

Black Internationalism

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There is in this postwar era a lowering or the attempt at a lowering of the barriers that exist between countries. Will the various frontiers, custom duties, prejudices, cultural mores, religion, and languages allow this project to be realized? We want to hope for this, those of us who note at the same time the birth of a movement not at all opposed to this first one. Blacks of all origins, of different nationalities, mores, and religions vaguely feel that in spite of everything they belong to one and the same race. Previously the more assimilated blacks looked down arrogantly upon their colored brethren, believing themselves surely of a different species than they; on the other hand, certain blacks who had never left African soil to be led into slavery looked down upon as so many base swine those who at the whim of whites had been enslaved, then freed, then molded into the white man's image.

Then came war, dislocation, blacks from every origin coming together in Europe, the sufferings of the war, the similar infelicities of the postwar period. Then snobs—whom we must thank here—and artists launched Negro art. They taught many blacks, who themselves were surprised, that there existed in Africa an absolutely original black literature and sculpture, that in America poetry and sublime songs, “the Spirituals,” had been composed by wretched black slaves. Successively revealed to the white world as well as the black was the plasticity of black bodies in their sculptural attitudes, giving way without transition to an undulation, or to a sudden slackening, under the rule of rhythm, the sovereign master of their bodies; in this black face, so mysterious to whites, the artist would discover tones so shifting and expressions so fleeting as to make either his joy or his despair; the

cinema, the theater, the music hall opened their doors to the conquering blacks.

All these reasons—from the most important to the most futile—must be taken into account to explain the birth among Negroes of a race spirit. Henceforth there would be some interest, some originality, some pride in being Negro, in turning back toward Africa, the cradle of Negroes, in remembering a common origin. The Negro would perhaps have his part to play in the concert of the races, where until now, weak and intimidated, he has kept quiet.

From these new ideas, new words, whence the creative significance of the terms: Afro-American, Afro-Latin. They confirm our thesis while casting new meaning on the nature of this Black Internationalism. If the Negro wants to know himself, assert his personality, and not be the copy of this or that type from another race (which often earns him contempt and mockery), it does not follow from that, however, that he becomes resolutely hostile to all contributions made by another race. On the contrary, he must learn to profit from others' acquired experience and intellectual wealth, but in order to know himself better and to assert his personality. To be Afro-American, to be Afro-Latin, means to be an encouragement, a consolation, an example for the blacks of Africa by showing them that certain benefits of white civilization do not necessarily lead to a rejection of one's race.

Africans, on the other hand, could profit from this example by reconciling these teachings with the millennial traditions of which they are justly proud. For it no longer comes into the head of the cultivated man to treat them en masse as savages. The work of sociologists has made known to the white world the centers of African civilization, their religious systems, their forms of government, their artistic wealth. Hence the bitterness they feel for having been despoiled is understandable and can be attenuated by that peculiar effect of the colonization: that of linking together, of unifying in a racial solidarity, and, in spite of the feuds between the conquering peoples, tribes who hadn't the slightest idea in this regard.

Along this barely trodden path, American blacks have been the pioneers, I believe. To convince oneself of this, it suffices to read *The New Negro* by Alain Locke, which is slated to appear in French translation by Payot.

The obstacles they encountered (late emancipation, economic slavery

still existing in the South, humiliations, lynchings) were so many incentives. And in business and industry, as well as in the fine arts and literature, their successes are impressive, and above all—what interests us here—the prejudices of the whites who surround them have produced in them an unparalleled solidarity and race consciousness.

The Afro-Latins, in contact with a race less hostile to the man of color than the Anglo-Saxon race, have been for that reason retarded in this path. Their hesitation, what's more, is a credit to the country that understood that it should try its best to assimilate them. Even though their loyalty is reassuring, their love of the Latin country, the adoptive land, and their love of Africa, land of their ancestors, are not incompatible. The Negro spirit, so supple, so capable of assimilation, so discerning, will easily surmount this apparent difficulty. And already, helped, encouraged by black American intellectuals, the young Afro-Latins, distinguishing themselves from the preceding generation, hastening to catch the masses up with those who are evolving in that effect, will go beyond them in order the better to guide them. In tending to this task, formed in European methods, they will take advantage of these methods in order to study the spirit of their race, the past of their race with all the necessary critical verve. That black youth are already taking on the study of slavery, facing up to, with detachment, a past that is quite palpable and so painful—isn't that the greatest proof that there does finally exist a black race, a race spirit on the path of maturity? Those who know how, among black people, certain subjects have until recently been taboo can appraise the progress represented by these recent facts.

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