REDDING, J. SAUNDERS, 1906-1988 . ***CHAPTER 15: THE CHANGING PATTERN*** . Philadelphia, PA : Lippincott , 1950 .

Chapter 15: The Changing Pattern15: The Changing Pattern

The drumming of the wind sounded at first like cheers as the boys, black and white, came marching home again. The old 15th New York (the 369th) had not had the thrill of marching away to war, but they were the first returning troops to parade under New York City's Victory Arch. Recalling it later, a white major, Arthur W. Little, wrote: "The multitudes of fellow citizens who greeted us that day -- the tens of thousands who cheered, the women who wept -- the men who cried 'God bless you, boys!' -- all were united to drown the music of Jim Europe's band. They did not give us their welcome because ours was a regiment of colored soldiers -- they did not give us their welcome in spite of ours being a regiment of colored soldiers. They greeted us that day from hearts filled with gratitude and with pride and with love, *because ours was a regiment of men, who had done the work of men.*"

That was on February 17, 1919. The next day a Negro was horribly lynched in Georgia. Within that year seventy-six Negroes, some of them still in uniform and one of them not yet recovered from his war wounds, were in like manner done to death. Brought to a maximum by those very things that should have minimized them -- that is, by Negro migration, a substantial upturn in the common white man's economic condition, the war and the promise of a period of post-war prosperity -- the South's ancestral fears and hates fixed themselves in the old pattern of violence and were bodied forth in the resurrected Ku Klux Klan. Indeed, it was the threatened loss of their better economic position and of the promises of continued prosperity that sparked the revival of the Klan spirit. If the Klan was anti-Catholic, anti-Jew and anti-Negro, it was because, as the South saw--252--it, Catholic, Jew and Negro were a danger to the Americanism that the common white man in the South saw physically represented in his new "standard" wages, a "standard" living level and "standard" schools. The South had contradictory feelings of inferiority. Though she wished to remain defiantly herself and *Southern*, she took pride in approaching the level of progress presumed to obtain North and West. And the chief danger to the maintenance of this new level was the returning Negroes. Whether they were returning from the war or merely from a sojourn in the North, they were different people from those who had gone away. They had had new and prideful experiences. They had broken with gloating impunity the old taboos that undergirded their historic role in Dixie. In the army they had seen Negro officers take the salute of white enlisted men. Some of them, for that matter, had been officers themselves. And in the North they had come in contact with -- Bolshevism? Undoubtedly. The United States government itself investigated, and on November 4, 1919, the Justice Department came out with the statement that "there can no longer be any question of a well-concerted movement among a certain class of Negro leaders of thought and action to constitute themselves a determined and persistent source of radical opposition to the Government and to the established rule of law and order." Among the salient points noted in the Negro's new attitude were, "First, an ill-governed reaction toward race-rioting. Second, the threat of retaliatory measures in connection with lynching. Third, the more openly expressed demand for social equality, in which demand the sex problem is not infrequently included. Fourth, the identification of the Negro with such radical organizations as the I. W. W. and an outspoken advocacy of the Bolsheviki doctrine."

Southern papers, of course, gave full coverage to this, and Southern white leaders went on from there with calamity howling, warnings, threats. Even so ordinarily sane a Southern white man as W. W. Alexander was moved to demand the suppression of the Negro press "in its bolshevistic tendencies and its attempt to inflame the colored population of America." The South's common whites, always quick to exaggerate and to personalize, began to have nightmares, in which every black they had ever known walked with a bolder step, looked with an insolent eye; and all the blacks, known and unknown,

were planning onslaughts on white government, white jobs and white--253--women. In short, what their minds misbegot were awful dreams of a revolution of blacks against whites.

It was a simple problem with a simple answer: "Get the nigger before he gets you." Thus, violence, lynching, and the Ku Klux Klan, which the New York *World* charged with "four killings, one mutilation, one branding with acid, forty-one floggings, twenty-seven tar and feather parties, and five kidnappings" in the twelve-month period ending in October, 1921.

The dreams were real bogies in the South, where, for instance, there could be no fear of Negro job competition since "white" jobs and "black" jobs were firmly fixed by a historical precedent which even the disorganization of the war could not destroy. The same was true of the competition for housing, in spite of the N. A. A. C. P.'s victory over residential segregation in the Buchanan-Warley case back in 1917. It is true that the Supreme Court had ruled the Grand-father Clause a perversion of the Fourteenth Amendment, but the Southern answer to this was the lily-white Democratic primary. So there was no political rivalry between black and white in the South, and no such thing there would be for twenty-five years -- and then only token.

