

The Crisis.

New York, NY : National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1910-

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"THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH"



COUNTEE P. CULLEN



(Speech delivered at Town Hall, New York, under auspices of the "League of Youth")

YOUTH the world over is undergoing a spiritual and an intellectual awakening, is looking with new eyes at old customs and institutions, and is finding for them interpretations which its parents passed over. Youth everywhere is mapping out a programme for itself, is banding together in groups whose members have a common interest. In some places these various youth movements, such as the German Youth Movement, are assuming proportions of such extent that they are being viewed with trepidation by those who desire to see things continue in the same rut, who do not wish the "old order to change, yielding place to new".

And so it is not to be wondered at that the young American Negro is having his Youth Movement also. We in America have not yet reached the stage where we can speak of an American Youth Movement, else I had not been asked to speak this afternoon. The American Negro's Youth Movement is less ostentatious than others, perhaps, but it is no less intense. And if there is any group which is both a problem for itself and a problem for others, and which needs a movement for the solving of both it is the American Negro. Details and specific instances of what I mean may be met with daily segregation, discrimination, and just this past week the barring by an American board of a colored girl from entering The Art School at Fontainebleau, France, because her presence *might* be objectionable to certain people who would be along, this supposed objection being based not on character, but on color. Surely where such conditions obtain a movement is needed. I may say that the majority of people, even my own people, do not realize that we are having a Youth Movement at all. It is not crying itself from the house tops. It is a somewhat subsurface affair like a number of small underground currents, each working its individual way along, yet all bound at length to come together.

In the first place the young American Negro is going in strong for education; he

realizes its potentialities for combating bigotry and blindness. Those colleges which cater exclusively to our own people are filled to capacity, while the number of Negro students enrolled in other colleges in the country is yearly increasing. Basically it may be that this increased respect for education is selfish in the case of each individual without any concern for the group effect, but that is neither here nor there, the main point to be considered is that it is working a powerful group effect.

Then the New Negro is changing somewhat in his attitude toward the Deity. I would not have you misconstrue this statement. I do not mean that he is becoming less reverent, but that he is becoming less dependent. There is a stereotype by which most of you measure all Negroes. You think of a healthy, hearty fellow, easily provoked to laughter, liking nothing better than to be slapped on the back, and to be called a "good fellow"—and to leave all to God. The young Negro of today while he realizes that religious fervor is a good thing for any people, and while he realizes that it and the Negro are fairly inseparable, also realizes that where it exists in excess it breeds stagnation, and passive acquiescence, where a little active resistance would work better results. The finest of lines divides the phrase "Let God do it," from the phrase "Let George do it". And there are some things which neither George nor God can do. There is such a thing as working out one's own soul's salvation. And that is what the New Negro intends to do.

Finally, if I may consider myself to be fairly representative of the Young American Negro, he feels that the elder generations of both Caucasian and colored Americans have not come to the best mutual understanding. I mean both North and South. For the misunderstanding is not one of sections, but is one of degree. In the South it is more candid and vehement and above-board; in the North where it does obtain it is sly and crafty and cloaks itself in the guise of kindness and is therefore more

cruel. We have not yet reached the stage where we realize that whether we side with Darwin or with Bryan we all spring from a common progenitor.

There is a story of a little girl of four or five years of age who asked her father, "Daddy, where were you born?" "Why I was born in San Francisco," said her father. "And where was mother born?" Why in Chicago." "And I, where was I born?" "In New York." The little girl thought this over for a while, then said, "Father was born in San Francisco, Mother in Chicago, and baby in New York. Isn't it wonderful how we all got together?" Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all get together? The Young Negro feels that understanding means meeting one another half way. This League has taken a splendid forward step. Will it go further?

In the words of a Negro poet, I bring you a challenge:

How would you have us? As we are?
Or sinking 'neath the load we bear?
Our eyes fixed forward on a star?
Or gazing empty at despair?

Rising or falling? Men or things?

With dragging pace or footsteps fleet?
Strong willing sinews in your wings?

Or tightening chains about your feet?

It is a challenge to be weighed mightily. For we must be one thing or the other, an asset or a liability, the sinew in your wing to help you soar, or the chain to bind you to earth. You cannot go forward unless you take us with you, you cannot push back unless you retrograde as much yourself. Mr. President, I hope this league will accept my challenge and will answer it in the new spirit which seems to be animating youth everywhere—the spirit of what is just and fair and honorable.

EL AFRICANO



ERIC D. WALROND



HENRY O. TANNER, the Negro artist whose paintings adorn the Louvre in Paris, and Alfred Smith, whose etchings of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Phyllis Wheatley and other Negro Immortals are at present on exhibition at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, are so far the two most outstanding painters of color of note known to us on this side of the Atlantic.

In Spain, however, there is a painter in whose veins runs the noble blood of Africa who is conceded by the foremost art critics of Europe to be the greatest imaginative painter in the world. The story of this Negro artist, who has never had a lesson in his life, reads like a chapter from a richly woven romance by Poushkin or Dumas. Born on the Canary Isles but thirty years ago Nestor Martin Fernandez de la Torr  as a very young man became famous as a swimmer in the sea between the Canary Islands and the Moroccan coast. Idolized as the peer, by reason of the lofty reach of his imagination, of such internationally famous painters as Sorrolla and Zuloaga, de la Torr  is adored by the nobility of Old Spain as "El Africano." Some of his mural paintings actually take one's

breath away. For superb skill, originality, deftness of execution, and sheer gorgeousness, they are unparalleled. Some of the shrewdest art critics of Europe, like Antonio Zarraga, are overwhelmed at the mighty sweep of his imagination. Only



"A LADY" BY DE LA TORRE