richard Wright issued overt attacks on Negrotarians charging that,

> The giver gives out of guilt and the recipient receives out of necessity. The real meaning of destructive nature of philanthropy must be judged by the corrosive effects it induces in the personalities of the Negro artist and intellectual.[3]

Examining Wright's style and the response of the Negrotarians is crucial in understanding, in part, the break between white and black social activists in the 1960s.

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Examples of the growing chasm between Negrotarians and many African-American intellectuals were present in the later years of the Harlem Renaissance. One such example is Langston Hughes's attempts to get his radical poetry published. While in Moscow working on a film about racism in the United States, Langston Hughes wrote and sent several

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[2] Richard Wright, notes from "The American Negro," n.d., transcript. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[3] Lecture by Richard Wright, 8 November 1960. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

poems criticizing American society and politics to Knopf for publication. Blanche Knopf wrote Hughes:

> I have now read the nine chapters of the Russian book that you sent me and, although I can't tell everything from nine chapters, I am disappointed. What you have done is charming and pleasant, but it is not fresh and it is not new and I don't think it is the kind of book the public expects to come from you....I want you to realize that you are too good to write something today that isn't striking.[4]

Hughes and Mrs. Knopf both asked Carl Van Vechten to review Hughes's poems, and Van Vechten decided that the poetry was too leftist.

Van Vechten advised Mrs. Knopf not to publish the poems because they could hurt Hughes's public image. He wrote Blanche Knopf:

> I think the revolutionary poems are pretty bad, more revolutionary than poetic...communists don't buy books and few others will buy a book in which communist sentiment is stronger than art.[5]

However, Van Vechten recommended that Knopf publish the poems if Hughes persisted because "Langston is never unreasonable."[6] Van Vechten then wrote Hughes:

> As usual with your work I am going to be frank with you and tell you I don't like Good Morning, Revolution (except in spots) at all....The revolutionary poem seems very weak to me: I mean very weak on the lyrical side. I think in ten years, whatever the outcome, you will be ashamed of these. Why attack the Waldorf? This hotel employs more people than it serves and is at present one of the cheapest places any one can go

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[4] Blanche Knopf to Langston Hughes, 3 August 1934. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[5] Carl Van Vechten to Blanche Knopf, 20 March 1934. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[6] Ibid.

> to who wants to go to a hotel. It even seems a little ironic to me to ask a capitalistic publisher to publish a book which is so very revolutionary and so little poetic in tone. This is my opinion: I don't know what his (Knopf's) opinion is....You asked me to read the poems and give my opinion to you, and I am sending it right off.
>
> I think it is possible (though difficult) to be a good revolutionist and a good artist too. But I think you have to ask yourself more questions (more searchingly) in case you decide to carry on this program....I have no quarrel with your linking the American Negro to Communism, if you want to, but I think your expression of this will have to be ever so much more deep, ever so much more sincerely felt before it will touch readers either for its ideas or its poetry. The present book seems to me calculated to appeal to only those who like the sort of things it says already.[7]

The Negrotarians' attempts to dissuade Langston Hughes from producing radical social commentary were based on their belief that he must maintain his public image. Although, the Negrotarians understood Hughes's desire to expose inequalities in American society, they were reserved in supporting the manner he chose to register his protest.[8]

Some black intellectuals sought a medium to express dissatisfaction and frustration with issues facing African Americans. The humanitarian efforts of white social reformers and the organizations established by the Communist Party of the United States created outlets for black writers' commentaries. The CPUSA's literary associations, the John Reed Clubs, were organized to "win writers and

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[7] Carl Van Vechten to Langston Hughes, (circa 1934). LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[8] Hughes's frustration with his myopic Negrotarians is prevalent in the short stories included in The Ways of White Folks discussed in chapter 4.

artists to the revolution."[9] Many young writers, including Richard Wright, joined the CPUSA with the hope of publishing in the Left Front.[10]

During the 1930s Richard Wright was more interested in organizing a left wing group of African-American writers than he was in financial support from white socialites. Wright never depended on the financial and aesthetic support of white patrons. Above all, he refused to associate with the Negrotarians of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1938, at the request of Van Vechten, Harold Jackman attempted to arrange an introduction of Richard Wright to the famous Negrotarian. Wright informed Jackman politely but emphatically, "I am too busy."[11]

Wright seemed hopeful that leftist groups, including black intellectuals, might accelerate African Americans' fight for racial equality. Wright wrote to Alain Locke that organized black writers

> Though moving in a Left direction, are not out and out Communist. We believe that it is too early for such a call. We want to build if possible, A Negro people's movement in writing.[12]

Wright's project never materialized. Instead, his

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[9] Harvey Klehr, The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade (New York: basic Books, 1984), 351.

[10] Richard Wright, American Hunger (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1944), 169; and Idem, The God that Failed (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1949), 122.

[11] Richard Wright to Harold Jackman, 13 April 1938. JWJ, JWJ, Beinecke.

[12] Richard Wright to Alain Locke, 8 July 1937. AL, MS, Howard. Wright hoped to organize writers in Washington D.C. like those in Chicago, New York, and Detroit.

frustration with white social reformers and their attempts to eradicate racial injustices ultimately alienated him from the white left wing.

Wright became critical of the CPUSA in the late 1930s, charging its members with "hiding their fear of acting on behalf of the Negro behind tall, militant words and fishing for votes in the muddy water of discontent caused by the mistreatment of the war."[13] The CPUSA's lack of concern for the lynching of blacks, the segregated United States Army, and Jim Crow laws led to Wright's growing disillusionment with the Communist party and eventually prompted his withdrawal from the party in 1943.[14] Houston Baker speculates that Wright became uncomfortable with the Marxist ideology and frustrated when the party stopped advocating full-citizenship for all African Americans.[15] Robert Bone believes that black intellectuals who became dependent on the CPUSA suffered an "agonizing psychological conflict" in the realization that the party's agenda did not

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[13] Richard Wright, "Communist Party and the Negro," n.d., transcript. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[14] See Wright, American Hunger and The God that Failed; Klehr, The Heyday of American Communism; Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression; Constance Webb, Richard Wright: A Biography (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1968); Daniel Aaron, "Richard Wright and the Communist Party," in Richard Wright: Impressions and Perspectives ed. David Ray and Robert Farnsworth (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan, 1973): 35-46; and Michel Fabre, The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright (New York: William Morrow, 1973).

[15] Houston Baker, ed., "Introduction," chap. in Twentieth Century Interpretation of Native Son: A Collection of Essays (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972), 6.

consider civil rights for blacks as a priority issue.[16] Noting both Baker's and Bone's theories, it appears that the issues leading to this rupture may have been more than simply ideological: resentment of a Negrotarian-like relationship. The "agonizing psychological conflict" Bone mentions is evident in Wright's lament after leaving the CPUSA. He declared, "I'll be for them, even though they are not for me."[17]

Increasingly, Wright found himself the object of suspicion and the target of slander by many fellow party members because he treasured individualism and did not consistently adhere to the party's policies and decisions. Wright commented:

> It was not courage that made me oppose the party. I simply did not know any better. It was inconceivable to me, though bred in the lap of Southern hate, that a man could not have his say.[18]

In 1940 Ralph Ellison wrote to Richard Wright that the publication of Wright's novel, Native Son, "shook the Harlem section to its foundation and some of the rot it has brought up is painful to smell."[19] The rot to which Ellison referred was criticism of Wright from white social reformers

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[16] Robert Bone, "Richard Wright," in Twentieth Century Interpretation of Native Son: A Collection of Essays ed. Houston Baker (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972): 79.

[17] Wright, American Hunger, 125; Wright, The God That Failed, 158.

[18] Ibid., American Hunger, 92; Ibid., The God that Failed, 136.

[19] Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 14 April 1940. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

and members of the CPUSA. This criticism was in response to Native Son's indictment of white liberals and the CPUSA for patronizing and dominating black intellectuals in the movement for racial and social equality.

An examination of Native Son suggests that Wright had become painfully aware of the complexities and ambiguities inherent in black-white relations, including relationships with whites who were ideologically predisposed to advocate the cause of racial equality. Wright believed that "the negro artist and intellectual realize all too keenly that their actions, their aspirations, etc. are limited by the racial norms of the white world about him."[20] Wright exposed an unintended consequence of white reformers' attempts at social and economic reform: "Black artists and intellectuals are in a position of uneasy dependence upon the white society of which he is a segregated part."[21] The author recognized the continuing and deleterious patronizing of black Americans by white humanitarians and social activists from the Harlem Renaissance into the post-World War II era.

The Harlem Renaissance was successful in creating an interracial forum for intellectuals and this forum had cultural implications and long-term consequences. The younger black intellectuals, coming of age in the 1930s,

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[20] Lecture by Richard Wright, "The Position of the Negro Artist and Intellectual in American Society," the American Church in Paris, 8 November 1960, transcript. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[21] Ibid.

resented the constant presence of white social reformers and their agenda for racial equality. Wright's Native Son examines the consequences of the interracial forum established by the Harlem Renaissance intellectuals and patrons. Unlike Langston Hughes, Wright was overtly hostile and disdainful of white social reformers. Additionally, Wright chose to attack, without pretense, the naive commitment of young Communists and the ideological beliefs of their older comrades.

Wright proposed that, unconsciously and unintentionally, many northern whites physically and psychologically isolated blacks from America society. In his proposition, Wright recognized the inherent complexities of the commitment of white social activists who espoused racial equality. According to Ralph Ellison, Wright sought to "reveal to both Negroes and whites those problems of a psychological and emotional nature which arise between them when they strive for mutual understanding."[22] Wright's portrayal of liberal-minded whites in Native Son reflects a recurring theme: the African-American race "stand[s] in no man's land," as much exiled by northern Negrotarians promoting egalitarianism as by the southern caste system.[23]

In Native Son, Wright attacks latent societal racism and targets Negrotarians who attempt to improve the plight

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[22] Ralph Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues," Antioch Review 5:4 (June 1945): 201.

[23] Richard Wright, Native Son (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940; repr., New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 76.

of poor urban blacks with token egalitarianism. Unlike the patrons of the Harlem Renaissance, the humanitarians of the 1930s sought to spread their philanthropy to include the low-income urban African Americans.[24] In the novel, Wright explains to readers that white Americans' stereotyping and negative expectations of black Americans left few options for black youths. Wright wrote Native Son during the Great Depression, when unemployment among urban blacks remained disproportionately high.[25] Ralph Ellison, in his review of Native Son, wrote that the Depression created a "working class awareness" that had a "sobering" effect on black writers.[26] Economic inequality aligned some black writers to white liberal and radical reformers because many members of the Communist party were Negrotarians hoping to better mankind through economic and social reform.

Unfortunately, many of the white liberals and radicals never grasped the full ramifications of racial problems or comprehended the remedies needed to ease racial tensions.

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[24] Klehr, The Heyday of American Communism, 385.

[25] Roger Biles writes that in Harlem during 1933 over fifty percent of black families received unemployment relief, with similar findings in Philadelphia, Atlanta, and New Orleans. Biles, New Deal For the American People, 173-192; see also, William Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963); Frank Freidel, FDR and the South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); Paul Conkin, The New Deal (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967); Bernard Sternsher, The Negro in Depression and War: Prelude to Revolution, 1930-1945 (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969); and Harvard Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[26] Ralph Ellison, review of Native Son, by Richard Wright, In New Masses, 5 August 1941, 13.