But more subtly knit into the social fabric, the same complex of fears was apparent in the North as well. Racial competition in all the usual areas was real enough and active enough, and had been even before the close of the war. The second Wilson campaign was the cause of desperate political skirmishing between Negroes and whites. It was basically job competition that led to the East St. Louis riot of 1917. The unslackening Negro migration forced a situation in housing that was certainly not calculated to soothe the interracial temper. What happened in Chicago is a case in point.

In 1916, a pennon strung across Grand Boulevard at Forty-third Street bore the legend: "They Shall Not Pass." The whites put the pennon there, and those who should not pass were Negroes. A year later, Richard B. Harrison, then entertaining at Liberty Bond rallies, dared to defy this warning and moved south of Forty-third. His House was bombed. In the next four years there were fifty-eight bombings of newly acquired Negro residences in Chicago.

But these bombings attracted little attention outside the Negro race. What attracted more was rioting. A riot was sensational, sweeping, far more evocative of mass hysteria. Compared to it, lynching is--254--a private party. The explosive beginnings of riots are not planned; they happen. To be a lyncher, you must first be a member of a mob. Riots sweep into their current even those who have no wish to riot. A lynch mob loiters. It is armed with guns and ropes and knows where the best tree is. Riots are spontaneous. They may organize themselves later, but they do not start with organization. Lynchings are the expression of the conscious anti-social will of the community. Riots may begin, and often do begin, as the expression of an individual in response to pressures that are hardly realized.

Riots shattered the uneasy peace of thirty cities and towns between 1917 and 1925. In the "red summer" of 1919 there were no less than eight major interracial clashes. Only a lucky accident prevented a horrible toll in Chester, Pennsylvania. A gang of white rioters surging into the Negro neighborhood did not meet a mob of Negroes surging toward the white neighborhood. Even so, five whites and seven Negroes were reported to have died. Longview, Texas, writhed in riot for several days after some whites undertook to discipline a Negro for reporting a lynching. Two Negroes and one white man were killed, several Negroes run out of town and sixty thousand dollars' worth of property was destroyed. There were riots in Elaine, Arkansas, and Knoxville, Tennessee. In the nation's capital, heavily armed Negroes prowled the streets in high-powered cars and killed four white men in revenge for a series of beatings.

But by far the most costly riot of that summer occurred in Chicago. On the lake front an imaginary line divided not only the beach but the water itself into white area and black area. When a young Negro swimmer drifted past this line, he was stoned by whites and drowned. Negroes who happened to be present demanded that a white policeman arrest George Stauber, one of the stoners. This was refused. The Negroes attacked the officer. The riot began. It roared on through the night and the next

day and for eleven days thereafter -- and this in spite of the National Guard who were called out on the fourth day. Rumors spread virulent poison. "Negro women of the stockyard district had had their breasts hacked off after being subjected to sexual violence." "Negroes were being soaked in gasoline, set afire, and made to run like living torches until the flames overcame them." "Gangs of Negroes were raping white women." "Negroes were firing the houses of white people." A city alderman, Joseph McDonough, warned that the Negroes possessed "enough ammunition for years of guerrilla warfare."

--255--When the official casualty list was made, it contained the names of twenty-two Negroes and sixteen whites killed and more than five hundred of both races wounded.
2

In what was called the Negroes' "ill-governed reaction toward race-rioting," the whites saw, or claimed to see, to their unspeakable horror, an element of calculation of great danger. This Bolshevikpromoted calculation, so Congressman James F. Byrnes of South Carolina declared in the House on August 24, 1919, was inspired by the "incendiary utterances of would-be Negro leaders, circulated through Negro newspapers in New York, Boston and Chicago.... [These] are responsible for racial antagonism in the United States."

Byrnes went on at some length. On the evidence already mentioned, he asserted "that Negro leaders deliberately planned a campaign of violence before the Washington and Chicago riots." He cited articles in the *Messenger*, a magazine edited by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, and proclaimed it palpable that the magazine was supported by a source "antagonistic to the United States.... It appeals for the establishment in this country of a Soviet Government.... It pays tribute to [Eugene] Debs and every other convicted enemy of the Government." Finally, calling on Attorney General Mitchell Palmer to start espionage proceedings against W. E. B. Du Bois, Byrnes quoted from a *Crisis* editorial of May, 1919.

We sing: this country of ours, despite all its bitter souls have done and dreamed, is yet a shameful land. It lynches. It disfranchises its own citizens. It encourages ignorance. It steals from us. It insults us.... This is the country to which we soldiers of democracy return. This is the fatherland for which we fought. But it is our fatherland. It was right for us to fight. The faults of the country are our faults. Under similar circumstances, we would fight again.

But, by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that the war is over we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.

We return. We return from fighting. We return fighting. We make way for democracy. We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in America or know the reason why.

