

The "New Negro," the Police, and Militant Self-Defense

If we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying but fighting back! ¹

¹ *Liberator*, II (July 1919), 21. Although it is sometimes asserted that McKay wrote this poem after, and probably in response to, the

SO WROTE A BLACK POET, Claude McKay, in the summer of 1919. And his was not a solitary voice calling for self-assertion, manliness, and resolute self-defense. In the forefront of this firmness of purpose was the returning black soldier, who, as one veteran put it, "knows past all doubting how to be unafraid in the valley of the shadow and how to die splendidly defending his own." ² Black veterans, the NAACP's W. E. B. Du Bois told an overflow audience at Chicago's Wendell Phillips High School, "will never be the same again. You need not ask them to go back to what they were before. They cannot, for they are not the same men any more." ³ "I went to war, served eight months in France," recalled one of Chicago's ex-soldiers. "I wanted to go, but I might as well have stayed for all the good it has done me. . . . No, that ain't so," he added bitterly, "I'm glad I went. I done my part and I'm going to fight right here till Uncle Sam does his. I can shoot as good as the next one. . . . I ain't looking for trouble, but if it comes my way I ain't dodging." ⁴

In addition to the soldiers who had steeled their courage in the crucible of war, countless thousands of other blacks were of one voice in their condemnation of nonviolence. Only twice in the twentieth century, August Meier and Elliott Rudwick have written, have there been major periods when black

Washington race riot, it is apparent that he wrote it earlier. The issue of the *Liberator* in which the poem appeared was published before the Washington riot. For similar expressions of the blacks' fierce determination to retaliate, see "The Remedy for Mob Violence," *The Veteran* (June 28, 1919), in 66th Cong., 1st Sess., U. S. Senate, *Investigation Activities of the Department of Justice*, Doc. No. 153 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), 165; Carita Owens Collins, "Be a Man," in *ibid.*, 163; *Cleveland Gazette*, September 6, 20, 1919; Robert T. Kerlin, *The Voice of the Negro, 1919* (N.Y.: Dutton, 1920), *passim*.

² W. H. Jordan, *With "Old Eph" in the Army* (Baltimore: H. E. Houck, 1919), 47-48.

³ *Chicago Broad Ax* and *Chicago Defender*, both May 24, 1919.

⁴ Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 481.

intellectuals have advocated retaliatory violence and masses of black citizens have committed dramatic acts of social violence. One was the period of the mid-1960's, the other was 1919. Reports drifted north from Tennessee, Mississippi, Texas, and other Southern states in the spring of 1919 that "Negroes were arming" there as well as in the North. They would "not make trouble unless they were attacked," said R. R. Church, a black leader in Memphis, "but in that event they were prepared to defend themselves." Obviously, some of these reports were the result more of the panic of whites who feared that blacks were arming to impose "social equality" than they were of personal observation. Yet others were authentic. Robert T. Kerlin, in 1919 a student of current black newspapers, wrote that with but one exception, "Self-defense is applauded and advocated . . . by the entire colored press. . . ." ⁵

Black men and women in 1919 were imbued both with pride in their race and with a fierce determination to possess the rights pledged to Americans by the Constitution. As an upshot of the migration and the race's contributions to the Allies' victory—as soldiers, industrial workers, purchasers of Liberty Bonds—black people felt they had earned the enjoyment of these guarantees. They were resolved also to defend their life, liberty, and property against white aggressors; consequently, numerous would-be lynchings became race riots when blacks fought back.⁶ And perhaps nowhere was this

⁵ Meier and Rudwick, "Black Violence in the 20th Century," in National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, *Violence in America*, prepared under the direction of Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr (N.Y.: Signet edition, 1969), 380–85; report of investigation of Herbert J. Seligmann, May 18–25, 1919, in NAACP Papers (C-74), Library of Congress (NAACP-1); Fuller Williamson to A. G. Whittington, August 25, 1919, in Papers of U. S. Railroad Administration (RG 14), Suitland, Maryland; Kerlin, *Voice of the Negro*, 23; E. Franklin Frazier, "New Currents of Thought among the Colored People of America" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Clark University, 1920), 39–41; Chicago Commission, *Negro in Chicago*, 488–90.

⁶ Rollin Hartt, "The New Negro," *Independent*, CV (January 15, 1921), 59–60.

determination to retaliate more evident than in Chicago during the city's race riot.

Personifying the attitudes of this "New Negro" was W. E. B. Du Bois, a founder of the NAACP, a leader of the black intelligentsia, and as editor of the *Crisis* a foremost articulator of the protests of black people. There was a chasm separating his immediate goals and doctrines from those of Booker T. Washington, the acknowledged leader of his race until his death in 1915; and the growing popularity of Du Bois' writings by 1919 was evidence of the long road the New Negro had traveled in just a few years. Washington had advocated patience, accommodation, and social, economic, and political "uplift" through economic development. Du Bois, on the other hand, preached assertiveness, and he rejected Washington's prediction that with vocational training and the acquisition of property would come the vote and an end to the race's subordinated status. He urged black people to claim their rights. Gradualism and satisfaction with "half a loaf" were patently contrary to the aspirations and expectations of the New Negro. Declaring that Washington was "a compromiser between the South, the North, and the Negro" and thus not a true leader of the race, Du Bois first disputed his teachings at the turn of the century. "So far as Mr. Washington preaches Thrift, Patience . . .," wrote Du Bois, "we must hold up his hands and strive with him. . . . But so far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, North or South, does not rightly value the privilege and duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions . . . so far as he, the South, or the Nation, does this,—we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them. By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men. . . ." ⁷