Ralph Ellison wrote that the Left and the New Deal politicians, "for all their activity, [both] neglected sharp ideological planning where the Negro was concerned."[27] As an example, Wright offered the South Side Boys Club of Chicago: "The Communists...did not know these boys, their twisted dreams, their all too clear destinies; and I doubted if I should ever be able to convey to them the tragedy I saw here."[28]

Many reform-minded whites committed to racial equality in the 1930s resembled the white liberals in Native Son. In the novel, Wright relays the experiences of a young African-American, Bigger Thomas, hired as a chauffeur to the wealthy, liberal-minded white Daltons. While employed by the Daltons, Bigger becomes acquainted with their daughter, Mary, and her communist boyfriend, Jan. Jan and the Daltons attempt to make Bigger comfortable by being friendly to the young man. However, Bigger is confused and suspicious of their motives. Racial codes forbade any intimate contact between the races; Bigger was aware of the circumstances and the possible consequences. Out of fear, he murders Mary when he is about to be discovered with the drunken young woman in her bedroom.

The Daltons exemplified white humanitarians who were concerned with bettering the life of blacks. Although the

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[27] Ralph Ellison, "Review of An American Dilemma," chap. in Shadow and Act (New York: Random House, 1964), 333.

[28] Richard Wright, "I Tried To Be A Communist," Atlantic Monthly, August 1944, 68.

Daltons believe that their desire to improve conditions for African Americans is benevolent, it has harmful repercussions for Bigger. For instance, Mrs. Dalton informs her husband,

> I think it's important emotionally that he feels free to trust his environment...using the analysis contained in the case record the relief sent us, I think we should evoke an immediate feeling of confidence.[29]

Mrs. Dalton regards Bigger as an experiment, as part of a larger project. Ultimately, Mrs. Dalton's approach robs Bigger of his humanity and individuality.

In Native Son, the Negrotarians appear ignorant as well as naive. Their commitment to the improvement of racial relations sometimes oversimplified African-American culture and its importance to American culture. Mary Dalton, the young debutante, is preoccupied with rebelling against her parents' upper-class values by dating a Communist, Jan Erlone. Mary believes that by experiencing Bigger's culture and sharing barbecue with him she will understand the plight of African Americans. Mary tells Bigger, "Look, Bigger. We [Mary and Jan] want one of those places where colored people eat, not one of those show places."[30] She fails to realize that by pushing herself into Bigger's world she is in turn pushing him away.

Mary overwhelms Bigger with terms and concepts he does not understand. For example, Mary refers to her father as

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[29] Wright, Native Son, 51.

[30] Ibid., 78.

"Mr. Capitalist" and asks Bigger if he belongs to a union. Mary's facility with concepts such as capitalism and organized labor confuse Bigger and his instincts caution him against her interest in his life. When Mary informs Bigger, "I think I can trust you. After all I'm on your side," he wonders what side he is on.[31] The physical and psychological boundaries enforced by cultural habits prevented Bigger from imagining social bi-racial interaction with Mary. Therefore, Bigger responds defensively to her attention, telling himself that she is crazy.[32]

Native Son views the actions of white reformers as maintaining an unconscious segregation of blacks in American society. Wright magnifies the exclusion of blacks through the isolation of Bigger and his race. For instance, Bigger is baffled by Peggy, the Dalton's white cook, who informs him that "[Mr. Dalton] does a lot for your people. He gave five million dollars to colored schools."[33] Mr. and Mrs. Dalton's charity is ambiguous in that their efforts to help "colored" schools also have the effect of reinforcing segregation in education. Mrs. Dalton is very eager for Bigger to return to school because education offers an avenue of escape from the ghetto. However, the young man concludes that she "wanted him to do the things she felt

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[31] Ibid., 72.

[32] Ibid., 73.

[33] Ibid., 63.

that he should have wanted to do."[34] Bigger chafes under Mrs. Dalton's tutelage when he realizes that she is imposing her social norms on him.

Wright also uncovers the ambiguous relationship between white humanitarians and African Americans. Mr. Dalton, like Langston Hughes's Mrs. Ellsworth and the Pembertons, exemplifies the Negrotarian's need for affirmation of his "good deed." He boasts to Bigger: "I want you to know why I'm hiring you. You see, Bigger, I'm a supporter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People."[35] However, Bigger is unfamiliar with the organization. In this instance, Wright draws attention to the NAACP, its interracial leadership, and how it often alienated the lower social and economic classes of African Americans.[36]

An important passage in the novel, highlighting the isolation of African Americans from white social reformers, is Bigger's awareness of his blackness upon meeting the young Communist Jan Erlone. Wright explained: "Bigger was very conscious of his black skin and there was in him a prodding conviction that Jan and men like him had made it so that he would be conscious of that black skin."[37]

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[34] Ibid., 70.

[35] Ibid., 60.

[36] Wilson Record, Race and Radicalism: The NAACP and the Communist Party in Conflict (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1946), 78; and Margaret Walker, Richard Wright Daemonic Genius (New York: Warner Brothers, 1988), 178.

[37] Wright, Native Son, 76.

Unintentionally and paradoxically, Mary and Jan emphasize Bigger's color by minimizing its importance. Jan and Mary are the first whites to act and react to Bigger as though his blackness is insignificant. Their behavior is alien and unsettling, placing Bigger in unfamiliar territory. In reality, Bigger and his race exist on the fringes of white society. For instance, Jan demands that Bigger not refer to him as "sir"; when Bigger hesitates, Mary laughs and tells Bigger "It's alright. Jan means it." Bigger then "flushed warm with anger" and thought, "God damn her soul to hell!...Were they making fun of him?"[38] Even when invited, Bigger is reluctant to cross the boundaries established by white society.

Jan and Mary appear unaware of Bigger's perspective and indifferent to his fear. Jan, an ideological and naive youth, believes that he can ignore social constraints imposed through centuries of racism by simply offering to shake Bigger's hand. For instance, "Jan smiled broadly, then extended an open palm toward him," and "Bigger's entire body tightened with suspense and dread."[39] Importantly, Wright captures more than just Bigger's confusion and fear. The author uncovers Jan's naivete. The racial etiquette imposed by whites upon blacks virtually forbade physical contact and civility. Jan's manners, more than bewildering, are appalling to Bigger. Societal conditioning rendered

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 75.

Bigger incapable of contemplating a genuine friendship with either Mary or Jan. Jan, on the other hand, is consumed with making Bigger comfortable but unknowingly makes Bigger ill at ease.

What little liberty Bigger feels in the presence of Jan and Mary is overshadowed by the fact that society and race afford the young couple experiences unlike those of Bigger. Mary casually informs Jan that she would like to meet some African Americans, and he replies: "I don't know any very well. But you'll meet them when you join the party."[40] Mary further isolates Bigger when he overhears her informing Jan that she will join the party and work with African Americans because "when I see what 'they've' done to 'those' people, it makes me so mad."[41] Like her mother, Mary views African Americans as a cause worthy of her attention. In addition, she evades responsibility for the oppression of blacks by transferring blame to other white people. Also like her mother, Mary is blind to her own role in the segregation of the races. In her determination to spread equality, she fails to recognize that the form of tutelage she has chosen continues to isolate Bigger and "his" people.

For Negrotarians, like the Daltons, class distinctions are as blinding as racial distinctions. During Bigger's trial, it becomes obvious that the Daltons have failed to learn anything from their relationship with Bigger. Ellison

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[40] Ibid., 88.

[41] Ibid.

writes that "it was they [the Negrotarians], not he [Bigger] who fostered the dehumanizing conditions which shaped his personality."[42] Yet, when Bigger's mother pleads for her son's life, Mr. Dalton promises that her family will not be evicted from the tenement house he owns. The Daltons, believing themselves to be truly humanitarians, harbor no ill-feelings towards Bigger, nor do they recognize the reasons behind the murder of their daughter.

The Daltons fail to view Bigger as human. Mr. Dalton is willing to supply African-American youths with ping-pong tables and an education. Yet, he is unwilling to offer blacks a rent break because he is not about to change economic policies at his expense. Wright once asked rhetorically of an audience, "Why do whites feel guilty?" He answered, "Millionaire sees a beggar [and says] "Take the sonafabitch out of my sight before I shoot 'im; he makes me feel awful."[43] To the Daltons, Bigger represents little more than a failed social experiment.

Additionally, Wright uncovered ambiguities found among members of the Communist party. He deftly exposed one problem found throughout United States history: some white interracialists found it difficult to suppress their racial prejudices. Jan is unable to escape racial stereotyping

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[42] Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 22 April 1940. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[43] Richard Wright, "The Position of the Negro Artist and Intellectual in American Society," transcript. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

when he asks Bigger, "You like fried chicken?"[44] Likewise, Jan's racial conditioning is exposed following Mary's disappearance. Jan lies to Mr. Dalton when questioned about the events of the previous evening. After admitting that he drank with Mary, Jan tells Mr. Dalton that he brought Mary home. Bigger believes Jan did this because he did not want Mr. Dalton to think that he left Mary "alone in the car with a strange chauffeur."[45] However, Jan may have feared telling Mr. Dalton that he left Mary alone with a *black* chauffeur.

Recently, Mark Naison has emphasized the benefits that black Americans derived from their association with the CPUSA, including the strengthening of civic organizations.[46] However, according to Harvey Klehr, the limited contact between ordinary blacks and members of the CPUSA alienated the two groups. In 1938 only nine percent of the CPUSA members were black.[47] When Mary first informs Bigger that she is not going to the university but instead she is meeting a friend "who's also a friend of yours," Bigger immediately decides that he wants nothing to do with Reds.[48] He believes that it is worth going to jail for

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[44] Wright, Native Son, 83.

[45] Ibid., 193.

[46] Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression, xvi-xviii.

[47] Klehr, The Heyday of Communism, 348.

[48] Wright, Native Son, 73.

stealing but not for being associated with the Communists.[49]

Jan Erlone, like Mary and her parents, uses language and concepts unfamiliar to Bigger. Bigger is ignorant of Marxist theory, and Erlone, the budding communist, acquaints him with party rhetoric. Erlone epitomizes a young Red, speaking to Bigger of revolution as a means of destroying racial and class distinctions. He tells Bigger:

> After the revolution it will be ours. But we'll have to fight for it. What a world to win, Bigger! And when that day comes, things will be different. There'll be no white and no black; there'll be no rich and no poor.[50]

In reality, Jan and Mary misunderstand racial issues. Although they have good intentions, Wright depicts their means as unrealistic because they view racial conflicts as class conflicts. In doing so, he exposes the flaws in the CPUSA's beliefs that a only a classless society would eradicate racism.

Ultimately, Jan recognizes the failures of the Negrotarians. Jan eventually realizes the contradictions inherent in white Americans attempting to elevate blacks out of the ghetto. Upon Bigger's arrest, Jan visits him in jail to tell Bigger that he does not hold him responsible for Mary's death nor does he hate Bigger. Wright's biographer, Constance Webb, believes that Jan "examines himself and discovers his own prejudices, that he has been an

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 78.

unconscious bigot despite Communist principle."[51] Jan explains to Bigger that "I'm a white man and it would be asking too much to ask you not to hate me, when every white man you see hates you."[52] Wright explained to a correspondent that

> The average moral-minded American simply does not want to believe that his attitude toward others can breed personalities so thwarted and twisted....I do not think that Negroes will be treated any better in this country until whites themselves realize that there is something dead wrong with the American way of life.[53]

The misperception of racial and social equality through economic determinism was not confined to Jan and the Daltons. Like Jan and Mary, Bigger's lawyer, Max, also views his client as an example of economic class struggle.[54] While the Daltons try to improve Bigger's life through financial assistance, Max believes that the destruction of class barriers will save the Biggers in America. Max concludes that African Americans suffer primarily from economic discrimination, and, therefore,

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[51] Webb, Richard Wright, 274.

[52] Wright, Native Son, 331.