--256--But Byrnes was wrong, for Du Bois' was not a text taken from a foreign ideology. Bolshevism had about as much weight in determining the Negro's post-war attitude as the cry "Come, seven" has in determining the fall of dice. Communism simply did not fit the average Negro's concept of himself. And this, but for hysteria, the white man -- and especially the Southern white man, who claimed a God-like knowledge of the Negro -- should have seen. Communism was revolutionary far beyond the limits of what the Negro saw as necessary. Communism was godless, and that was against it. Communism was supported by a dogma and explained by an esoteric jargon that the Negro was by nature impatient of and emotionally unresponsive to. Communism made the fatuous assumption of class alliances which necessitated the breakdown of all race lines, and this, the Negro knew, was not then or in his foreseeable future possible. Communism proposed, among other things, the establishment of a forty-ninth Negro state, and the idea was anathema to the Negro. Mostly, though, communism was un-American, and the average Negro was American through and through.

Not that there were no Negro Communist-sympathizers. A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen were at least deeply moved by the possibilities of Bolshevism. A delegation of American Negroes attended the Third Congress of the Third Internationale. Though not an official delegate, a West-Indian-born

New York Negro poet addressed the Fourth Congress (November, 1922) of the Internationale in France. His speech aroused the American press to alarmed comment, for this was the same poet, Claude McKay, who had written:

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, O let us nobly die Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe; Though far outnumbered, let us still be 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.

--257--But this was not Bolshevism, really, although it first appeared in the "radical" *Liberator*. It was something much more familiar and much better understood than its new mask of bitterness let be apparent. It was Americanism, though frustrated. It was the American impulse, the American spirit, reelectrified in the Negro people by the war and the war aims and by a thousand charges of current coming directly from the war, and it galvanized the Negro people into an assertiveness that led to the coining of the phrase "New Negro."
3

Of course there was nothing new about the N. A. A. C. P. and the National Equal Rights League. The Commission on International Cooperation was new, but this Southern white liberal's idea of a militant organization was curiously weak. It was weak even where it was supposed to be strongest -- in making personal appeals to white Southern leaders who might, and often did, have influence over the Southern mind. W. W. Alexander, Robert Eleazer and Mrs. Jessie Daniel Ames were potent personalities, but their Commission enslaved itself from the very beginning. It enslaved itself by accepting segregation as the sine qua non of race relations, and even the combined force of the personalities it enlisted, including Howard Odum, John Hope, Plato Durham and R. R. Moton, was not enough to break through to anything approaching democracy. Besides, these campaigners in parlor sociology were sometimes quickly dismayed.

But the N. A. A. C. P. had in it not only Mary White Ovington, Oswald G. Villard, Moorfield Storey and Du Bois, battle-scarred fighters who were never dismayed, it could now call on the fresh energies of Walter White and the firm diplomacy and rocklike patience of James Weldon Johnson. This latter at forty-five had had a successful career as teacher, composer of musical comedies, poet and diplomat (consul in Venezuela and Nicaragua). He joined the N. A. A. C. P. staff as field secretary in 1916. Next to Du Bois, Johnson understood the temper of his people and the prevailing attitude of whites better than any Negro of the day.

By the early 1920's, the N. A. A. C. P. was in the midst of its campaign for the passage of H. R. 13, an anti-lynching bill presented by Congressman Dyer of Missouri. The organization had built up to this through a series of first-hand investigations carried on by Elizabeth--258--Freeman and Roy Nash, both white, and Walter White. It had published a grisly diagnostic record, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States*. It had got the Negro press fully behind the campaign. Negro school children sent letters to their congressmen. James Weldon Johnson was certain that the campaign for the Dyer bill brought out the greatest concerted action colored people had ever taken. After several delays, debate on the bill opened before packed galleries. When it passed the House by a vote of 230 to 119, the Negroes rose and cheered.

But their jubilation had plenty of time to cool in the six months it took H. R. 13 to reach the Senate sub-committee of which Borah of Idaho was chairman. Claiming that its constitutionality was doubtful, Borah was reluctant to report the bill out of committee. Only the pressure of a petition to the Senate Republican leader brought the bill out. The petition bore the signatures of twenty-four governors, thirty-seven mayors, eighty-eight bishops and churchman and half a hundred other dignitaries, but it did not divert the Republicans from their game of run-around, nor Southern Democrats from their filibuster. In the end, the bill did not come up for a vote in the Senate. Threatened by Alabama's Senator

Underwood, the Republicans withdrew it. Other anti-lynching bills have been submitted subsequently, and all have failed.