After the Springfield, Illinois, race riot of 1908 had dramatically revealed the intolerable status and vulnerability of

⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903), 41–59.

blacks, Du Bois and a group of sympathetic whites established the NAACP. In this organization, Du Bois felt, he had an effective instrument with which to contest Washington's philosophy. Through its periodical, the *Crisis*, he put forth monthly the precepts of rebellion against lynchings, of stout objection to the countless inequities that black people had to endure, and of the use of protest for the righting of these wrongs. During the war the size and receptivity of Du Bois' audience mounted; from an annual circulation in 1915 of 385,000, the *Crisis* sold 560,000 copies in the first six months of 1919 alone. Other New Negro periodicals and newspapers likewise proliferated in size and number. In Chicago, the circulation of the *Defender* boomed from 10,000 to 93,000 during the war years; and in the summer of 1919, the *Whip*, the city's most militant black weekly, initiated publication. More than simply reflecting the rapidly increasing literacy of the race, this upsurge signified that black people enjoyed and agreed with what they were reading.⁸

The New Negro did not reject all of Washington's teachings. In fact, many of the assertive race journals praised his contributions; certainly thrift, the acquisition of property, and qualification in a trade were desirable goals. Yet there was one tenet that the New Negro generally could not bear: non-resistance to physical aggression. After the Atlanta race riot of 1906, Washington had urged "the colored people . . . to exercise self-control and not make the fatal mistake of attempting to retaliate, but to rely upon the efforts of the proper authorities to bring order and security out of confusion. If they do this," he said, "they will have the sympathy of good people the world over."⁹ But it was self-defense, not self

⁸ For *Crisis* circulation figures, see NAACP Board minutes, July 11, 1919, in NAACP-1 (A-1); for the increase in NAACP branches during the war, see NAACP, *8th and 9th Annual Reports, 1917 and 1918* (no imprint), 17, 55; and *ibid.*, *10th Annual Report*, 7, 64.

⁹ *New York Age*, September 27, 1906; quoted in Frederick G. Detweiler, *The Negro Press in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 138.

control, that was the byword of the New Negro; if attacked, he would oppose his enemy with resolute militance.

Had Washington not died in 1915, he would still have witnessed the repudiation of his teachings, especially by Northern blacks.¹⁰ For two forces were undermining his kind of conservative dominance: the migration of over 450,000 black people to the North, and black soldiers' participation in the war. These dynamics, even more than the preachments of Du Bois and the other advocates of rebellion and protest, were the immediate progenitors of the New Negro.

Of its very nature the migration was a rejection of Washington's counsel to Southern blacks to "cast down your bucket." Much more significantly, patience and accommodation were woefully inadequate guidelines for the black people who had come North. For the migration was not just a matter of physical relocation; it was the abrupt transformation of a feudal peasantry into an urban proletariat. Conservative Southern ministers, disciples of Tuskegee, and other beneficiaries of Washington's patronage could not influence the Northern masses as they had the Southern; the exigencies of Northern city dwelling often demanded adjustments from the selfsame doctrines that they were preaching. On the other hand, the New Negro press and spokesmen were in general attuned to the needs, attitudes, and goals of black people in the cities of the North.

The migration also meant psychological liberation from the chronic trauma of caste. Being powerless in a hostile society had frequently caused black men and women to adopt avoidance and denial mechanisms. They had begun to believe what white people told them—that they were inferior; the self-fulfilling prophecy had become a reality. They had also sup-

¹⁰ Kelly Miller, *Radicalism and the Negro* (Washington: Murray Bros., 1920), 11; Horace M. Bond, "Negro Leadership since Washington," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XXIV (April 1925), 115-30; E. Franklin Frazier, "The American Negro's New Leaders," *Current History*, XXVIII (April 1928), 56-59; V. F. Calverton, "The New Negro," *Current History*, XXIII (February 1926), 694-98.

pressed their anger, sometimes turning it against themselves in destructive acts, other times projecting it onto fellow blacks and being hostile to them rather than to the white oppressor. For many, the migration, accompanied by such benefits as higher wages, the franchise, and decent schools, meant an end to or at least a subsidence of self-hatred.¹¹

"I have talked with some about leaving," reported a white railroad official in Mississippi, "and they say they are equal to a white man in the North. . . ." Moreover, merely being able to pack up his belongings and depart for the North with some expectation of finding a job made the migrant conscious of his control over his own destiny. For a sharecropper, with his tradition of dependence on and obedience to the orders of the landowner, this was liberating indeed. Upon arriving in the North, the migrant found not only that he could obtain work, but even on occasion that he could demand equal pay with whites for equal work and nondiscrimination in shop conditions. Because of the migration, noted Dr. George E. Haynes of the Labor Department's Division of Negro Economics, the black man "is coming to a consciousness of himself as a man among men." He was becoming an independent agent who could "look the world in the face and . . . make no apologies because God made his skin black and his hair curly." And upon arriving in Chicago, the migrant usually received advice which reinforced the exhilarating feeling of liberation. Do not call the foreman "boss," warned the *Defender*. "Leave that word dropped in the Ohio river. Also captain, general and major. We call people up here, Mister This or Mister That." Also do not tip your hat to white workers; ". . . treat them as you want them to treat you—AS A MAN. . . ." Liberation could, as Walter F. White of the NAACP observed in Chicago, result in "irresponsible" and "boisterous" conduct. But it also resulted in heightened self-