[53] Richard Wright to Dorothy Fisher, 20 July 1944. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[54] Several authors argue that Max was a member of the Communist party. Margaret Marshall refers to Max as a communist in her review of Native Son. However, Paul N. Seigel, believes that Max did not represent the party. This study views Max as a Marxist, although sympathetic to the party but not a member.; See Kenneth Kinnamon, ed., "Introduction", chap. in his New Essays on Native Son (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 6; Margaret Marshall, review of Native Son, by Richard Wright, in The Nation, 16 March 1940, 368; and Paul N. Seigel, "The Conclusion of Richard Wright's Native Son," PMLA (May, 1974): 517-523.

removing class distinctions is essential to alleviating racial tensions.[55] Wright further reflects his frustration with Marxism in Max's commitment to the ideology that causes the lawyer to view his client as a means to an end. Max's defense partially absolves Bigger of the responsibility for the murder of Mary Dalton and places blame on the environment created by white society.

The most interesting aspects of Max's plea are its implications for the African-American race. During the trial he informs the courtroom:

> Perhaps it is in a manner fortunate that the defendant has committed one of the darkest crimes in our memory; for if we can encompass the life of this man and find out what has happened to him, if we can understand how subtly and yet strongly his life and fate are linked to ours--if we can do this perhaps we shall find the key to our future.[56]

In pardoning Bigger for this crime, Max diminishes Bigger's human capacity for moral judgment. Wright is magnifying the ambiguities of the CPUSA's doctrine. Likewise, Wright calls attention to a double standard: whites insisting that African Americans rely on white Americans to rescue them from white society's discrimination. For Wright, white assistance in itself becomes oppressive and patronizing. For instance, Max theorizes that by placing partial responsibility for the crime on society, he is exposing the detrimental effects of discrimination imposed by the white race. However, once again whites psychologically segregate

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[55] Kinnamon, "Introduction," New Essays on Native Son, 6.

[56] Wright, Native Son, 444.

Bigger and his race by attending to their needs.

Max's misunderstanding of the issues of racial, social, and economic inequalities facing African Americans reflects the flaws in the CPUSA's interpretation. By blaming white Americans for creating an unhealthy environment in which urban blacks exist, Max magnifies the differences between the races. In doing so, Max "was able to filter Bigger through the party's vision."[57] The CPUSA utilized this defense in high profile criminal cases during this period. Some of Wright's biographers believe that the Communist party's involvement in the Scottsboro Boys case influenced Wright in developing the plot of Native Son.[58] Max's closing argument is a corollary to the CPUSA's defense of the Scottsboro Boys. In that case, nine black male youths were accused of raping a white woman. The International Labor Defense, supported by the CPUSA, supplied attorneys and a defense similar to Max's defense of Bigger.[59] However, Wright reported that he based Bigger's case on Robert Nixon, a young, black Chicagonian accused of murder, because the author believed that "the boy involved...never

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[57] Daniel McCall, "The Bad Nigger," in Richard Wright's Native Son: Modern Critical Interpretations ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988): 21.

[58] Walker, Richard Wright Daemonic Genius; and Fabre, The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright.

[59] Paul Seigel believes that Max's defense was based on Clarence Darrow's success in getting a trial without a jury and a "life" sentence rather than execution in the Leopold and Loeb Case. In the novel, Max introduces himself as from the "Labor Defenders." Seigel, "The Conclusion of Richard Wright," 520.

had a chance from the moment he was picked up and charged with murder."[60]

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Wright's Native Son deviates from the type of work published by black writers during the Harlem Renaissance. Ralph Ellison commented that "American Negro fiction of the 1920s was timid of theme and for the most part technically backward."[61] Wright agreed with Ellison. In part, Native Son represents social protest literature reacting to the Harlem Renaissance.

In Wright's "Blue Print for Negro Writing," he criticized earlier black writers and their work because it "has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim."[62] He referred to the Harlem Renaissance writers as "decorous ambassadors who went a--begging to white America."[63] Wright later added, "My speaking [of patronage] has this aim: perhaps I can make you aware of the tragic tensions and frustrations which such a system of control inflicts upon Negro artists and intellectuals."[64] Wright failed to identify the achievements made by the earlier generation of writers. In doing so, he did not

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[60] Wright, "I Bite the Hand that Feeds Me," Atlantic Monthly (May 1940). RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[61] Ellison, review of Native Son, 11.

[62] Richard Wright "Blue Print for Negro Writing", New Challenge 1:1 (Fall 1937): 53.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Wright, "The Position of the Negro Artists and Intellectual in American Society."

recognize the cultural exchange which initiated discourse on social inequality between the black avant-garde and Negrotarians. Wright's oversight reflects the growing independence of many African-American intellectuals from the limitations placed on social activism by Negrotarians.

Following the novel's publication, Ralph Ellison informed Wright that CPUSA members "are hollering their heads off because Bigger became a man rather than a political puppet."[65] Wright responded publicly to the party's criticism. He wrote,

> If there had been one person in the Dalton household who viewed Bigger as a human being, the crime could have been solved within one half hour. The one piece of incriminating evidence which would have solved the "murder mystery" was Bigger's humanity, and the Daltons, Britten, and the Newspapermen could not see the living clue of Bigger's humanity under their very eyes.[66]

Wright complained that Negrotarians, as characterized by the Daltons and CPUSA in Max and Jan, often failed to humanize African Americans such as Bigger.

Wright believed that the publication of Native Son alienated him from the middle class professionals of his race and members of the Communist party because, as Mark Naison points, he "refused to assign the Left greater weight in fiction than it possessed in real life."[67] Some members of the CPUSA were outraged at the publication of Native Son

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[65] Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 22 April 1940. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[66] Wright, "I Bite the Hand that Feeds Me," 828.

[67] Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression, 300; and Kinnamon, "Introduction," 18-19.

because "it failed to offer the approved 'solution' of united action by black and white workers, offering instead a more ambiguous image of personal emancipation through violence."[68] In a 1940 review of Native Son, Ben J. Davis, a black CPUSA official, argued that characters representing the CPUSA were not typical and served to "project the role of the Communist Party, in a confused manner."[69] Nonetheless, Davis believed that Native Son portrayed the CPUSA as the only true organization capable and willing to fight for the civil rights of blacks. Ralph Ellison argued that Ben Davis and other CPUSA members "fail to see what's bad in Bigger from the point of view of bourgeois society, is good from our point of view."[70] Likewise, in Bigger's lament that "black folks and white folks is strangers. We don't know what each other is thinking,"[71] Wright argued that "white Communists had idealized all Negroes to the extent that they did not see the same Negroes I saw."[72]

Wright often criticized the "pseudo-intellectuals of the party" for their underlying racism.[73] On the other

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[68] Ibid.,; See also Aaron, "Richard Wright and the Communist Party", 43-46.; and Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression, 210, 300.

[69] Ben J. Davis, review of Native Son, by Richard Wright, In Sunday Worker, 14 April 1940, 4-6.

[70] Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 22 April 1940. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[71] Wright, Native Son, 406.

[72] Wright, American Hunger, 86.

[73] Walker, Richard Wright Daemonic Genius, 178.

hand, some members of the Communist party concluded that "intellectuals [in general] were troublesome" because of their upper class backgrounds, independent thinking, and reluctance to follow the party line.[74] In fact, a "comrade" warned Wright that "intellectuals don't fit well into the party."[75] Not surprisingly, in 1943, Wright disassociated himself from the CPUSA. Having spent many of the post war years in France, he settled in Paris in 1947. Wright explained that "I live in exile because I love freedom, and I've found more freedom in one square block of Paris than there is in the entire United States."[76]

Wright hoped that by writing Native Son he would break the constraints imposed by white society and the pattern of patronization carried from the Harlem Renaissance.[77] Ralph Ellison believed that Wright achieved this goal, reporting that the CPUSA's "opinion on [Native Son] seems sharply divided...[because] the assumptions of many Communist party members have been challenged."[78] In challenging the party's assumptions, Wright successfully emphasized the increasing isolation of blacks within American society by

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[74] Klehr, The Heyday of American Communism, 69.

[75] Wright American Hunger, 128; Wright, The God that Failed, 80.

[76] Richard Wright, "I Choose Exile," transcript. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[77] Richard Wright, "How Bigger Was Born," chap. in Native Son (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 525.

[78] Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 14 April 1940. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

the unintentional patronization of reform-minded whites.

Wright believed that in a writer's work "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."[79] Similar to Langston Hughes, Richard Wright understood the paradox of humanitarianism and called attention to it in his writing. Wright's view of interracial relations in Native Son depicts Negrotarians as largely unaware of the debilitating effects of white humanitarianism on integration. This attitude stayed with Wright until his death in 1960. In his last appearance, Wright informed an audience that,

> Whites approach the Negro artist or intellectual with offers of help in the form of philanthropy and it has been philanthropy rather than the just appreciation of laws that has molded the being of the black artists and intellectuals of the United States today.[80]

Harold Cruse believes that African-American intellectuals, like Wright, became "intellectually sidetracked" by "Communist left-wing philosophy" during the 1930s.[81] On the contrary, black intellectuals searched for a viable answer to racial and economic inequalities in American society. This struggle against racism and prejudices endured because the African-American avant-garde opened avenues of discourse about equality between the races during

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[79] Wright, "Blue Print for Negro Writing," 58.

[80] Richard Wright, "The Position of the Negro Artists and Intellectual in American Society."

[81] Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 63.

the Harlem Renaissance.

TABLE 17

RICHARD WRIGHT CHRONOLOGY

1908	Born in Natchez, Mississippi.
1913	Moves with family to Memphis, Tennessee. His experiences are later chronicled in Black Boy.
1927	Moves to Chicago.
1933	Joins Chicago's John Reed Club and the CPUSA.
1936	Joins the Federal Writers Project in Chicago. Moves to New York and is introduced to Langston Hughes and Ralph Ellison.
1937	Becomes editor of New Challenge and writes essay "Blue Print for Negro Writing."
1938	Publishes collection of short stories, Uncle Tom's Children.
1939	Elected member of executive Council of The League of American Writers, an affiliation of the CPUSA.
1940	Publishes Native Son.
1941	"Native Son," the play, directed by Orson Wells, debuts on Broadway.
1943	Leaves CPUSA and writes "I Tried to be a Communist," published in Atlantic Monthly in 1944.
1945	Publishes Black Boy, an autobiographical novel.
1947	Moves to Paris, France.
1950	Writes "I Choose Exile," defending his migration to Paris.
1951	"Native Son," the film, is released in Central American and Europe, starring Richard Wright as Bigger Thomas.
1958	Publishes his last novel, The Long Dream.
1960	Dies on November 28th, in Paris, France.
1977	American Hunger is published posthumously.

CHAPTER V

RALPH ELLISON'S ART AND PROTEST

Ralph Ellison once said that he "recognized no dichotomy between art and protest."[1] He later added that protest in his novel, Invisible Man, "is there not because I am helpless before my racial condition, but because I put it there."[2] Part of the protest in Ellison's novel is an indictment against white humanitarians and their often patronizing attempts at racial equality. Ellison remarked that, while on vacation in 1950, he "met some white liberals who thought the best way to be friendly was to tell us what it was like to be Negro. [He] got mad at hearing this from people who otherwise seemed very intelligent."[3] He became incensed at their insensitivity and channeled his frustration into his work in progress, Invisible Man. Ellison explained, "I went upstairs that night feeling that we needed to have this thing out once and for all and get it done with; then we could go on living like people and

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[1] Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Fiction: VIII," interview by Alfred Chester and Vilma Howard, Paris Review, (Spring 1955): 58.

[2] Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," chap. in Shadow and Act, 137.

[3] Ellison, "The Art of Fiction: VIII," 69.

individuals."[4] In Invisible Man he reflects the increasing resentment that black intellectuals felt about the domineering leadership or "visible hand" of white social reformers in the struggle for racial equality.