The N A A C P carried on the fight along other fronts too. Its lawyers, Scipio Jones and Moorfield Storey, won a notable victory in the case of the Negro farmers of Elaine, Arkansas, six of whom had been sentenced to death as a result of the riot of 1919. Twice the date of their execution was set and twice it was postponed, the last time on an appeal to the United States Supreme Court. On February 23, 1923, the court ruled in effect that the willful exclusion of Negroes from a jury trying Negroes in criminal cases was a departure from due process of law. The decision set a precedent which led to the addition of Negroes' names to jury rolls in districts where Negroes had not served as talismen since Reconstruction days.

When the N A A C P extended its activities outside the United States, the talk of foreign influences on the American Negro did not quiet any. But there was even less basis for it now, for the matter was just the other way round. Not just lately aroused to the plight of Negroes in other parts of the world, the Association was trying primarily to create a wider forum and to enlarge the bounds of its influence --259--Four times between 1919 and 1927, Du Bois called together in a Pan-African congress Negroes from the United States, the West Indies, Europe and Africa. They met in London, Brussels and Paris in 1919, in Paris again in 1921, in Lisbon in 1923, and in New York in 1927.

Not too much was accomplished by these meetings, but intelligent Negroes were made aware that the color bar was "a cardinal principle of modern civilization" and that, as Du Bois phrased it, "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." It took another kind of man than Du Bois (and another kind of program than the N A A C P's) to bring this truth home to American Negroes everywhere.

4

The man was Marcus Garvey, and he came screaming out of the British West Indies onto the American stage in 1916. His screaming was to little purpose at first, but when the Lusk Legislative Committee named his paper, the *Negro World*, as dangerous to the *comfort and security* of whites, Garvey's voice deepened into a thunderous roar. His movement was called the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and, though Garvey was a monumental liar, there is no reason to dispute his claim of forty-one world-wide chapters in 1919. Indeed, there may have been even more a year later. On August 4, 1920, the New York *Tribune* estimated that twenty-five thousand Negroes "from all parts of the world" were assembled in the city for a thirty-day convention of U N I A.

But even this number was an infinitesimal fraction of Garvey's dream. As President-General of U N I A, he declared to the world that he would organize four hundred million Negroes "to draw up the banner of democracy on the continent of Africa." He went about it with prodigious energy, an unfailing sense of drama, and a flair for phrase-making and phrase-taking. "Africans for Africans," he shouted more than once, and, blinking the occasion on which Senator John Sharpe Williams had used it, "Race is greater than law." He appealed to race pride and race courage. "We have died for five hundred years for an alien race. The time has come for the Negro to die for himself." He dressed his key followers in brilliant uniforms and organized auxiliaries that appealed to the parade-sense of the naïve masses. There were the Black Eagle Flying Corps, the Universal--260--Black Cross Nurses, the Universal African Motor Corps and the Universal African Legion. Proclaiming himself Provisional President of the Empire of Africa, he created orders of nobility like the Knights of the Distinguished Order of Ethiopia and the Duke of Uganda. By these palpable means, Garvey attracted thousands of the simple and ignorant. (His own figure was two million American Negroes by 1922.) He also attracted a squad of the "wise boys" who cut themselves in on the take. And, if his wife can be believed, there was a tremendous take -- ten million dollars in the three years from 1919 to 1921.

The less spectacular Negro organization leaders ignored Garvey for as long as they could. Du Bois was moved to warn Negroes that charlatans and scoundrels of both races were offering impossible

returns "in cash and race adjustment" on a very small investment. "Do not invest in the conquest of Africa," Du Bois cautioned. "Do not take desperate chances in flighty dreams."

Though this reference to Garvey was plain, the attacks on the man and his program did not remain oblique and hidden. Negro leaders grew fierce and scornful. Garvey was not their kind. His aims were not theirs. The dream of organizing a great black host and leading it back to Africa was fanciful and foolish, the deceptive cover for a mountebank preying upon the hopes, ambitions and fears of the ignorant masses.

Garvey was not the kind to ignore attacks, no matter from what quarter. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Eugene Kinckle Jones were "weak-kneed and cringing ... sycophant to the white man. ... The 'Uncle Tom' Negroes must give way to the 'New Negro,' who is seeking his place in the sun."

Garvey threatened law suits and tried to promote dissension in other groups, but these were merely diverting tactics. His great energies were spent in another more profitable direction. With part of the tribute, collected from thousands of followers, Garvey bought three ships and organized the Black Star Steamship Line. The idea was to use the ships not only as transportation for the black emigrés, but for commerce between United States ports and those of Africa and South America. The scheme fell through. Charges of using the mail to defraud were brought against Garvey, and in 1923 a federal court sentenced him to prison for five years. He tried to sustain and direct the movement from his cell in Atlanta, but this effort failed--261--too. His followers -- seventy-five per cent of whom were ignorant and hard-working West Indians -- scattered, and the U. N. I. A. evaporated like steam. Pardoned by President Coolidge in 1927, Garvey was deported to Jamaica, B. W. I., from whence he went to London where, in 1940, he died.