¹¹ See James P. Comer's highly suggestive essay, "The Dynamics of Black and White Violence," in Graham and Gurr, *Violence in America*, 423-40.

esteem, and this could mean black people redirecting anger from themselves and their race and focusing it on the whites they saw as the oppressors.¹²

Apparently the composition of the migration was also significant. Neither very many children nor very many old people journeyed to Chicago. The migrant was typically an unattached male, whether he was unmarried or had left his wife and family behind until he could get established; single males, of course, could leave home with greater ease than entire families when job opportunity beckoned from Chicago. A preponderance of the migrants, moreover, was of young adult age, usually between the years of twenty and forty-four. Of black males and females in the city in 1920, 60.2 and 59.6 per cent, respectively, were between twenty and forty-four, while the corresponding figures for native-born whites were 40.6 and 40.9 per cent. Just under one fourth of Chicago's black males were in their twenties. Although the significance of these data is open to debate, there seem to be several possible correlations between them and the emergence of both the New Negro and retaliatory violence in Chicago. Young adult males furnished the bulk of the self-defense and black violence during the riot. Being unattached, living in boarding houses or as lodgers, and not feeling the restraints of family obligations, many were free to participate in this racial warfare. It was to this age group, too, that the doctrines of the New Negro had great appeal. For in at least

¹² Letter from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, May 18, 1917, in Files on East St. Louis, in U. S. Department of Labor Papers (RG 174), Box 205, National Archives; George E. Haynes, "Negro Labor and the New Order," National Conference of Social Work, *Proceedings*, 1919, 531-38; Charles S. Johnson, *Shadow of the Plantation* (Chicago: Phoenix Books of University of Chicago Press, 1966), 3-4; Frazier, "New Currents of Thought," 12-13, 16-19; Charles S. Johnson, "The New Frontage on American Life," in Alain Locke (ed.), *The New Negro* (N.Y.: Atheneum edition, 1968), 287-88; George E. Haynes, "Effect of War Conditions on Negro Labor," *Proceedings of Academy of Political Science*, VIII (1918), 174-76; *Chicago Defender*, April 21, 1917; Walter White, "Chicago and Its Eight Reasons," *Crisis*, XVIII (October 1919), 293-94.

one respect these young men were unlike their fathers, who had been of comparable age during the immediate aftermath of slavery. The sons had encountered fewer whites who had taken even a paternalistic interest in them; as a result, their distrust and hatred were often more acute, and they "found it difficult," as Allan Spear has pointed out, "to live with whites on the terms accepted by their fathers."¹³

As weighty an immediate source of the New Negro as the migration was participation in the war. Black men had clamored to enlist, just as white Americans had. In addition to national allegiance, a most pervasive reason for the unflagging support of black people was the intense hope that one of the fruits of world democracy would be the fulfillment in the United States of the principle of equality of rights, opportunity, and treatment. It was in this spirit that the *Crisis* implored blacks, "while this war lasts, [to] forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens." Expressions of this purpose highlighted practically every discussion of the war by black men and women. Forget "all the injustice for the time being," exclaimed speakers at Chicago's Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in April 1917, and be "as one man ready to stand by the government in this crisis. . . ." Just before embarking on a tour of cantonments in France, Julius Rosenwald received a letter from Emmett J. Scott, the black special assistant to the Secretary of War. Tell the black soldiers, Scott had written, "that the DEMOCRACY for which they

¹³ Ernest W. Burgess and Charles Newcomb, *Census Data of the City of Chicago, 1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 9-10; E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 262, 270 ff.; Irene J. Graham, "Family Support and Dependency among Chicago Negroes: A Study of Unpublished Census Data," *Social Service Review*, III (December 1929), 541-62; Elizabeth Hughes, *Living Conditions for Small Wage Earners in Chicago* (Chicago: Department of Public Welfare, 1925), 11; Louise V. Kennedy, *The Negro Peasant Turns Cityward* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1930), 135-40; Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 137-38.

have gone forth is an idealism as holy as ever [a] Crusader went forth to battle for, and that their struggles shall not be in vain."¹⁴

Even Southern racists acknowledged that black soldiers, by serving, would earn for their race a stake in democracy—and this prospect alarmed them. Arguing against conscription for blacks, Senator James K. Vardaman and other politicians asserted that it would be a contradiction of the color-line creed; that it would place firearms in the hands of black men; that it would expose these men to social equality in France, thus "Frenchifying" and ruining them. But the government proceeded to draft blacks, more than 340,000 of them; and including volunteers, regular Army units, and the National Guard, upwards of 400,000 served in all. In addition, 200,000 of these men served in France, 42,000 as combat troops.¹⁵

Of the black combat units that served heroically, the 8th Illinois was the only regiment commanded wholly by blacks for much of the war. Officered and manned primarily by Chicagoans, the unit was one of which the black community was immensely proud. Called the "Black Devils" by the Germans

¹⁴ "Close Ranks," *Crisis*, XVI (July 1918), 111; *Chicago Defender*, April 7, 1917; E. Scott, Washington, to J. Rosenwald, Washington, July 31, 1918, Julius Rosenwald Papers, University of Chicago Library. For perhaps the best poetical treatment of this theme, see Roscoe Jameson, "Negro Soldiers," *Crisis*, XIV (September 1917), 249; and Joseph S. Cotter, Jr., "Sonnet to Negro Soldiers," in Walter C. Jackson and Newman I. White, *An Anthology of Verse by American Negroes* (Durham, N.C.: Trinity College Press, 1924), 182.