Ellison was one of many black intellectuals who had observed the interaction between white benefactors and black beneficiaries and had come to resent its implications of racial dominance inherent in the notion of the Negrotarians as ambassadors of social equality. The black intellectuals realized that the Negrotarian's humanitarianism sometimes, in effect, created obstacles for integration especially in areas of segregation in housing and education. Among the intellectuals, Ellison continued a theme seen in Langston Hughes's Ways of White Folks and Richard Wright's Native Son. Ellison, like Hughes, recognized the Negrotarians' and the writers' paradoxical situation in attempting to maintain the cultural bridge, created during the Harlem Renaissance, in a society rife with racial inequalities. Like Wright, Ellison also criticized the political Left for its seemingly token attempts at social equality.

Ellison's nameless Narrator in Invisible Man finds himself to be unseen, as an individual, by white society including Negrotarians, who see him only as part of a larger cause. Ellison explains in the novel's Prologue that "you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor

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[4] Ibid.

vision...out of resentment, you begin to bump back."[5] He maintained that he wrote the novel:

> as a way of dealing with the sheer rhetorical challenge involved in communicating across our barriers of race and religion, class, color, and region--barriers which consist of the many strategies of division that were designed, and still function, to prevent what would otherwise have been a more or less natural recognition of the reality of black and white fraternity.[6]

Some black intellectuals believed that Negrotarians reinforced the invisibility of African Americans by failing to recognize their own role in maintaining and promoting racial barriers. The Negrotarians did so by creating a situation in which the success of racial equality and integration became dependent upon their humanitarianism. Interracial relationships were sometimes ambiguous because white humanitarian efforts, like those of Wright's Daltons and Hughes's Pembertons, often evolved out of a guilty conscience and not genuine concern for social equality. The relationships were sometimes patronizing because the Negrotarians' liberalism often stifled or dictated the growth of the black beneficiary.

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Beginning with the opening scene in Invisible Man, at the Battle Royal boxing match and throughout the Narrator's education at the state college for African Americans, the young man adheres to interracial protocol. As a child, his

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[5] Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York: Vintage Books, 1952; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1982), iii-iv.

[6] Ibid., xiii.

grandfather advised him to "overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller 'till they vomit or bust wide open."[7] What the Narrator finds most disturbing about this advice is that his grandfather considered himself a traitor for complying with the social terms imposed by some Negrotarians. Thus, throughout the novel, the Invisible Man finds himself guilt-ridden for accepting accolades and praise from "the most lilly-white [sic] men in town."[8] Like Hughes's Ways of White Folks, Ellison's novel depicts the relationship between many Negrotarians and African Americans as ambiguous at best and patronizing at worst.

The Narrator's earliest exposure to the ambiguities of white philanthropy occurs following his high school graduation, when he is asked to appear before the local businessmen's club to recite his valedictorian speech. Before giving his speech he must compete in a boxing match with several other young African Americans. To Ellison, the Battle Royal represented the "greenhorn's initiation into a crazy and prejudicial society."[9] The Invisible Man observes that white humanitarianism is not necessarily free of entanglements. Ellison explained in an article for the Paris Review:

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[7] Ibid., 16.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Fiction VIII," 63; Robert O'Meally, The Craft of Ralph Ellison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 13.

> This is a vital part of [the] behavior pattern in the South, which both Negroes and Whites thoughtlessly accept. It is a ritual preservation of caste lines, a keeping of taboo....This pattern states what Negroes will see I did not have to invent; the patterns were already there in society so that all I had to do was present them in a broader context of meaning.[10]

The Narrator, unlike the Negrotarians, was aware of the ambiguity within this interracial interaction. The Narrator must first entertain the benefactors before receiving their benefits.

The young men are blindfolded with white cloth and sent into the ring to fight each other simultaneously. One critic believes that the blindfolding of the boys forces them to fight a "darkness imposed upon them by the white spectators who represent the whole society."[11] Additionally, the blindfolds prevent the young men from fighting effectively--turning the match into a farce. The boxers must fling their arms aimlessly hoping to land a blow on an unseen target. The image entertains the town fathers, who laugh heartily at the teenage boys whose kidney punches land on the unprotected areas of their opponents. One of the men in attendance is the school superintendent who invited the Narrator. He is heard yelling, "Bring up the shines, gentlemen! Bring up the little shines!"[12] Undeterred throughout the battle, the young man continues to

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[10] Ibid., 62-63.

[11] Thomas Vogler, "Invisible Man: Somebody's Protest Novel," in Ralph Ellison: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. John Hersey, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974), 143-144.

[12] Ellison, Invisible Man, 18.

think about his speech because he truly, if foolishly, believes that "only these men can judge my true ability."[13]

Following the boxing match, the young Narrator, covered in sweat and blood, recites his speech to the audience of community leaders. During the course of his speech, he verbally slips by saying 'racial social *equality*' instead of 'racial social *responsibility*'. The men immediately jeer the Narrator and taunt him with their laughter. One benefactor asks him to repeat the phrase and then questions, "You weren't being smart, were you, boy? You sure that about 'equality' was a mistake?"[14] The Narrator assures the man in the audience that he simply fumbled his words. Finally, the man informs the student that "We mean to do right by you, but you've got to know your place at all times."[15]

This patronizing sentiment of the white benefactor toward the black beneficiary becomes even more evident when the businessmen give the young man a scholarship to the state college for "blacks only". The Negrotarians' 'visible hand' endeavors to guide black development--but paradoxically has the effect of teaching African Americans a lesson different from the one intended. In this sense, Ellison's Narrator transcends Wright's Bigger Thomas, who never seems to learn that in race relations help is sometimes a synonym for control.

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[13] Ibid., 25.

[14] Ibid., 31.

[15] Ibid.

One of the most important lessons that the Narrator learns at the state college is "the difference between the way things are and the way they're supposed to be" between blacks and whites.[16] He is at first confused by the ambiguity of the benefits extolled by Negrotarians and the strict limitations their humanitarianism places upon him. The Narrator's confusion puts his college education in jeopardy because he fails to understand the paradoxical situation for both the black intellectual and the white social reformer. Consequently, the Narrator errs in judgment by allowing Mr. Norton, a white New England trustee, to mingle with a black sharecropper and several mentally unstable black veterans. Norton's fraternization with the sharecropper and veterans ultimately exposes the harsh realities of the Negrotarian's racial thoughtlessness. This becomes the Narrator's true education.

Trueblood, a sharecropper guilty of incest, and the disabled veterans are considered among the lowest class in their society. The black community resented Trueblood because his actions reinforced the white community's prejudicial stereotypes of the African-American race.[17] The Narrator, with contempt, concludes that he and the college officials "were trying to lift them up and they...did everything possible it seemed to pull us

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[16] Ibid., 139.

[17] Kenny McSweeney, Invisible Man: Race and Identity (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 49-50.

down."[18] Thus, the Truebloods find themselves outcasts in their own community. The white community, on the other hand, offers assistance to the family. For instance, the local sheriff and townspeople protect Trueblood from the college officials, who try to force him to leave the county. Similarly, Mr. Norton is both intrigued and repulsed upon hearing the circumstances surrounding Trueblood's crime and gives the sharecropper money. Norton's behavior toward Trueblood denotes racial biases mixed with a white guilty conscience.

After hearing Trueblood's story, Mr. Norton is disturbed and asks the Narrator to find him some whiskey. The young man brings the trustee to the Golden Day, a bar frequented by many mentally disabled black men from the local veteran's hospital. The scene turns into a free-for-all after the veterans incapacitate their orderly. Mr. Norton, in shock from his conversation with Trueblood, is ushered upstairs to the bordello to be cared for by one of the veterans, a former physician. The black physician soon engages Mr. Norton in a philosophical discourse on the meaning of the Negrotarian's influence on the Narrator. The veteran informs the trustee that "to you he is a mark on the score-card of your achievements, [but] he believes in the great false wisdom taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that white is right."[19]

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[18] Ellison, Invisible Man, 47.

[19] Ibid., 93-94.

Norton is oblivious to the veteran's charges because, like the Pembertons in Hughes's "Poor Little Black Fellow" and the Daltons in Wright's Native Son, the Negrotarian "lives in a world that insulates him from the moral consequences of his actions."[20] However, the African-American physician exposes the paradox in social reform to the Negrotarian. The social ramifications of Mr. Norton's 'visible hand' and its effect on the lives of his beneficiaries are called to his attention. But he is blinded by his humanitarianism and fails to see his role in maintaining racial inequality. The Narrator recognizes his own paradox in being both delighted and uneasy in hearing a black man speak to a white man "with a freedom which could only bring on trouble."[21]

On returning to the campus the young man receives another lesson on the ambiguity of relationships between white benefactors and black beneficiaries. The college's black president, Dr. Bledsoe, is incensed because the Narrator brought Norton into the old slave quarters to see Trueblood and into the Golden Day bar to mix with the unstable veterans. The student tries to defend his actions by telling Bledsoe that the trustee asked to stop and speak with the sharecropper and then desperately needed a shot of whiskey. Dr. Bledsoe is angriest with the Narrator because he listened to Mr. Norton. Bledsoe believes that the young

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[20] Alan Nadel, Invisible Criticism: Ralph Ellison and the American Canon (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1988), 101.

[21] Ellison, Invisible Man, 91.

man failed in his responsibilities because he allowed the Negrotarian to have his own way. The president bellows at the student, "Damn what he wants....We take these white folks where we want them to go....I thought you had some sense."[22] Again, the ambiguous relationship of the white benefactor and black beneficiary is puzzling to the young man.

Even more puzzling is Dr. Bledsoe's role in perpetuating the importance and visibility of the Negrotarian in racial equality. In an attempt to educate the young man on the state of integration, Dr. Bledsoe explains 'the rules of the assimilation game' played between Negrotarians and African Americans. The president informs the Narrator that neither blacks nor whites control the school. Bledsoe tells the student that it is he, Bledsoe, who is in power because "I's beg and I say 'yes, suh' as loudly as any burrhead when it's convenient."[23] Bledsoe advises the Narrator to acquire power through accommodation and "then stay in the dark and use it!"[24]

Unlike Richard Wright, Ellison did not wish to characterize African Americans as "brutalized and without hope."[25] Ellison believed that "Wright was over committed

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[22] Ibid., 100.

[23] Ibid., 140.

[24] Ibid., 144.

[25] Larry Neal, "Politics as Ritual: Ellison's Zoot Suit," Black World 20 (December 1970): 52.

to ideology."[26] He explained that "Even though I wanted many of the same things for our people, you might say that I was much less a social determinist."[27] Ellison postulated that some black intellectuals, similar to Dr. Bledsoe in Invisible Man, "did not represent the Negro community, [and] beyond their special interests they represented white philanthropy, white politicians, business interests and so on" but also that others, like the Narrator, understand their condition and thereby gain hope.[28]

Inevitably, the Narrator is dismissed from college. The Narrator, believing to have Dr. Bledsoe's recommendation in securing employment from various trustees, travels under false pretenses to New York City He reencounters the veteran physician who reinforces Bledsoe's advice by telling the young man "play the Game, but don't believe it."[29] Bledsoe, the veteran physician, and the Narrator's grandfather all advise the young man to participate in a form of day-to-day resistance by treating the relationship between Negrotarians and African-Americans as a game in which the latter imposes a front of compliance while playing by his own rules. An example of this type of behavior is evident in Langston Hughes's and Zora Neale Hurston's

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[26] Ralph Ellison, "That Same Pleasure, That Same Pain," interview, Richard G. Stern, December, 3:2 (Winter 1961): 41-42.

[27] Ibid., 42.

[28] Ellison, Native Son, 43.

[29] Ibid., 151.

relationship with Charlotte Osgood Mason. Hughes warned Hurston to give Godmother only information on a-need-to-know basis. Mason, unlike most Negrotarians--the Knopfs, the Spingarns, and the Van Vechtens--attempted to control the professional and personal lives of her beneficiaries.