The Garvey movement cannot be dismissed merely as the aberration of an organized pressure group. The least that can be said of it is that it was an authentic folk movement. Its spirit of race chauvinism had the sympathy of the overwhelming majority of the Negro people, including those who opposed its objectives. For this was the potent spirit of race consciousness and race pride that informed the "New Negro."

5

In the beginning this new Negro was led in the direction of aberrancy as much by a misprized notion of his relation to the body politic as by the social content of the early post-war period. Before his transformation he had always been an object of charity and of *special* treatment. Things had been done to him, with him and for him. But the great metastatic tide of race consciousness that swept through him purged the Negro of many of the old fallacies, and particularly of the fallacy of excusing himself because of the way he was treated. But even more particularly of the false notion that he could survive in an inimical civilization by means of social and cultural mimicry. Purged, he grew overnight into a manhood's fullness of initiative and self-reliance. This was the entire sum of the "radicalism" so much deplored and so misunderstood to be merely a temporary aftermath of the war.

But it was not so transient. The new initiative and self-reliance, which Alain Locke saw as marking a "spiritual emancipation," demanded fulfillment of itself in the most diverse and dynamic ways. The Garvey movement was but a single instance. Negro-founded and Negro-controlled organizations sprang up everywhere. In 1920, the Friends of Negro Freedom was founded to promote race solidarity in all areas. The American Negro Labor Congress came into being in 1925. The Colored Merchants Association came a little later. In an effort to channel the Negro consumer dollar into a kind of race pool, the Colored Housewives League was formed. All kinds of Negro enterprise flourished. The Chicago *Defender* and the *Afro-American*,--262--Negro weeklies, had capital assets, including advertising revenue, of close to a million dollars. By 1927, Madame C. J. Walker, Indianapolis scrubwoman, had earned two million dollars from her cosmetics and hairdressing business. By then, too, the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company and the Liberty Life Insurance Company -- all completely Negro owned and controlled -- were multi-million

dollar corporations. When it came, the depression, such as had wiped out earlier Negro business efforts, could not shake them.

Nor were these businesses all, or even the major part of the matter. The Negro had an intellectual side to him too, and this was thoroughly awakened by the war and post-war series of social explosions. The repudiation of dependency and the sentimental appeal was no exclusively emotional matter. It sprang as well from a conscious and careful examination of the formula that had composed the "old" Negro. The new Negro did not like what he found. He did not like it in intellectual terms. He did not like the obedience to white folk's expectations, the submission to white folk's thought and the aping of white folk's way. And so he began that reappraisal of himself that was at once revelation and vindication.

It started naturally with the scholars -- with Du Bois and Alain Locke and Carter Woodson and Charles S. Johnson and James Weldon Johnson. Of course Negro social historians had preceded Du Bois. he had begun his own work in historics in the 1880's, but, like his scholarly predecessors, he had not aroused even a decently supporting interest in his early contemporaries. By 1916, however, he must have thought that such an interest was ready to spring to life, for it was then that he established the first Negro book publishing concern. In that same year Carter Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and brought out the first issue of the *Journal of Negro History*. Charles S. Johnson at about the same time was editing *Opportunity* on an informed and creative level. And as for Alain Locke, Phi Beta Kappa, Rhodes Scholar and professor of philosophy at Howard University, no man did more to stimulate, direct and stabilize this new intellectualism than he.

But if the Negro voluntarily began a reexamination of himself, the whites were literally forced to reexamine him. What was this strange, new creature? What were these stirrings, organizations, books? The--263--whites began to take a closer look and to recompose their notions, not excluding the one that to know the Negro was but to question the family cook or to pass the time of day with the yardman. Chicago set up a Commission on Race Relations. Social agencies put in departments of Negro work. Books by whites about Negroes streamed from the press: Robert Kerlin's *The Voice of the Negro*, Herbert J. Seligman's *The Negro Faces America*, F. J. Woofter's *Negro Problems in Cities*, Frank Tannenbaum's *Darker Phases of the South*, F. G. Detweiler's *The Negro Press in the United States*. America went to school to the Negro, and America learned much.

It learned: from the bitterness and defiance and race passion of Claude McKay, from the historical revelations of Woodson and Logan, from the tom-tom beats of Langston Hughes, from the jazz of nameless musicians and the blues of nameless singers, from the polished lyrics of Countee Cullen, and, in review, again from the bitterness, defiance and race passion of a hundred thousand tones and lights and weathers of the Negro soul. Which is to say that Claude McKay's "If We Must Die" pretty well established the emotional tone of this period in the Negro's development.