¹⁵ Memorandum from Emmett J. Scott to Grosvenor B. Clarkson, Director, National Council of Defense, March 26, 1919, in RG 174, Box 17, 8/102; Rufus E. Clement, "Problems of Demobilization and Rehabilitation of the Negro Soldier after World Wars I and II," *Journal of Negro Education*, XII (Summer 1943), 533-34; Moorfield Storey, *The Negro Question, An Address . . . before the Wisconsin Bar Association* (N.Y.: NAACP, n.d.), 5; *Chicago Defender*, April 28, 1917; *Congressional Record*, LV, 6062-63; "American Negro in the World War," *Negro Year Book, 1925-26* (Tuskegee Institute, Alabama: Negro Year Book Publishing Co., 1925), 250-53; and *ibid.*, 1919-1921, 188-93.

because of their fierce fighting at St. Mihiel, the Argonne Forest, and the Meuse, and called the "Partridges" by the French because of their proud military bearing, the 8th Illinois fought the last battle of the war in the final drive against the Germans. Suffering 20 per cent casualties, the regiment surrendered only one prisoner to the Germans and was one of the most abundantly decorated of American outfits. The United States awarded the Distinguished Service Cross to twenty-one of the regiment's heroes, while the French government pinned the *Croix de Guerre* on sixty-eight of them.¹⁶

Photographs of the 8th Illinois adorned shop windows in Chicago's black belt, and surrounding the pictures were the helmets, rifles, and canteens that the troops had sent back from France. Black officials returning from the battlefield praised the regiment, and there was scarcely a public meeting in the black belt that was without a prayer or a cheer for the 8th. "Our boys are just natural bayonet fighters," boasted Franklin Denison, the former colonel of the regiment who had become ill in France. The black troops, he said, were "cheerful and earnest"; they were happy to be fighting for democracy, "and they believe that their fighting will provide a fuller measure of equality for you and for them when it is over—that the democracy for which they are fighting will include the American Negro when peace is signed in Ber-

¹⁶ *Heroes of 1918* (no imprint), in stacks, Library of Congress; Walter White, "Notes on Chicago of WFW," September 17, 1919, NAACP Papers located in Washington, D.C., at the Middle Atlantic office of the NAACP's Youth Division (NAACP-2); *Complete History of the Colored Soldiers in the World War* (N.Y.: Bennett & Churchill, 1919), 93-105; W. Allison Sweeney, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War . . .* (Chicago: Crineo-Henneberry, ca. 1919), 183 ff.; Emmett J. Scott, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (Chicago: Homewood Press, 1919), 214-30; Major Warner A. Ross, *My Colored Battalion* (Chicago: pub. by author, 1920), 83-119; "Soldiers" file in the WPA's "Negro in Illinois" project, files in George Cleveland Hall Branch, Chicago Public Library; William S. Braddan's history of the 8th Illinois, in *Chicago Broad Ax*, May 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, June 7, 14, 21, 1919; *Chicago Defender*, December 22, 1917, January 5, August 10, 1918.

lin. . . ." Chicago's black soldiers, he added, were "not complaining now"; "their complaint will come when it is all over. . . ." ¹⁷

The 8th Illinois returned to Chicago in mid-February 1919; and, according to the *Defender's* reporter, it was greeted with "a maelstrom of joy and wonderment." It was "a day of wild rejoicing," awaited for months, for the 8th was "the first of the city's fighters to come back as a unit." Four hundred thousand cheering people lined Michigan Avenue as the 8th marched by the reviewing stand filled with white and black dignitaries. Offices and stores had closed for the day, and 60,000 exuberant Chicagoans had jammed the Coliseum to welcome the unit. The speakers included the 8th's black officers, who thanked their friends for coming; but in the midst of the speeches Mayor Thompson, "who just couldn't miss the fun," burst into the hall amidst much applause. For "your devotion to our country and your heroism in battle," he shouted happily, "I bespeak for you that justice and equality of citizenship which shall . . . enable you and your posterity . . . as a living truth, to sing in a mighty chorus, 'My Country 'Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Liberty.' " ¹⁸

Black people had been active on the home front, too, pitching in across the country by purchasing an estimated \$250,000,000 worth of thrift stamps and Liberty Bonds. And in Chicago, aside from succoring the Allied armies by laboring long days in essential war industries, black men and women had donated countless hours of volunteer work. Auxiliaries of the Red Cross had knitted sweaters, caps, and socks, while other ladies had greeted soldiers at the railroad stations with refreshments and had packed Christmas boxes for shipment to France.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Journal of Illinois State Historical Society*, XI (January 1919), 606-12.

¹⁸ *Chicago Defender* and *Chicago Broad Ax*, both February 22, 1919.