Ellison's novel exposes the risky paradox in this form of interracial interaction. For example, in the last pages of Invisible Man, the Narrator encounters a very bewildered Mr. Norton, who has lost his way on the streets of New York City. When the trustee fails to recognize the young man, he is bitterly informed by the Narrator:

> I'm your destiny....Now aren't you ashamed?...Because, Mr. Norton, if you don't know *where* you are, you probably don't know *who* you are. So you came to me out of shame. You are ashamed, now aren't you?[30]

Mr. Norton considered himself a humanitarian based on his monetary donations to the college. Critic Robert Bone argues that Mr. Norton represents the Northern capitalist who, intent on industrializing the South, worked with white Southern politicians and conservative black leaders to establish vo-technical colleges for blacks.[31]

More simply, Mr. Norton can be categorized as the classic Negrotarian who believed that his intent and money liberate his own social conscious. Early in the novel, he tells the Narrator:

> You are my fate....only you can tell me what it really is. I mean that upon you depends the

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[30] Ibid., 564-565.

[31] Robert Bone, The Negro Novel in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 204.

> outcome of the years I have spent in helping your school. That has been my real life's work, not my banking or my research, but my first hand organizing of human life.[32]

Confused, the young man thought to himself, "but you don't even know my name."[33] Mr. Norton fails to realize that his good will reinforced the dependence of black youths upon white society which kept integration on white terms. Norton's support of an all black college reinforced segregation in education.

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Historians commonly emphasize the positive influence of the Communist Party of the United States on African-American intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s.[34] However, some African-American intellectuals came to resent the attitudes of the party's white leadership and its stifling effect on black writers. For example, the treatment of white social activists in Ellison's Invisible Man aptly reflects the growing disillusionment among black writers and intellectuals with white social reformers. African-American intellectuals affiliated with the CPUSA found similar experiences with the political left as those acquainted with white humanitarians. In the novel, Ellison characterizes

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[32] Ellison, Invisible Man, 41-42.

[33] Ibid., 45.

[34] See, Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression; Philip S. Foner and Herbert Shapiro, ed. American Communism and Black Americans (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); and Earl Ofari Hutchinson, Blacks and Reds: Race and Class in Conflict, 1919-1990 (East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1995).

the American Communist party as 'the Brotherhood'. He depicts the role of the CPUSA in the struggle for black social and economic equality as a form of patronization. Like Richard Wright, Ellison's growing frustration with Negrotarians increased with his interaction with the CPUSA.

However, unlike Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison's own political affiliation with the CPUSA was at times ambiguous because, publicly, the author became increasingly vague about his political ideology. Historian Mark Naison refers to Ellison as "a left-winger but not a Communist."[35] Subsequent scholars, such as Guenter Lewy, support Naison's claim that Ellison's political leanings were left-of-center and he was a "Party ally."[36] Lewy places Ellison in the category of "well-known liberals and socialists."[37]

Ellison's growing attempts to keep his political beliefs sheltered reflected, in part, his experiences with white chauvinism found in the CPUSA.[38] Ellison's experiences stemmed from personal ordeals and his witnessing

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[35] Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression, 211.

[36] Guenter Lewy, The Cause that Failed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 108.

[37] Ibid., xv.

[38] White chauvinism refers to racial biases and prejudices of white members of the Communist party of the United States of America.; see Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression; Klehr, The Heyday of American Communism; Philip S. Foner and Herbert Shapiro, ed. American Communism and Black Americans (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); and Earl Ofari Hutchinson, Blacks and Reds: Race and Class in Conflict, 1919-1990 (East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1995).

the party's criticism of Richard Wright following the 1940 publication of Native Son. Ellison took heed of Langston Hughes's advice to "be nice to people and let them pay for meals."[39] Because Ellison's professional survival depended on his ability to work within an environment laden with racism and patronage, his success in surpassing both obstacles demanded cleverness in eluding white biases and racial prejudice. The deftness Ellison exhibited in deflecting racial prejudices within the CPUSA was an example of skills cultivated by generations of African Americans peaceably existing within the constraints of a white society as discussed in Chapter 4.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, African-American writers reacted to the long-held practice of an "unquestioning willingness to do what is required of [black Americans] by others."[40] With the end of the Harlem Renaissance in the early 1930s and the onset of the Great Depression, Ralph Ellison, like Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, became interested in Marxism and turned to the CPUSA for political leadership and publishing opportunities. In 1936 Ellison wrote Langston Hughes that "C. Day Lewis has me interested in the Left since I found his poetry and essays appealing. Don't be surprised if you see me on a soap box

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[39] Ralph Ellison to Langston Hughes, 7 July 1936. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[40] Ellison, "The Art of Fiction VIII," 66.

next time you're here."[41] The following month Ellison wrote Hughes again explaining that "I haven't had the time to do much reading lately, but I don't want to be ignorant of Leftist literature anymore."[42] In addition to studying Marxism in his early years, Ralph Ellison learned from Langston Hughes the art of keeping patrons and supporters content by cloaking criticism of patronization and white chauvinism in his texts through vague language unintelligible to most white socialites and reformers.

Langston Hughes's influence on Ellison is evident in Invisible Man. Ellison, like Hughes, recognized the difficulties Negrotarians and black writers faced in maintaining the cultural bridge built during the Harlem Renaissance. Segregation and racism in American society severely strained the relationship created by this bridge between African-American intellectuals and Negrotarians. Ellison points to white chauvinism in the CPUSA as one manifestation of the straining relationship. In his novel, white chauvinism, in its simplest form, is best exemplified by a white member of the Brotherhood, who asks the Narrator "How about a Spiritual, Brother? Or one of those real good ole Negro Work Songs?"[43] In reality, white chauvinism is found in a Communist's belief that "all American blacks"

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[41] Ralph Ellison to Langston Hughes, 7 July 1936. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[42] Ralph Ellison to Langston Hughes, 24 August 1936. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[43] Ellison, Invisible Man, 304.

knew traditional spirituals and work songs.[44]

Langston Hughes once remarked that for Ellison "Wright became a sort of literary god for a time."[45] Born and raised in Oklahoma City, Ellison studied at Tuskegee before moving to New York City, where Langston Hughes introduced him to Richard Wright in 1936. Encouraged by Wright, Ellison submitted and had his first essay, "Slick Gonna Learn," published in 1939. Some critics believe that Richard Wright's short story, "The Man Who Lived Underground," and Native Son influenced Ralph Ellison's writing of Invisible Man.[46] In his novel, Wright calls attention to the invisibility of African Americans in white society. In Native Son, Wright magnifies a Negrotarian's racial unconsciousness through her physical blindness. Like Native Son, a premise of Invisible Man concerns the invisibility of black Americans to white Americans. Ellison, like Wright, found gratification in exposing Negrotarians to their own racial unconsciousness. In 1952 Ellison forwarded a signed copy of Invisible Man to Wright's wife, Ellen, with a note attached, which read, "Tell Dick

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[44] Jack El-Hai. "Black and White and Red," American Heritage, May/June 1991, 88; Langston Hughes, I Wonder as I Wander: The Autobiography of a Journey (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956), 80; and Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, 248.

[45] Langston Hughes to Michael Fabre, 25 April 1963. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[46] See Clifford Mason, "Ralph Ellison and the Underground Man," Black World, December 1970, 20-26; and Irving Howe, "Black Boys and Native Sons," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Native Son: A Collection of Essays, ed. Houston Baker (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972), 63-70.

that I hope that I haven't let him down since it is the best I could do up to now."[47]

Following the publication of Wright's novel, Ellison corresponded with Wright, who by then was living in Paris. Ellison kept Wright abreast of state-side opinion on Native Son. Inevitably, criticism from the Left began affecting Ellison's politics. In 1940, Ellison asked Wright, "How far can the Marxist writer go in presenting a personalized humanist version of his ideology? Does the writer who accepts Marxism have the freedom to expound a personalized philosophy?"[48] Ellison answered his own questions:

> Marx, and later Lenin, were so occupied with economics and politics....This lack I am trying to get at is indicated by the almost total failure on the part of Marxist Leninist literature to treat human personality.[49]

Five years later Ellison's mild explanations became bitter denouncements of the CPUSA. Ellison informed Wright: "I think we should serve notice on them that, goddamit, they are responsible to the Negro people at large."[50] Ellison's frustration was not surprising, considering the party's record on race relations. No African Americans were present at its founding convention in 1919.[51] Not until 1928 did

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[47] Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 26 March 1952. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[48] Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 14 April 1940. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 18 August 1945. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[51] El-Hai, "Black and White and Red," 84.

the CPUSA take a stand on racial inequality in the United States. At the Sixth World Congress, the Comintern, the international body of the Soviet Communist party which oversaw the Communist Party of the United States, and the CPUSA called for self-determination for African Americans living in the South.[52]

Regardless of political rhetoric, African Americans affiliated with the party sometimes found themselves the objects of racial prejudice. In the early thirties, the Comintern sought to produce a motion picture in an attempt to expose racial inequality in the southern United States. Notable African-American artists, such as Louise Thompson, Dorothy West, and Langston Hughes, were invited to the Soviet Union to portray characters in the film, "Black and White." In all, twenty-one black artists traveled half-way around the world to make "documentary proof of the manner in which capitalist America discriminated against and oppressed its colored citizens."[53] Instead, the black Americans uncovered racist attitudes among the Soviets and their communist leaders. For instance, many Soviets doubted the Americans' race because of the light skin color of some artists. The Soviets "had anticipated...the skins of their

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[52] "Resolution on the Negro Question in the United States," in The Communist IX, by the Political Commission of the ECCI (February 1931); 153-67, in American Communism and Black Americans, ed. Philip S. Foner and Herbert Shapiro, 36-50.

[53] El-Hai, "Black and White and Red," 84.

American actors would be universally pitch black."[54] One official remarked in disgust that "we needed genuine Negroes and they sent us a bunch of *metsi* [mixed bloods]."[55]

The movie production magnified the Soviets' ignorance of racial customs in the United States. The Russian script writers believed it perfectly acceptable to allow a wealthy white southern man to fraternize with a young black woman in public. Langston Hughes complained:

> In Russia, old Russia of the Tsar...master and maid might dance together in public without much being made of it. But *never* [sic] in Birmingham [Alabama], if the master is white and the maid colored.[56]

Finally, the Comintern decided to shelve the production. When one African-American artist objected, a Communist official rebuffed him by saying, "You wouldn't dare speak to me like this in the state of Mississippi."[57] The Communist official's response reflects the Negrotarian's paradox. Like Hughes's Pembertons and Mrs. Ellsworth and Wright's Daltons, some Negrotarians were frustrated by what they believed to be black beneficiaries' ungratefulness.

During the 1930s, racial factionalism within the CPUSA emerged, and tension between white and black members intensified. The Comintern issued a resolution in 1930

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[54] Ibid., 86; and Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, 247.

[55] El-Hai, "Black and White and Red," 84; and Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, 86.

[56] Hughes, I Wonder as I Wander, 78.

[57] El-Hai, "Black and White and Red," 87.

denouncing negrophobia and demanding that the CPUSA remedy the problem immediately. Beginning in 1931 the party held trials, charging and convicting white members for discriminating practices and prejudicial behavior toward black members. Ironically, the trials left many African Americans suspicious that either the party was full of racists or that the trials were publicity stunts.[58] Some suspected that these trials held in an attempt to eradicate white chauvinism were not entirely successful.[59] For instance, Richard Wright relayed an experience in which officials of the CPUSA were hard pressed to find him accommodations at the homes of their white members during a John Reed Conference held in New York City in 1935. Wright finally found a place at the Negro Young Men's Christian Association.[60]

Wright and Ellison dealt differently with white chauvinism and racial bias. Wright publicly defended Native Son against several negative reviews, including, David L. Cohn's description of Native Son as "a blinding and corrosive study in hate."[61] To Cohen; Wright responded:

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[58] Philip S. Foner and Harold Shapiro ed., in American Communism and Black Americans provide primary readings on several trials.