Yet the scholars, writers and artists mentioned above differed widely, except for one thing. They were alike in the urge to damn the old imperative to use their art and their intellectual gifts for prettifying and excusing the Negro. Their position was exactly opposite to that of most of their predecessors. The new Negro writer and artist expected to satisfy no one, either black or white. "If," Langston Hughes remarked, "white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. And if Negroes are pleased, we are glad, but their displeasure doesn't matter either." The new Negro writer had attained an objectivity that must sometimes have seemed brazen, posturing and withal defensive.

Take McKay as novelist. As poet he had had his powerful say by 1922. But as novelist, from *Home To Harlem*, his first, to *Banana Bottom*, his last, there is a progressive concentration on atavistic reversion, on social degeneration and on moral decadence, reaching its nadir in the character of Herald Newton Day, the young preacher-teacher of *Banana Bottom*. Or take the degenerates, the parasites and--264--the vampires who slink through the slimy demi-world of Wallace Thurman's

novels, or the weaklings, misfits and psychotics in the novels of Nella Larsen, Walter White, Zora Hurston and Langston Hughes, and one finds that they are but various projections of atavism, pessimism and futility. Hughes might praise the new Negro writer's sense of liberation and declare that he stood as it were free on the mountaintop, but even there on the mountaintop he seemed to breathe a noxious and despairing air. His self-revelation sickened him.

And what, about himself, did the Negro reveal? What, perhaps, did he reveal without being aware of it? What was he thinking? Truth to tell, he was becoming a first-class cynic -- excusable perhaps by virtue of the fact that it was a cynical age. He deserted the church, that bulwark of bourgeois conservatism, in great numbers. Indeed, he began to laugh at religion, and some, like Major J. Divine (afterwards called "god" and "father") and Elder Becton (afterwards murdered), began to use it as the gimmick in inexplicable shenanigans. The Negro lost all sense of ethical progression and, like his white fellows in that boomtime, acquired an exaggerated sense of the equalizing power of the dollar. He went in for rackets, like banking the numbers and bootlegging, and accepted into his best society the denizens of the underworld. Caspar Holstein, a gambling king, was given as much respect as the Reverend A. Clayton Powell, messiah-like pastor of the largest Negro church in the world. The Negro's Republican faith, long undermined by political opportunism, collapsed totally. He laughed at the uniforms, the unmanned and rotting ships of the Black Star Line and the leader of U. N. I. A., but it was a strained laughter. For he was shocked and angered by Marcus Garvey and called him the "monkey man" and a "monkey chaser," and parodied him and his followers in jingles.

"When I git on t'other side, goin'a live like white folks, yas'r. Goin'a marry me a ring-tail gal and be a monkey chaser."

The new Negro was shocked, alarmed, amazed at the gigantic demonstration of the herd instinct. He was confused, confounded and humiliated by the public disclosures of graft and "nigger incompetence" that an examination of the U. N. I. A. revealed. For all his vaunted objectivity, he could not dissociate himself from whatever onus attached to race. His illusions of freedom settled about–265--him like choking dust. The old hounds of inferiority bayed on his trail. He began to believe that but two ways were left open to him: indifference -- if it could be managed -- a kind of desperate joy; and escape -- escape through conformity, or through desertion (a great many Negroes expatriated themselves for a longer or a shorter time), or through submission, or through reversion to the old "type."

For what else can George Schuyler's *Black No More* mean -- a humorous book so indifferent to the judgment of the Negro its every line implies that the humor scalds like boiling tar? What else can Jessie Fauset's *There is Confusion* mean except that the way to escape is to conform? What else Paul Robeson's long sojourn in Europe, and Hughes' wandering over the face of the earth and Toomer's pale loitering in France, except escape by desertion? And Walter White's *Fire in the Flint* -- what else does it show, besides the cruelty of Southern whites, save that the Negro can escape by submission?

Much of the new Negro's brooding pessimism was encouraged by the work of certain white writers whose books were beginning to find a wide public in the 1920's. Julia Peterkin's *Black April* and *Scarlet Sister Mary* were undoubtedly written with great sympathy and sincerity, but the fact of their return to old concepts and stereotypes was a shattering blow to the Negro's new image of himself. Dowd's sociological *The American Negro* lent authority to the race prejudices of the South. The primitivism of DuBose Heyward's Porgy, Crown and Bess and of O'Neill's Brutus Jones seemed to indicate that the Negro was still a raw savage. Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* pictured him as absorbing all the vices and none of the virtues of white civilization. These books and others like them, either in a humorous or carping vein, were enough to offset the Rosenfeld-Frank-Calverton-Mencken belief that the new Negro, both as man and artist, had a rich and particular gift to make to American culture.

And so the new Negro was caught as the old had been. It was in bitterness that Hughes exclaimed:

We cry among the skyscrapers As our ancestors Cried among the palms in Africa--266--Because we are alone, It is night, And we're afraid.

