

CLAUDE MCKAY For a Negro Magazine (1934)

Ten years ago all the literary circles of America were enlivened by talk of a Negro Renaissance. Appreciative and interpretative articles in newspaper and magazines were duly followed by a fat little crop of Negro books by white and colored authors. The vogue for Negro music attained its peak. African Negro sculpture found a place in modern art circles beside the art of other peoples.

Looking back to that period today the Negro Renaissance seems to have been no more than a mushroom growth that could send no roots down in the soil of Negro life.

About this apparent setback there are many opinions. Some think that the field was over-unscrupulously exploited. Others that the national interest in the artistic expression of the Negro was only a passing fad.

But we believe that any genuine artistic expression can transcend a fad; that the Negro's contribution to literature and art should have a permanent place in American life; that American life will be richer by such contribution; and that it should find an outlet and a receptive audience.

Therefore, our aim is to found a magazine to give expression to the literary and artistic aspirations of the Negro; to make such a magazine of national significance as an esthetic interpretation of Negro life, exploiting the Negro's racial background and his racial gifts and accomplishments.

We want to encourage Negroes to create artistically as an ethnological group irrespective of class and creed. We want to help the Negro as writer and artist to free his mind of the shackles imposed upon it from outside as well as within his own racial group.

We mean to go forward in the vanguard of ideas, trends, thoughts and movements. But we are not demanding that the creative Negro should falsely accept nostrums and faiths that he does not understand. We realize that there are creative persons whose reaction to life is instinctive and emotional like actors who say their lines grandly without knowing what they really are about. We are not demanding that writers and artists should be more intellectual and social-minded in their work than they are constitutionally capable of being.

Nevertheless we have standards to which we will hold our contributors, such as:

Sincerity of purpose

Freshness and keenness of perception

Adequate form of expression

The magazine is to be established under the editorship of Claude McKay, who has often been referred to as a pioneer of the so-called Negro Renaissance.

Mr. McKay has returned to this country after over 11 years' residence abroad, during which time he has traveled extensively and written a number of novels. He has not only kept in close touch with the social and artistic trends of American Negro life in their purely racial as well as radical phases, but he has also an international outlook on the Negro besides a store of experience from his long residence in different countries of Europe and [Africa].

From his mature experiences and broad outlook we believe that he will forge an adequate and keen instrument for the expression of genuine Negro talent.