[59] See, Record, Race and Radicalism, 139-141; Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression, 44-45; and Klehr The Heyday of American Communism, 339.

[60] Richard Wright, "I Tried To be a Communist," Atlantic Monthly, August 1944, 70.

[61] David L. Cohen, "The Negro Novel: Richard Wright," Atlantic Monthly, May 1940, 659.

"No *advocacy* of hate is in the book. *None*! I wrote as objectively as I could of a Negro boy who hated and feared whites, hated them because he feared them."[62] Like Wright, Ellison dealt with the paradoxes of interracial relationships. In Invisible Man Ellison recognized racial prejudices and exposed discrimination present in the party. However, unlike Wright, Ellison did so in a manner which did not produce attacks from white party members.

Ellison believed that many Negrotarians were motivated by guilt and a political agenda. Ellison, like the Narrator in Invisible Man and many black writers before him, expressed strong feelings against white biases and patronization. Unlike Wright, but similar to Langston Hughes, Ellison disguised his criticism. In his novel, Ellison never refers to the CPUSA by name. Rather, its policies, procedures, and agenda become those of the Brotherhood. Ellison once explained to an interviewer that "I didn't identify the Brotherhood as the C.P., but since you do I'll remind you that they too are white."[63] While the author was reluctant to target the CPUSA as the Brotherhood, he was quick to point out that both were white, which was the basis for their racial chauvinism. Ellison's reluctance to attack publicly the CPUSA may reflect the party's treatment of Richard Wright.

Despite subtlety, the CPUSA still criticized Ellison.

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[62] Richard Wright, "I Bite the Hand that Feeds Me," 828.

[63] Ellison, "The Art of Fiction VIII," 55.

And, exposing racial biases among white members within the party was effective. Larry Neal agrees that both black and white Americans on the political left criticized Ellison's novel because it rejected the political domination of whites and harshly depicted the Communist Party of the United States.[64] Initial reviews by leftist publications charged that Invisible Man reflected "middle class snobbishness--even contempt--towards the Negro people."[65] Irving Howe argued that the novel's portrayal of the party was unrealistic. However, Howe concedes that racial biases existed among the white membership. Nonetheless, he concludes that white chauvinism "was surely more complex and guarded than Ellison shows it to be."[66] Regardless of the degree of concealed prejudices, Howe does not deny the presence of racial biases. This criticism of Ellison is less harsh than that afforded Richard Wright.

In Invisible Man, the Narrator is convinced to join the Brotherhood as "a spokesman for [his] people [with] a duty to work in their interest."[67] Like the artists filming "Black and White" in Moscow, the Narrator encounters racial ignorance with Emma, a female member, who asks a comrade, "But don't you think he should be a little darker?"[68]

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[64] Neal, "Politics as Ritual," 34.

[65] Daily Worker, 1 June 1952, cited by Larry Neal in "Politics as Ritual," 35.

[66] Howe, "Black Boys and Native Sons," 38.

[67] Ellison, Invisible Man, 286.

[68] Ibid., 295.

Ellison's Emma occupies a similar role as Mary in Wright's Native Son. Like Mary, who gave money to Jan for the CPUSA, Emma gives money to Jack to help finance the Brotherhood's efforts, including the Narrator's stipend of sixty dollars a week. Primarily, the Narrator is interested in the pay. He soon enjoys his position as a Harlem organizer. However, when he becomes too popular, he is relocated downtown. Eventually, the party's attempts to restrict the Narrator's individualism led to his quitting the Brotherhood.[69]

Ellison agreed with Wright and other African Americans who left the CPUSA because of the "paternalistic relationship between party leaders and party members."[70] Like the Narrator, Ellison was once informed by the CPUSA that they deemed his writing in New Masses too "individualistic."[71] Ellison believed that the Brotherhood's interests in Harlem and its black members waned "because they were not concerned basically with Negro freedom but with effecting their own ends."[72] Inevitably, the Narrator is informed by a white member of the Brotherhood that "your [Harlem] members will have to be sacrificed [because] we are making temporary alliances with other political groups and the interests of one group of

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[69] Ibid., 491.

[70] O'Meally, The Craft of Ralph Ellison, 54.

[71] Ellison, Invisible Man, 395; Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 26 May 1940. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

[72] Ralph Ellison, lecture, "On Initiation and Power: Ralph Ellison Speaks at West Point," (March 26, 1969), ed. Robert H. Moore, Contemporary Literature (Spring 1974): 184.

brothers must be sacrificed to that of the whole."[73] Thus, Ellison criticized the Left because they "went about solving the Negro problem without defining the nature of the problem beyond its economic and narrowly political aspects."[74]

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In Richard Wright's last appearance before, his death the expatriate informed his audience at the American Church in Paris:

> Each Negro's white sponsor urges him to reflect the so-called white point of view. But since all the whites do not think and feel alike, there exists divergent views among Negro artists and intellectuals. And it is good sport to sick one black artist against another. Cash is involved. Reputations are at stake. Groceries and meat and rent are the prizes.[75]

Wright then cited an example, detailing an incident which occurred one evening in the late 1950s. Over dinner, Ralph Ellison threatened to stab the African-American novelist Chester Himes, who had accused Ellison of writing "the right kind of nook [sic]...within the narrow racial limits allowed Ellison by the white race, Ellison had found a way of writing a novel that would please both whites and blacks."[76] Wright explained that Himes's "statement carried in its meaning a stinging insult."[77] Wright

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[73] Ellison, Invisible Man, 490.

[74] Ellison, "An American Dilemma: A Review," 310.

[75] Wright, "The Position of the Negro Artists and Intellectual in American Society."

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

believed that "whites [having] imposed this sense of shame upon the black artist and intellectual" through fostering their economic and social dependence on Negrotarians, had prompted Ellison to grab a steak knife and threaten to lash out at Himes.[78]

Ellison believed in "the ideals that are shared--at least in the abstract--by all Americans."[79] However, as an African-American, he was painfully aware that American ideals are not universal held for all races. A few years before the knife incident with Himes, Ellison confessed to Wright that he was

> Beginning to truly understand the greatest joke, the most absurd paradox, in American history, that simply by striving consciously to become negroes we are becoming and are destined to become Americans....Just as the biggest joke on you, is that after striving to become a responsible Communist writer and spokesman, you became instead something much more important, an artist and an articulation of the most vital possibilities of American life.[80]

Following the publication of Invisible Man, Ellison finally came to think of himself as an American and resented Himes's attack upon the manner in which he integrated himself in American society. More importantly, he took offense at Himes's lack of understanding of Ellison's method--an obscure style--which exposed discrimination in the CPUSA

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Ralph Ellison, "Intellectuals and Writers since the Thirties," interview by William Phillips, Partisan Review, (1991): 535.

[80] Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 22 July 1945. RW, JWJ, Beinecke.

while deflecting attacks from white chauvinists.

Literary critics continue to perceive Invisible Man as a classic in contemporary American literature. An important quality is its optimism in recognizing the possibilities for interracial harmony rather than condemning it to failure. Both attributes serve as legacies of the Harlem Renaissance's cultural bridge. Ellison remarked:

> I don't think books change society in any immediate way. And this despite the fact that during the thirties there were theorists who tried to convince us of such as possibility....I was still forced to live in the same sections of our cities and was strictly limited in my choices of such matters as jobs, restaurants, neighborhoods.[81]

In the novel, Ellison emphasized the increasing isolation and alienation of blacks by Negrotarians from American society because he believed that "what is needed in our country is not an exchange of pathologies, but a change of the basis of society. This is a job which both Negroes and whites must perform together."[82]

Ellison, in the Invisible Man called attention to the role of Negrotarians in the movement for black social and economic equality as ambiguous and, at times, patronizing. In an interview he remarked:

> When you see those who exercise power in the country you love violating its ideals you're obligated to criticize them and do whatever one can to correct it. And when it works, it works. And when it doesn't...accept the punishment that goes with telling the truth. For that after all,

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[81] Ellison, "Intellectuals and Writers Since the Thirties," 540.

[82] Ellison, "An American Dilemma: A Review," 317.

is your role in society.[83]

Ellison's novel criticizes both racist institutions and attitudes in the United States. In doing so, it magnified the frustration of black intellectuals with the 'visible hand' of white social reformers who often dictated the course for social and economic equality. Importantly, like Hughes and Wright, Ellison influenced the later generation of black intellectuals in their fight against racial biases and prejudices during the civil rights movement.

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[83] Ellison, "Intellectuals and Writers from the Thirties," 536.

TABLE 18

RALPH ELLISON CHRONOLOGY

1914	Born March 1st in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
1933	Enters Tuskegee Institute to study music.
1936	Moves to New York City and meets Langston Hughes and Richard Wright.
1938	Joins Federal Writers Project.
1939	Publishes first article, "Slick Gonna Learn."
1945	Begins writing Invisible Man.
1952	Publishes Invisible Man and wins National Book Award.
1964	Publishes Shadow and Act, a collection of essays on racial inequality in the United States.
1969	Receives Presidential Medal of Freedom.
1970	Appointed Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities at New York University.
1975	Elected to American Academy of Arts and Letters.
1986	Publishes Going to the Territory, a collection of essays on integration.
1994	Dies in April.
1996	"Boy on a Train" and "I Did Not Learn Their Names" are published posthumously in The New Yorker.

CONCLUSION

The accomplishments of the civil rights movement and the breakdown of the relationship between white and black social reformers are important legacies of the Harlem Renaissance. The cultural bridge erected by the relationships between Negrotarians and black artists allowed many Africa-American intellectuals to establish independent views on racial equality. The next generation of writers and intellectuals, such as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, exposed the racial and economic inequalities in American society often promoted unconsciously by some Negrotarians. Both Negrotarians and African-American intellectuals faced the paradox of white patronage in social reform.

Beginning in the 1950s, the second generation of black artists after the Harlem Renaissance emerged. The second generation of writers and intellectuals, such as James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) magnified the resentment the earlier writers' felt toward Negrotarians. Some African-American writers and intellectuals, out of frustration, took radical steps in breaking--off relations with all Negrotarians. Many of these young black writers looked to Langston Hughes, Wright, and Ellison for guidance and copied their styles.

James Baldwin believed that both Wright and Ellison

influenced him in establishing his identity. Baldwin "admired and liked" Wright, who "had gotten caught between his habits of rage and what is going on in the world."[1] In 1948 Baldwin, following in Wright's footsteps, moved to Paris. Baldwin explained that "I knew I would die if I stayed here [United States]....I would never be a writer."[2] Baldwin added,

> At the time I left this country....[if asked] I would have answered....'I am a writer' with an edge in my voice while thinking: 'I am a nigger', now [in 1960] I think I'd say 'I am a writer with a lot of work to do and wondering if I can do it.'[3]

In 1952 Baldwin met Ralph Ellison. Ellison impressed Baldwin as a "tough minded man who already took it for granted that great changes had come and that it was time for a Negro writer to learn a new job."[4] He thought that Ellison tried "to help Negroes destroy their habits of mind of inferiority, those crushing habits, to become men and women, not use black as a crutch, but to get past it to become a person with no special privileges."[5]

The poet and playwright Amiri Baraka became familiar with African-American writers while studying at Howard University under the Harlem Renaissance alumnus, poet

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[1] James Baldwin, "Five Writers and their African Ancestors: Part II," interview by Harold R. Isaccs, Phylon (Winter 1960): 323.