And it was not so much revelation as catharsis that Wallace Thurman was after in *The Blacker the Berry*, that White was after in *Flight*, Nella Larsen in *Quicksand* and McKay in *Banana Bottom*.

But it would be wrong to give the impression that all was unrelieved bitterness, cynicism and pessimism. There was, for instance, a refunding of folk material and a reshaping of folk legend that was much more than mere transcription and that led to some works of enduring value and beauty. Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923) was a nugget of gold. The moods of this book were hot, colorful, primitive. Through the book's prose and poetry gushed a tide of ecstasy in a return to a heritage too long ignored. Toomer came "like a son returned in bare time to take a living full farewell of a dying parent, and all of him [loved and] wanted to commemorate that perishing naïveté."

... Thy son, I have in time returned to thee.... In time, for though the sun is setting on A song-lit race of slaves, it has not set; Though late, O soil, it is not too late yet To catch thy plaintive soul, leaving, soon gone.... O Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums, Squeezed, and bursting in the pine-wood air, Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes An everlasting song, a singing tree, Caroling softly souls of slavery, What they were, and what they are to me, Caroling softly souls of slavery.

With surer artistry, James Weldon Johnson made the same return in *God's Trombones*, published in 1927. These seven Negro sermons in verse were immediately hailed by H. L. Mencken, whose *American Mercury* had published two of them, as masterpieces of folk expression. Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes among the poets, and Zora Neale Hurston, Willis Richardson and Eulalie Spence, playwrights, and, again Langston Hughes, among those who wrote prose, made effective use of folk material.

--267--Indeed, only one major writer of the period did not, and that was Countee Cullen. "What is Africa to me?" he questioned, and went on from there in a conscious effort to prove that Africa was nothing to him, "one three centuries removed from the land his fathers loved." Cullen could not beat the tom-tom above a whisper, nor know the primitive delights of black rain and scarlet sun. His gifts were delicate, elegant, and he used them best in the delightfully personal love lyrics for which he was (and is) deservedly admired. Keats was his man, with just a touch of Shelley, and just more than a touch of that master scorner of his heritage, William S. Braithwaite.

But to go back to Hughes, for he is after all the most prolific and representative of the new Negro artists, and he is -- or was back in the twenties and thirties -- the one most divinely capable of realizing and giving expression to the dark perturbation in the soul of the Negro. Go back to him, and this remains to be said: race and the race experience and the race mold, if you will, with all of its complex of false concept and impacted reality, were for him the most volatile, appealing and compelling forces in the world.

8

And so it was with others who had other ways of expressing it, and some of whom had been expressing it in these other ways before the emergence of the new Negro and the artistic renaissance. Take jazz, for instance, and the men who made it. Jazz was new in the twenties only in the sense that it was first given serious attention then. It had come up from God knows where, but certainly from earthy origins in the peasant soul of the Negro. Come up to St. Louis and Chicago before the World War, before the turn of the century. Such men as Scott Joplin and William Christopher Handy took it, and then they took it to New York. It was there by 1917, for James Reese Europe's Fifteenth New York Infantry band was playing it there then. That was the year Scott Joplin died there too. It was still, in condescending terms, "Negro stuff," not counted as much, but it packed the theatres on the Negro vaudeville circuit,

and made a living for Will Marion Cook and Will Vodery, Ford Dabney, Jelly Roll Morton and three youngsters, Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong.

The "new music" soon attracted white listeners, who made the trek--268--to Harlem just to hear it, and who, titillated, invited jazz players downtown. Fletcher Henderson was one of the first to go, but others followed him shortly. The National Association of Negro Musicians encouraged it, and soon a toned-down jazz was being heard in Rector's and Delmonico's.

In 1921 an all-Negro musical show opened on Broadway. *Shuffle Along* revived in more brilliant fashion the old days of Williams and Walker, of J. Rosamond and James Weldon Johnson, of *Abyssinia* and *Bandana Land* and *In Dahomey*. It was full of bouncy jazz and muted minors -- "I'm Just Wild about Harry," "Love Will Find a Way," "Wang-Wang Blues" -- and it was all written and produced by the Negroes, Flourney Miller, Aubrey Lyles, Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle. In pairs or singly, these men went on to write other shows with the same ebullience, the same raciness and raceness -- *Runnin' Wild*, with its new Charleston dance, *Chocolate Dandies*, to which, in 1923, audiences flocked to watch the boneless pantomimes of Josephine Baker, and *Dixie to Broadway*, which brought Florence Mills to wide notice. In 1926, she was raised to stardom. When she died the next year, all Broadway and Harlem wept, and neither the rich voice of Ethel Waters in *Africana* nor the dancing of Bill Robinson in the second *Blackbirds* could make the theatrical world forget.