¹⁹ Elinora Manson, "War Activities among the Colored Women of Chicago," in *Chicago Broad Ax*, December 21, 1918; *Chicago De-*

With the Armistice, men and women in the black belt eagerly awaited prompt payment for their contributions; caught up in the validity of their supplications, most asked for no more than justice. Such was the moderate entreaty of a black poet, Chicago's Fenton Johnson:

For we have been with thee in No Man's Land,
Through lake of fire and down to Hell itself;
And now we ask of thee our liberty,
Our freedom in the land of Stars and Stripes.²⁰

Less idealistic blacks knew that the superordinate white community would grant justice grudgingly, if at all.

Despite their warm welcome home, the veterans of the 8th Illinois returned to Chicago with "a very widespread dissatisfaction bordering on bitterness."²¹ Having fought on the Mexican border in 1916, the 8th Illinois had been ordered back to the Southwest in 1917, this time to Houston's Camp Logan. One company had just detrained at Houston when a race riot erupted in that city. Black troops of the 24th Infantry, goaded by white civilians, had taken up their weapons and killed seventeen of the local citizens. After a farcical trial, thirteen of the troops were hanged for murder and mutiny, and forty-one were imprisoned for life. These trials, reported a sergeant from the 8th, "caused many days of anxiety to our boys. . . . Uneasiness akin to despair swept our ranks." Because of the post-riot hysteria, the rest of the unit did not leave Chicago for Texas until October. But the city was still in "a state of frenzy" when the regiment arrived, and

fender, April 19, 1919; Ira De A. Reid, "A Critical Summary: The Negro on the Home Front in World Wars I and II," *Journal of Negro Education*, XII (Summer 1943), 515; *Congressional Record*, LIX, 7482; Monroe Work (comp.), "Negro Patriotism," *Southern Workman*, XLVIII (October 1919), 510-11.

²⁰ Fenton Johnson, "The New Day," in William S. Braithwaite (ed.), *Victory!* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1919), 30-31.

²¹ Report from Director, Division of Negro Economics, to Secretary of Labor, September 12, 1919, RG 174, 8/102-E.

the city council redoubled its efforts to ensure that the city's accommodations were segregated. The atmosphere in France was decidedly different, but the racial attitudes of the American military hierarchy apparently were not. Bitterness swept the 8th when a white officer replaced Colonel Denison as commanding officer in France. The white colonel, charged the unit's chaplain, Major William S. Braddan, was "one of the worst enemies of the colored soldiers." He allegedly branded the soldiers of the 8th as "a bunch of thieves," adding that he had "never seen as many ruffians outside of prison." Braddan also quoted the colonel as saying: "You are not fit for a combat unit, you are nothing but an armed mob, unfit for ought save a labor battalion." Whatever the truth of these allegations, it is evident that numerous black troops abhorred the colonel, and that he in turn had contempt for many of them.²²

Postwar hostility to the aspirations of blacks was intense and widespread. In the early months of 1919, lynchings proliferated, several of them of black soldiers still in uniform. Moreover, white people misconstrued these aspirations as overweening exertions for social equality; and as expectations of equality collided with the general determination of whites to reestablish prewar subservency, bitter disillusionment set in upon the black community. The war, however, and its concomitant, the migration, had helped to form the New Negro, who would persevere with intensified militancy in spite of and perhaps even because of the opposition. Black people had endured oppression when there seemed to be no other alternative; but once the war had suggested the possibility of escape, oppression became intolerable. It was thus not a case of absolute deprivation but of relative deprivation, especially for the

²² Sgt. Oscar Walker, "The Eighth Regiment in France," in *Heroes of 1918*, not paginated; *Chicago Defender*, July 28, August 25, September 22, October 13, November 10, 1917; *Champion*, I (September 1916), 7-9, 39-40 ff.; Edgar A. Schuler, "The Houston Race Riot, 1917," *Journal of Negro History*, XXIX (July 1944), 300-38; Ross, *My Colored Battalion*, 9-10; *Chicago Broad Ax*, May 3-June 21, 1919.

migrants who had usually arrived in Chicago with higher expectations and lower skills than Northern blacks. For the migrants in particular, the obdurate resistance of whites could be psychologically more disruptive in a dynamic urban setting than in a traditional area of the South. And, of course, there were the aspirations, embittered though they were, of the black soldier. He "is coming back," A. L. Jackson told a group of white business and professional men, "with a consciousness of power hitherto unrealized, a sense of manhood, and a belief in his ability to carry responsibility. He believes," Jackson added, "that his strength is the same as that of other men." This assertion of independence and manliness was a sentiment with which much of Chicago's black community seemed to agree in 1919. For many blacks, the period of patient endurance was past. Sparked by persistent antagonism or by a dramatic racial incident, they might well retaliate against whites, and the tinderbox of race relations would burst into flames.²³

Other indispensable facets of the New Negro attitude were race pride and heightened race consciousness. Culturally as well as politically and economically, both were useful as antidotes for the fever of race hatred in the United States, and in its cultural aspects the New Negro attitude had been evolving since at least the turn of the century. "Race prejudice," white sociologist Robert E. Park wrote in his introduction to the Chicago Urban League's 1917 report, "in so far as it has