[2] Ibid., 322.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

Sterling Brown. Baraka ranked Langston Hughes as "one of the major Afro-American writers and certainly the major poet."[6] Baraka, who later taught a class on Hughes and Richard Wright at Yale, pointed to Hughes's play, Scottsboro Limited as an example of Hughes's importance. Baraka explained that this play "deals squarely with the question of black national oppression and what one has to do with it."[7] He thought that "it is very important to identify Langston Hughes with these kind of progressive messages."[8] Regarding Wright, Baraka considered him "an author who can give information about the black experience...and knows the truth."[9] Baraka believes that, like Wright, he too "criticizes the white vision of reality."[10] William Harris explaines that for Baraka, like Wright's Bigger Thomas, "to be terrible is to be extreme...by being the white man's idea of terrible, the black man assumes stature and becomes in his own eyes, strong and beautiful."[11]

Like the Harlem Renaissance writers, some of the second

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[6] Amiri Baraka, "Restaging Langston Hughes's "Scottsboro Limited," interview by Ve Ve Clark (1979), The Black Scholar (July-August, 1979), in Conversations with Amiri Baraka ed. Charlie Riley (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 158.

[7] Ibid., 163; Hughes's play dealt with the events surrounding the Scottsboro Boys incident.

[8] Ibid.

[9] William J. Harris, The Poetry and Politics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic (Columbus: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 63-64.

[10] Ibid., 23.

[11] Ibid.

generation from the late 1950s interacted with the white literati. One group of white literati, in particular the Beat writers, influenced Baraka. Baraka became acquainted with Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and the grandfather of the Beats, William Carlos Williams. The first time Baraka heard Allen Ginsberg read "Howl", the black poet felt that Ginsberg's "language and his rhythms were real to me...[He] talked of a different world, one much closer to my own."[12] Baraka later copied Ginsberg's style in singing his own poetry.[13]

Similar to the renaissance of the 1920s, poetry and literature in the 1950s "was the underlying passion" and for the writers, "the reason we all came together."[14] Like the Harlem Renaissance generation, these young artists felt connected to young white intellectuals of their generation. Baraka wrote that he and other artists or black "bohemians" associated with groups like the Beats because "the young white boys and girls in their pronouncement of disillusion with and 'removal' from society [was] related to the black experience."[15] However, Baraka quickly emphasized that "the connection could be made because I was black and that made me...an *outsider* [sic]."[16]

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[12] Amiri Baraka, The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984), 150.

[13] Harris, The Poetry of Amiri Baraka, 105.

[14] Baraka, The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones, 155.

[15] Ibid., 156.

[16] Ibid., 157.

In addition to the relationship with the white literati, there are several other parallels between the black writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the generation of the late 1950s. For instance, young white jazz enthusiasts "worshipping pre-swing and pre-Big Band jazz...had come up with the music as youths" and impressed black artists as the "most advanced critics of the music."[17] In another parallel to the Harlem Renaissance, white and black bohemians of the late 1950s were people "who never *did* [sic] anything but hang around [Greenwich] Village claiming they were this or that but who were just hang-arounders."[18] Additionally, just as the 1920s represented a cultural turning point following World War I, the 1950s marked a cultural change following World War II. Amiri Baraka referred to this period as a time of "transition, from the cooled-out reactionary 50s, the 50s of the Cold War and McCarthyism and HUAC, to the late 50s of the surging civil rights movement."[19]

As the civil rights movement gained momentum, black artists began opposing integration. Baraka wrote that he rejected Martin Luther King's philosophy of non-violence. Baraka's poem, "A Poem Some People will have to Understand," displayed his movement away from King:

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[17] Ibid., 140.

[18] Ibid., 133.

[19] Ibid., 128; HUAC refers to the House Un-American Activities Committee charged with rooting out communists in the American government and society.

We have waited the coming of a natural
phenomenon. Mystics and romantics, knowledgeable
workers
of the land.
But none has come.
But none has come.
Will the machingunners please step forward?[20]

Baraka explained that by 1963 Malcolm X and not King, "spoke for me and my friends."[21] Regarding his white social circle, Baraka thought that by 1964, they "saw I was moving away from them and there was some concern because it wasn't that I didn't like them any longer, but, where I was going they could not come along."[22]

The transitions taking place in white and black literati relationships deeply affected the African-American artists' personal and public lives. Amiri Baraka left his white wife shortly following Malcolm X's assassination. He explained, "having never felt anything abstractly negative about [her], [he] had begun to see her as *white* [sic]."[23] Baraka described this experience as "the middle-class native intellectual, having out integrated the most integrated, now plunges headlong back into what he perceives as blackest, nativest."[24]

Baraka and other black artists established the Black Arts Repertoire/Theater School in Harlem. Their goals were

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[20] Ibid., 161.

[21] Ibid., 186.

[22] Ibid., 192.

[23] Ibid., 195.

[24] Ibid., 202.

two-fold. They hoped to provide young African-American poets and playwrights a place to express their art.[25] More importantly, the black artists endeavored to develop a means of communicating with other black people because African-Americans "have been constantly bombarded with the white man's image of himself."[26] Of his own experience, Amiri Baraka lamented: "I never knew there was any such thing as a "colored hero" until I got to be almost into my adulthood."[27] During this period, strengthening the confidence of black Americans and their pride in African-American culture became very important to many black intellectuals and social activists.

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Part of the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance's cultural bridge was that it forged a working relationship between white and black social reformers. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, while some African-American intellectuals' became empowered by criticizing racial inequalities in their poetry and literature, other African-American intellectuals cooperated with white politicians and social reformers in an attempt to eradicate segregation and racism. The 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas prohibiting segregation, the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964, the Twenty-fourth Amendment,

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[25] Leroi Jones, "An Interview with Leroi Jones," by Robert Allen (1967) in Conversations with Leroi Jones, 20.

[26] Ibid., 20; 17.

[27] Ibid.

and the Voting Act of 1965 depended on the efforts of white politicians and black leaders. These accomplishments also resulted from black and white social activists in both political and social organizations, such as the national Democratic Party, the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Additionally, black and white college-age members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) played an important role.

In the early years of the civil rights movement, white politicians moved slowly in desegregating American society.[28] In 1948 President Harry S. Truman desegregated the armed forces. However, he could not raise much support for his civil rights agenda on the Democratic party's platform for that same year. During President Dwight D. Eisenhower's first term, Jim Crow Laws restricted civil rights for African Americans living below the Mason-Dixon Line. Jim Crow Laws in the South separated the races on buses and trains, in restaurants, at water fountains, and in hotels and schools. Jim Crow laws were legally enforced through the "separate but equal" doctrine established in the 1896 US Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson. Black Americans living in the North faced lingering prejudice and

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[28] See, Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow; Barbara Whalen and Charles Whalen, The Longest Debate: A Legislative History of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Washington: Seven Locks Press, 1985); and Harvard Sitkoff, The Struggle for Black Equality: 1954-1992 (New York: HarperCollins, 1981; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

urban segregation. North of the Mason-Dixon line, black Americans were better educated, and the majority enjoyed suffrage, but they faced discrimination in employment and were excluded from many neighborhoods and schools. In the North, urban segregation and racism maintained white social and economic control.

In 1954 black and white social reformers made great strides in the area of civil rights for African Americans. Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka consisted of a series of cases filed by the NAACP and argued by Thurgood Marshall. The cases challenged the existing "separate but equal" doctrine. Chief Justice Earl Warren surprised many Americans, including President Eisenhower, when he wrote the Supreme Court's opinion in an unanimous decision to desegregate education. On May 17, 1954 Warren wrote "separate education facilities are inherently unequal," overturning the half-century old Plessy v. Ferguson.

Following Brown v. the Board, some white politicians and black leaders began lobbying for civil rights legislation. In 1957 President Eisenhower favored "the mildest civil rights bill possible."[29] The 1957 civil rights bill created a bi-partisan commission empowered to investigate civil rights violations and proposed a civil rights division in the Department of Justice under a specially appointed Assistant Attorney General. The Attorney General would have the authority to seek court

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[29] Michael Barone, Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan (New York: Free Press, 1991), 296.

injunctions against anyone obstructing or depriving another of the right to vote guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment. The bill also gave the Attorney General the authority to file civil suits and injunctions against deprivation of civil rights specifically in cases involving school segregation. It was aimed at the southern school districts in which the federal government expected resistance to desegregate. The 1957 Civil Rights Act represented the first federal laws protecting civil rights for African Americans since the end of Reconstruction in 1877.

The 1957 desegregation crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas, represented the first challenge to the federal government's civil rights legislation and a challenge to the commitment of white politicians to integration. The authority and power of the federal government in civil rights came under attack by its old adversary--state's rights. Until Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus's refusal to desegregate Central High School, President Eisenhower never pressured the South to comply with desegregation. Several other southern state governors also refused to obey the Brown v. Board decision. In response to their behavior, Congress passed a new civil rights bill in 1960. This bill provided federal voting registrars and criminal penalties against any person obstructing federal court orders to desegregate schools. It also gave federal aid to communities for school integration programs. Additionally, the bill appointed federal officials to assist in apprehending suspects in bombing cases. Still, many African-American leaders believed more

legislation was needed.

Some African-American social reformers who supported Senator John F. Kennedy during the 1960 presidential election were later disappointed with his response to civil rights issues. At first, many Americans perceived John F. Kennedy as a champion of civil rights. But, while in Congress, "Kennedy had been relatively uninterested in the problems of black [Americans], and...he took little notice of the Supreme Court's desegregation decision.[30] African-American congressman Don Edwards wondered if "there would not be a [civil rights] bill under Kennedy, or at least it would be a very difficult process, [because] there just wasn't that kind of movement behind it, and it was running out of gas."[31]

President Kennedy's advisor on civil rights, Harris Wofford, concurred with Congressman Edwards, stating that Kennedy made his civil rights decisions "hurriedly and at the last minute, in response to southern political pressure and without careful consideration of an overall plan."[32] The Attorney General, the president's brother Robert; admitted to Wofford that before 1960 civil rights was not a pressing issue. JFK's believed that protesting "was silly and not helping the country."[33] Wofford recalled that

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[30] Whalen and Whalen, The Longest Debate, 16.

[31] Ibid., 69.

[32] Harris Wofford, Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the '60s (New York: Farras, Straus, Giroux, 1980), 124.

[33] Ibid., 128.

during the Freedom Rides, Kennedy yelled at him: "Stop Them! Get your friends off those busses."[34] Kennedy felt that Martin Luther King and his associates were embarrassing him on the eve of his meeting with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushev.

President Kennedy typically responded to violations of civil rights with executive orders and federal force. Like Eisenhower, Kennedy reacted to blatant public displays denying civil rights. In 1961, when CORE members and a presidential aide were beaten in Atlanta, President Kennedy sent six hundred federal marshals to restore order. Incidents in which Federal Marshalls were needed to desegregate the University of Mississippi in 1961 and the University of Alabama in 1963 further disillusioned many African-American leaders and intellectuals. Martin Luther King told Harris Wofford that during the 1960 election

> When I gave my testimony for Kennedy, my impression was that he had the intelligence and the skill and the moral fiber to give the leadership we've been waiting for and do what no other President has ever done. Now, I'm convinced that he has the understanding and political skill, but so far I'm afraid that the moral passion is missing.[35]

In June of 1963, President Kennedy finally introduced civil rights legislation to Congress.

Following John Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, Vice-President Lyndon Johnson endeavored to restore

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[34] Ibid., 125.

[35] Martin Luther King, quoted in Harris Wofford, Of Kennedys and Kings, 128.

the confidence of black social reformers in the presidency. He addressed a joint session of Congress the following week. In Johnson's first nationally televised speech, he called for the passage of Kennedy's civil rights bill. Johnson told his countrymen:

> The dream of equal rights for all Americans, whatever their race or color....No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long.
>
> We have talked long enough in this country about equal rights. We have talked for one hundred years or more. It is time now to write the next chapter--and to write it in the books of law. I urge you again, as I did in 1957 and again in 1960, to enact a civil rights law so that we can move forward to eliminate from this nation every trace of discrimination and oppression that is based upon race.[36]

Regardless of Johnson's commitment, some black civil rights activists remained wary of the new President.[37] Although Johnson had pushed through the civil rights legislation of 1957 and 1960 as Senate Majority Leader, Arno Aronson, Secretary of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, charged that "the deals made by the majority leader cut the heart out of [those] bills."[38] Barbara and Charles Whalen attribute Johnson's new commitment to his personal experiences. They believe, that "President Johnson had seen for himself how segregation destroyed the smallest decencies of life" while traveling through the South for many years

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[36] Merle Miller, Lyndon an Oral Biography (New York: Ballentine Books, 1980), 412.

[37] Charles Roberts, quoted in Merle Miller, Lyndon, 414.

[38] Whalen and Whalen, The Longest Debate, 75.

between Texas and Washington, D.C..[39]

Lyndon Johnson kept civil rights his top priority. At a meeting immediately following the Kennedy's funeral, LBJ requested the support of both Republican and Democratic governors. Additionally, Johnson inquired about and offered advise on the roles black leaders could play. He urged Roy Wilkins, the Executive Secretary of the NAACP, to tone down demonstrations and channel the group's energy towards pressuring lawmakers. In early December, LBJ met with Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders and discussed the difficulties in passing legislation of this magnitude.[40]

Up to the time of his assassination, President Kennedy's bill had made little progress. On January 31, 1964, Johnson sent a revised bill to Capital Hill. The new bill amended Kennedy's by giving the federal government authority to intervene in cases of civil rights violations. It also created the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). The final bill passed 290-130, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act became the strongest legislation of its kind since the end of Reconstruction.[41]

President Johnson's commitment to eradicating racial inequality did not stop with the 1964 Civil Rights Act. That same year, the Twenty-Fourth Amendment was ratified,

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[39] Ibid., 82.

[40] Miller, Lyndon, 415.

[41] Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 186.

outlawing the poll tax. Following Martin Luther King's march to Selma, Alabama, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed. The Voting Act enhanced the power of the Attorney General to protect potentially eligible voters under federal law. Additionally, it provided voter registration for black southerners through federal registrars and outlawed literacy tests.

During the 1950s and early 1960s blacks leaders and social activists worked with white politicians and social reformers, making great strides in the areas of civil rights. At the beginning of the 1960s, many believed that this decade would hold great hope and promise in the "expansion of liberalism's dedication to the welfare state, an end to poverty, and the eradication of racial discrimination in voting, housing, education, and employment."[42] The 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas prohibiting segregation, the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964, the Twenty-Fourth Amendment and the 1965 Voting Act succeeded with the involvement of white politicians, black leaders, and interracial social reform organizations.

By the mid-1960s, many black civil rights activists had developed a militant attitude and resented white involvement. Previously, interracial non-violent protesting gained many accomplishments in the area of civil rights.

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[42] Allen J. Matusow, The Unravelling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), X.

The Freedom Rides of 1961 and the March on Washington in 1963 were non-violent efforts by both whites and blacks protesting for civil rights. SNCC and CORE worked closely with SDS, registering voters in the southern states. Then, during the summers of 1966, 1967, and 1968, black ghettos in urban America exploded. Stokely Carmichael, a SNCC leader, explained:

> Mild demands and hypocritical smiles mislead white America into thinking that all is fine and peaceful. They mislead white America into thinking that the path and pace chosen to deal with racial problems are acceptable to masses of black Americans.[43]

White members of SDS envied the courage and resolve of SNCC in their efforts to fight racism with civil disobedience. But by this time, SNCC had broken all ties to SDS. Tom Hayden, spokesman for SDS, commented: "The southern movement turned itself into the revolution we hoped for, and we didn't have much to do with its turning at all."[44]

By the middle of the 1960s black civil rights activists began asserting their independence from their white supporters. Many African-American intellectuals and social activists called for Black Power. Proponents of Black Power concluded that "group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of

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[43] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America (New York: Random House, 1967), x.

[44] Tom Hayden quoted in Todd Gitlin, The Sixties: The Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam Book, 1987), 128.

strength in a pluralistic society."[45] Young black intellectuals like Stokely Carmichael, argued:

> Respectable [white] individuals can absolve themselves from individual blame: *they* [sic] would never stone a black family. But they continue to support political officials and institutions that would and do perpetuate institutional racist policies.[46]

Carmichael expressed what Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison recognized as the paradox of Negrotarianism: "white people [must] free themselves not so much from overt racist attitudes in themselves as from a more subtle paternalism bred into them by society."[47]

Similar to Wright and Ellison, the younger generation of African-American intellectuals continued the theme begun by Harlem Renaissance writers like Langston Hughes. The second generation argued that "white allies have often furthered white supremacy without the whites involved realizing it, or even wanting to do so."[48] This younger generation resented integration because to them it represented a "one-way street" in which black Americans, "in order to have a decent house or education...must move into a white neighborhood or send their children to a white school."[49] Amiri Baraka explained,

> We thought we could simply trample the racist

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[45] Carmichael and Hamilton, Black Power, 44.

[46] Ibid., 5.

[47] Ibid., 28.

[48] Ibid., 46.

[49] Ibid., 55.

> rulers with the sincerity of our feelings. We hated white people so publicly...because we had been so publicly tied up with them."[50]

A major difficulty in interracial attempts at social reform was that many African-Americans resented integration on white Americans' terms. Some black intellectuals questioned the validity of integration and its effects on the African-American community.

As late as the 1970s and 1980s, African-American intellectuals continued expressing frustration with white liberal patronization in areas of racial equality. The poet and playwright Maya Angelou speculated that true racial equality in the United States will evolve after white Americans "clear up their own backyards."[51] Angelou suggested that "racism is still a major issue because it is a habit."[52] She believes that the "color line" remains the biggest social problem facing Americans. Angelou added, however, it "will not be dealt with from a paternalistic point of view".[53]

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Harold Cruse was mistaken that the Harlem Renaissance

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[50] Baraka, The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones, 215.

[51] Maya Angelou, "A Conversation with Maya Angelou," interview by Bill Moyers (1973), in Conversations with Maya Angelou ed. Jeffrey M. Elliot (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1989), 23.

[52] Maya Angelou, "The West Interview: Maya Angelou," by Sal Manna (1986) San Jose Mercury News (22 June 1986) in Conversations with Maya Angelou, 160.

[53] Angelou, "A Conversation with Maya Angelou," interview by Bill Moyers (1973), 24.

"was merely a period of parties and patrons...when the Negro was in vogue".[54] The Harlem Renaissance left an important legacy, a cultural bridge which fostered and encouraged interracial discourse on racial inequality in the United States. Some artists and Negrotarians established genuine long-lasting friendships. For instance, Langston Hughes, after having received financial support for his college education from the Spingarns, sent Amy Spingarn money to help offset the medical cost of her husband's stay at the Neurological Institute of New York in 1939.[55] Years later Hughes felt comfortable in turning to Carl Van Vechten for financial assistance. In 1955, Hughes wrote Van Vechten:

> By any chance you've got a spare hundred lying around loose anywhere [that] you could lend me for a month...Anyhow, if you're broke, too, don't worry about it. But if you aren't, and want to help ART [sic] and RACE [sic] through the rainy month of April, I'll send it back to you when the sun shines in May and ASAP [sic] and publishers pay off.[56]

Van Vechten sent his old friend the money and received a "Thanks to no end. I'll have it back to you in about a month. Saved again!" Hughes repaid the loan in May, as promised.[57]

Many Negrotarians, such as Carl Van Vechten, Joel

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[54] Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 62.

[55] Amy Spingarn to Langston Hughes, 14 March 1939. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[56] Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten, 3 April 1955. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[57] Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten, 7 April 1955. Note "repaid May 25, 1955." LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

Spingarn, and Arthur Spingarn, provided a genuine support and concern for racial equality and African American culture. The James Weldon Johnson Collection at Yale University became its founder's, Carl Van Vechten, obsession. Van Vechten became preoccupied with establishing an archive not only in memory of his good friend but to provide future generations with evidence and examples of the renaissance's importance in the development of race relations. Van Vechten wrote to Hughes in 1952:

> At last I have read all your back letters and arranged them chronologically, a terrific job, but one well worth doing: they will go to Yale presently. They are among the most valuable lots in the collection: warm (showing how colored and white get along on occasion) intimate, full of references to every living thing, and a mine of information about Negro habits and doings, full of enclosures and endorses, rich in folklore, and fabulous in friendship.[58]

Van Vechten received recognition from the African-American community in 1955. That year, Fisk University awarded him an honorary doctorate of philosophy. With recognition in hand, Van Vechten parodied his role in the Harlem Renaissance, calling the period the "Cullard Renaissance," and signing a note "Carlo, the Patriarch."[59]

Many of the Harlem Renaissance artists and intellectuals were well aware of the potential paradoxes in their relationships with the Negrotarians. Some artists

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[58] Carl Van Vechten to Langston Hughes, 4 September 1952, (postmarked 1957). LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

[59] Carl Van Vechten to Langston Hughes, 12 October 1959; Carl Van Vechten to Langston Hughes, 2 June 1964. LH, JWJ, Beinecke.

understood not only the importance of the Negrotarians' aesthetic patronage, but also the significance of the Negrotarians' recognition of African-American culture. For instance, Zora Neale Hurston wrote to Langston Hughes in 1934:

> Instead of feeling less need of Godmother and more independent as success approaches me, I need her more and feel her great goodness to me more deeply. If I am acclaimed by the world, and make a million in money, I would feel still that she was responsible for it.[60]

The paradox is also revealed by the depth of the relationships. The Harlem Renaissance created a cultural bridge between some African Americans and Negrotarians. Beyond the confines of these relationships existed a stubbornly, structured racist society. The black artists became trapped in their own paradox attempting to expose the inequalities of a society of which their white friends belonged. For example, African-American intellectuals who joined the Communist Party of the United States, because it advocated civil rights for black Americans, found racial biases and prejudices among the white membership.

This study recognizes that interracial relationship between Negrotarians and African-American intellectuals were problematic. Many of the relationships established during the Harlem Renaissance were affected by white patronage. White patronage helped to sustain financially and aesthetically the Harlem Renaissance by creating a market

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[60] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 29 October 1934. ZNH, JWJ, Beinecke.

for the budding African-American artists. However, white financial support of black artists sometimes became patronizing.

Complications between Negrotarians and black intellectuals continued into the 1960s. During the 1940s and 1950s issues of race chauvinism affected relationships between members of the CPUSA. During the civil rights movement, the paradox became increasingly evident to black social reformers. Young African-American intellectuals and civil rights activists warned white social reformers that they too were part of the problem. This idea was especially pronounced by the 1960s generation. Stokely Carmichael explained that "there is a definite, organizational, supportive" role that white Americans can play in the civil rights movement.[61] But, "one of the most disturbing things about almost all white supporters has been that they are reluctant to go into their own communities--which is where the racism exists."[62] For instance, beginning in the 1950s, under federal pressure southern school districts were forced to desegregate, however, in Boston city officials waited until 1974 to demand desegregation.[63]

Examining interracial relationships developed during the Harlem Renaissance makes that period significant in

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[61] Carmichael and Hamilton, Black Power, 81.

[62] Ibid.

[63] See, Ronald P. Formisano, Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

understanding twentieth century race relations in the United States. The Harlem Renaissance offered a rare opportunity for a cultural and intellectual exchange between many black and white intellectuals and social reformers. Some Negrotarians recognized equality in African-America culture, tradition, and history. The Negrotarians' recognition of cultural equality encouraged many black intellectuals to criticize the marginalization of African-Americans. Recognizing and analyzing the paradox and historical implications of the relationships between Negrotarians and African-American intellectuals reflects the realistic, yet delicate nature of these friendships. Likewise, the human elements of the relationships indicate the importance of the Harlem Renaissance's legacy, a cultural exchange between many white and black Americans.

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