²³ Chicago Urban League, *Annual Report*, II (no imprint), 3-4; Loraine Green, "The Rise of Race-Consciousness in the American Negro" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1919), 49 ff.; Lewis A. Coser, "Violence and the Social Structure," in Shalom Endelman, *Violence in the Streets* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1968), 74-75; Ralph H. Turner (ed.), *On Social Control and Collective Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 173; report of Brandeis University's Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence, in *Washington Post*, June 27, 1967; Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1962), 243; "Returning Soldiers," *Crisis*, XVIII (May 1919), 14; A. L. Jackson, "Chicago's Negro Problem," *City Club of Chicago Bulletin*, XII (March 17, 1919), 75.

compelled him to think always and everywhere in racial terms, has given the Negro a cause, and created a solidarity and unity of purpose which might not otherwise exist." This observation was indeed pertinent to the world of black culture. Years before the war, with its migration and accelerated urbanization for blacks, the impulse toward cultural autonomy and ethnocentrism had been evident. Parents started to buy black dolls for their children, even spending a little more for them. "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," written in 1900, became the "Negro National Anthem." Unashamed racial themes began to distinguish the art and literature of black intellectuals. A further cultural example of race pride and consciousness involved the color of the Lord. A *Crisis* editorial in 1914, intimating that Jesus was "not a white man," touched off the profitable issuance of such pamphlets as *Jesus Was Born Out of the Black Tribe*, *Jesus Christ Was Part Negro*, and *The Black Man, the Father of Civilization, Proven by Biblical History*. And in 1915, to explode the myths of black history, Carter G. Woodson, aided by Dr. George Cleveland Hall, A. L. Jackson, and several other men, organized the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History at Chicago's Wabash Avenue YMCA. The Association's *Journal of Negro History* first appeared in January 1916, beginning what John Hope Franklin has called perhaps "the most far-reaching and ambitious effort to rewrite history that has ever been attempted in this country." It was also significant, Franklin has written, as "a remarkable attempt to rehabilitate a whole people" and "to develop self-respect and self-esteem."²⁴

²⁴ Chicago Urban League, *Annual Report*, I (no imprint), 4; August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks of University of Michigan Press, 1966), 256-78; Green, "Rise of Race Consciousness," 3-9, 40-44; Robert E. Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1950), 87; W. Lloyd Warner, *Color and Human Nature: Negro Personality Development in a Northern City* (Washington: American Council on Education, 1941), 16; "The Color of the Lord," *Crisis*, VIII (June 1914), 73; Miles Mark Fisher, "The Negro Church and the World War," *Journal*

Although the beginnings of this cultural rebirth antedated the war and the migration, these latter events were powerful stimulants to its emergence. Perhaps its leading edge during and after the war was the New Negro poetry. "A people that is producing poetry . . .," asserted a professor of English at the time, "is not a people that is perishing. On the contrary, it is a people that is astir with vital impulses, a people inspired by life-giving visions." Robert Park even felt that the New Negro poetry not only reflected a new dynamism in black culture but that indeed it was "a transcript of Negro life" itself. Even while treating such racial and literary categorizations with skepticism, the scholar still must view the black poetry of 1919 as an invaluable source. For it was, among other things, the poetry of rebellion and protest, and it mirrored the predisposition of black men and women to identify white skin with oppression.²⁵

It was "the stirring year 1917," the black scholar and writer William Stanley Braithwaite has noted, "that heard the first real masterful accent in Negro poetry." That September the *Crisis* published Roscoe Jameson's "Negro Soldiers," and the next month, in *The Seven Arts*, appeared Claude McKay's "The Harlem Dancer." Glorifications of black beauty and courage, these works seemed to touch off a poetic interest in being black, thus reversing the prewar art with its imitation of white values and customs and its suppression of black individuality. Moreover, with the bitter disillusionment of the immediate postwar months, the pathways to cultural assimila-

of Religion, V (September 1925), 494; Carter G. Woodson, "Ten Years of Collecting and Publishing the Records of the Negro," *Journal of Negro History*, X (October 1925), 598-606; John Hope Franklin, "The New Negro History," *Journal of Negro History*, XLII (April 1957), 93-94.

²⁵ For the characteristics of race consciousness, see W. O. Brown, "Nature of Race Consciousness," *Social Forces*, X (October 1931), 90-97; Robert E. Park, "Negro Race Consciousness as Reflected in Race Literature," *American Review*, I (September-October 1923), 505-6; Park, *Race and Culture*, 299; Frazier, "American Negro's New Leaders," 58-59.

tion were impeded, and, as if by reflex, literary race pride in 1919 was dramatically heightened. Some black writers, trying to breach the caste barrier, still sought to erase racial distinctions, cultural and otherwise. But other writers, and especially the younger ones, glorified the selfsame characteristics disdained by those who aspired to become "whiter and whiter" with every generation. In "The Mulatto to His Critics," for example, a poet earnestly identified with being black, spurning the urge to "pass" for white, while another black poet placed his pagan African heritage on a plane superior to his Christian American environment. These men and women no longer wanted to imitate white America; they were proud of what they were.²⁶

Although in a real sense positive contributions, race pride and heightened race consciousness did more than build up self-respect. They militated against nonviolence. As lynchings and other forms of oppression abounded early in 1919, black poets increasingly condemned the white perpetrators of the crimes. In July 1919, for example, Claude McKay's "A Roman Holiday" appeared:

'Tis but a modern Roman holiday;
Each state invokes its soul of basest passion,
Each vies with each to find the ugliest way
To torture Negroes in the fiercest fashion.
Black Southern men, like hogs await your doom!
White wretches hunt and haul you from your huts,
They squeeze the babies out your women's wombs,
They cut your members off, rip out your guts!

²⁶ Braithwaite, "The Negro in American Literature," in Locke, *New Negro*, 38-40. For a discussion of the origins and manifestations of the "Negro Renaissance," see Robert A. Bone, *The Negro Novel in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 61-64; Park, "Race Consciousness in Race Literature," 509, 511-12; Bond, "Negro Leadership since Washington," 116-17; Georgia D. Johnson, "The Octoroon," *Liberator*, II (August 1919), 10; Countee Cullen, "Heritage," in Locke, *New Negro*, 250.

Other poems, nearly as inflammatory, were also published at this time. Undoubtedly several of these descriptions of the horrors of hangings and burnings were true, but the poems indicted the white race as a whole; the object of bitterness had been generalized from the "cracker" to all whites. The black press likewise railed indiscriminately against an entire race over the depredations of a few fiends. In this respect, Chicago's *Defender* and *Whip* were prime offenders.²⁷

Chicago's black community in 1919 identified white skin more and more with oppression. In this teeming metropolis, impersonality bred stereotypes and mutual distrust, especially along racial lines. A. L. Jackson warned a gathering of white men in March 1919: "Young men among the negroes . . . are growing up with a suspicion against anything that is white. . . . We cannot afford to let this attitude grow."²⁸ Stanley Norvell, a black ex-officer of the American Expeditionary Force, similarly explained to Victor F. Lawson, editor of the *Chicago Daily News*, that "Negroes have become highly suspicious of white men, even such white men as they deem their friends ordinarily."²⁹

Considered with the New Negro's fierce determination to defend himself, this stereotype of the white oppressor was portentous. A single instance of aggression could be ascribed by blacks to all white Chicagoans; in massive retaliation against all available whites for the immediate misdoings of a few, a race war would surely result.

²⁷ *Liberator*, II (July 1919), 21; see Georgia D. Johnson, "Prejudice," *Crisis*, XVIII (May 1919), 14; Walter Hawkins, "A Festival in Christendom," in Robert T. Kerlin (ed.), *Negro Poets and Their Poems* (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1923), 234-35; G. R. Margetson, "The Fledgling Bard and the Poetry Society," in Newman I. White, "Racial Feeling in Negro Poetry," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XXI (January 1922), 22; Eugene Gordon, "A Survey of the Negro Press," *Opportunity*, V (January 1927), 8.

²⁸ Jackson, "Chicago's Negro Problem," 75-76.

²⁹ S. Norvell, Chicago, to V. Lawson, Chicago, August 22, 1919, Rosenwald Papers; also in William M. Tuttle, Jr. (ed.), "Views of a Negro during 'the Red Summer' of 1919," *Journal of Negro History*, LI (July 1966), 209-18.

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Outspoken government officials generally could see only a Bolshevik plot behind the retaliatory violence of a people they thought they knew as docile and cheerful. Behind the Chicago race riot, there is "more than the smouldering antagonism of race feeling," a British intelligence officer authoritatively reported. The riot was the result of "a vicious and well financed propaganda" campaign. But who would finance such unrest and why would they want to promote bloodshed? His answer was simple enough: "Revolutionary agitators [who seek] to stimulate a sympathetic unrest among the coloured races in order to make the breakdown of the Capitalist system universal." Without agitators, an American Army intelligence officer agreed, there would have been no racial violence that summer. The "inspiring parties," he reported, were members of the "Boule," a secret society in West Africa. The "Boule," or "Bowl," as some people called it, was anarchistic, and it made its members take an oath swearing "to die defending their brothers and to exterminate white rulers." The New York State Senate's Lusk Committee was another governmental endeavor to impute to radicalism the race pride of black men and women and their determination to retaliate against aggression. Also in 1919 Representative James F. Byrnes of South Carolina followed this lead and declared that the race riots "were part of a general scheme of that 'Little Russia' [which] is being established in the North." Partly as a consequence of Byrnes' accusation, the Justice Department initiated an investigation of radicalism and sedition among black people. The report of the Attorney General's investigation not only assailed blacks for their "ill-governed reaction toward race rioting" and for recommending "retaliatory measures in connection with lynching," but also cited as seditious the blacks' "political stand . . . toward the present Federal administration, the South in general, and incidentally, toward the peace treaty and the league of nations." A further criterion of black radicalism was apparently the de-

nunciation of Booker T. Washington's racial philosophy; those who condemned it were not to be trusted. The report intimated, moreover, that an end to black subserviency was a threat to law and order.³⁰

The New Negro attitude was a radical departure from the doctrines of Washington, but it was manifestly not Bolshevistic. Even Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, before his antiradical operations shifted into high gear, admitted that the Washington and Chicago race riots were "due solely to local conditions."³¹ Although certain newspapers and periodicals such as the *Challenge*, *Crusader*, *Messenger*, *Negro World*, and *Veteran* did seize upon radical economic and political solutions for racial problems, the overwhelming majority of black men and women were too race conscious to embrace extreme class consciousness.

Chicago's leading black weeklies emphatically denounced Bolshevism. The *Defender*, in fact, published a cartoon in July 1919 which pictured four vultures perching on a tree limb; these "Birds of a Feather" were the "Lyncher," "Bomber of Our Homes," "Segregation," and "Bolshevism." The *Broad Ax* was likewise in adamant opposition to all shades of radicalism.³²

After the Chicago race riot an Army intelligence officer

³⁰ W. F. Elkins, "Unrest among the Negroes: A British Document of 1919," *Science and Society*, XXXII (Winter 1968), 68-79; *Chicago Daily News*, November 5, 1919; Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-In, 1919 and the 1960s* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 77-79, 186-96; Chicago Commission, *Negro in Chicago*, 574-575; *New York Times*, October 5, 1919; Major H. A. Strauss, USA, to Director, Military Intelligence, Subject: Negro Agitation, July 1, 1919, in Glasser Files, Justice Department (RG 60) Papers, National Archives; State of New York, Joint Legislative Committee Investigating Seditious Activities, *Revolutionary Radicalism* (Albany: J. B. Lyon, 1920), II, 1210-11, 1312-13, 1464-66, 1476-1520; *Congressional Record*, LVIII, 4302 ff.; 66th Cong., 1st Sess., U. S. Senate, *Investigation Activities of the Justice Department*, 162, 164.

³¹ *New York Times*, July 31, 1919.

³² *Chicago Defender*, May 10, July 12, 1919; *Chicago Broad Ax*, July 12, 1919.

submitted a report to the Chicago Commission on Race Relations charging the Industrial Workers of the World with responsibility for the bloodshed. The officer compiled a list of "inflammatory" meetings at which the IWW supposedly propagandized blacks. Several of the Commission's members, however, had attended the same meetings and "were able to report personally the entire absence of any of the features described in the report."³³

Many white Americans were groping in the dark for the origins of the New Negro. As often happens they came up with a simple answer to a complex phenomenon. They did not perceive that race pride and the readiness to retaliate were the offspring of such dynamics as the war and the migration.

Other government officials could not perceive, or perhaps would not admit it if they could, that the readiness of black people to retaliate was also born of their profound lack of faith in all levels of government. Their disillusionment with the administration of Woodrow Wilson was both bitter and widespread. As a presidential candidate, Wilson had solicited their votes; and his campaign pronouncements, although probably influencing few blacks to transfer party allegiance, had fostered the race's trust in him. Writing to a leading black clergyman in 1912, Wilson had expressed his desire to "assure my coloured fellow citizens of my earnest wish to see justice done them in every matter, and not mere grudging justice, but justice executed with liberality and cordial good feeling." But once elected, he failed to nominate a black politician for the ministerial post to Haiti and he did not fully endorse his black nominee for the Register of the Treasury, both slots traditionally held by black men. Worse yet, the Bureau of Printing and Engraving, the Post Office Department,

³³ Minutes of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, December 4, 1919, in Rosenwald Papers, and in Papers of Chicago Commission on Race Relations (CCRR), Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

and offices of the Treasury Department segregated dining and toilet facilities and certain working areas. As a consequence of federal segregation, Booker T. Washington dejectedly observed: "I have never seen the colored people so discouraged and bitter as they are at the present time."³⁴

Wilson was out of touch with the race's needs and aspirations, as various incidents of his first administration revealed. For example, the first motion picture to be shown at the White House was *The Birth of a Nation*. Wilson not only did not respect the protests of blacks, he retaliated. In late 1914 he remarked after a siege of criticism: "If the colored people made a mistake in voting for me, they ought to correct it." The black supporters of Wilson in 1912 generally swung back to the Republican party in 1916.³⁵

The President's inaction during the East St. Louis, Illinois, race riot of the summer of 1917 was one more reason for opposing him. It was also the event which more than any other destroyed the faith of Chicago's black people in their

³⁴ See NAACP-I (C-272, 411); Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 186-89; Arthur S. Link, "The Negro as a Factor in the Election of 1912," *Journal of Negro History*, XXXII (January 1947), 81-99; R. S. Baker, *Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters: Governor, 1910-1913* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1931), III, 387-88; other assurances by Wilson included a paid advertisement in the *Crisis*, V (November 1912), 44-45; and a friendly statement to a delegation headed by William Monroe Trotter in July 1912, see *Crisis*, IV (September 1912), 216-17; Henry Blumenthal, "Woodrow Wilson and the Race Question," *Journal of Negro History*, XLVIII (January 1963), 1-21; "Segregation in Government Departments," *Crisis*, VII (November 1913), 343-44; "Federal Segregation," *ibid.*, 331-34; Oswald Garrison Villard, "The President and Segregation at Washington," *North American Review*, CXCVIII (December 1913), 800-7; Kathleen L. Wolgemuth, "Woodrow Wilson and Federal Segregation," *Journal of Negro History*, XLIV (April 1959), 158-73; Nancy J. Weiss, "The Negro and the New Freedom: Fighting Wilsonian Segregation," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXXIV (March 1969), 61-79.

³⁵ Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film* (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), 175; *New York Times*, November 13, 1914; Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 27-28; the *Chicago Defender* was particularly hostile to Wilson's reelection; see the issues of October 7, 14, 21, 28, 1916, in which the *Defender* put down "Wilson's Ideal Negro" as an "Old Uncle Tom."