Meantime the Negro was finding his way in serious music and on the legitimate stage. Roland Hayes, the tenor, made his American debut at Town Hall in 1924. He sang German lieder, French arias and, best of all, Negro spirituals arranged for him by Negro composers. Already a fixture at the white St. George's Episcopal Church, Harry T. Burleigh gave occasional concerts. Paul Robeson had begun in 1920 to give small private concerts to help pay his way through Columbia Law School. He gave his first full-scale concert of spirituals at the Greenwich Village Theatre in 1925. During that same year Marian Anderson gave a recital in Town Hall, but criticism was so harsh that she "vowed never to sing again." She broke that vow the next year, and to the world's applause. Dorothy Maynor was still a student at Hampton in 1925, but her great teacher, R. Nathaniel Dett, was even then predicting a shining future for her.

As for the legitimate theatre, the Negro had had his own in Harlem since 1909. He had supported a talented stock company since 1916. Though the folk plays of Willis Richardson and Eulalie--269--Spence were worthy, the Lafayette Players preferred *Within the Law* and *Over the Hills*. Some of them got their first experience with Negro plays in 1917, when Mrs. Emily Hapgood produced *Three Plays for the Negro Theatre*, by the white playwright, Ridgely Torrence.

The event marked an epoch, James Weldon Johnson said, for the Negro on the stage. Such drama critics as Robert Benchley and Francis Hackett agreed with him. In 1919, Charles Gilpin, sometime elevator boy and director of the Lafayette Players, was called on to play William Custis in Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln*. The epoch waxed, or seemed to. Gilpin was chosen to play O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*. His performance was honored as one of the ten best in 1920, and, though by 1921 he was again running an elevator for a living, he had placed Negro acting on its highest level and had aroused audience interest in serious drama of Negro life.

The interest was still there when Paul Robeson played opposite a white actress in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* in 1924, and when Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1926. Paul Green had written many Negro plays for the Carolina Playmakers at Chapel Hill, where he taught. He had a sense of Negro life that not even Marc Connelly had then acquired. The roles in *In Abraham's Bosom* were extremely difficult, but he wanted no white actors black-faced. He chose Rose McClendon as one of the principals, with Richard Huey, Abbie Mitchell and Frank Wilson. In 1927 came the Heywards' *Porgy*, and for her portrayal of Crown's Bess, Rose McClendon, too soon to die, was recognized as the first lady among Negro players.

And if she was the first lady, then Richard B. Harrison was certainly the first gentleman. He opened as De Lawd in Connelly's *The Green Pastures* in 1930, and turned what might easily have been burlesque into folk art of the simplest, purest kind. He brought to his role not only the Negro's ancestral reverence for God, but the human dignity and beauty of character that had endeared him to hundreds of Negro high school and college audiences for a half century. *The Green Pastures* ran for five years.

But even before *The Green Pastures* opened, whites less understanding than Marc Connelly, H. L. Mencken, and the Heywards had begun to capitalize on the genuine interest in the Negro and to turn it into a commercialized fad. Harlem was, in an expression of--270--the time, a "natural" as a center for this. There, were concentrated all the diverse elements of Negro life -- or, better perhaps, non-white life -- Sudanese and Bengalese and Sengalese, Camaroons and Filipinos and Cubans, black Jews and West Indians and native Negro Americans. And not just a handful, but half a million packed in two square miles. There was one Negro newspaper printed in English, Spanish and French and another printed in Yiddish. Most of the great race movements started in Harlem, where race organizations, radical and otherwise, had their headquarters. Negro artists, writers, composers, students, preachers and peasants found their way there. It has been said of other corners in other cities, but in the twenties and thirties it was literally true that anyone standing at 135th Street and Seventh Avenue was likely to see pass every Negro he had ever known.

Life in Harlem seemed to have a buoyancy and dynamism, a flavor of exoticism and the very odor of primitive virility. That this was largely as synthetic as Harlem's gin anyone who cared to look could have discovered. But no one cared to look, and the Negroes themselves were not averse to being synthetic, so long as there was money in it. "Nigger heaven," a white writer called Harlem, and there, the well-advertised belief was, Dullness was dethroned; Gaiety was King! The pale-faced revolters from Sauk Center and Winesburg, from Main Street and Park Avenue sought carnival in Harlem. "Life," the burden of the dithyrambics ran, "had surge and sweep and blood-pounding savagery."

Here dat music... Jungle night. Hear dat music... And the moon was white. Jungle lover... Night-black boy... Two against the moon And the moon was joy.The moon was also papier-mâché.

Such was the vicious commercialization of Harlem that Negroes, who were generally too poor anyway, could not -- that is, were not permitted to -- enter the best-known Negro night club in the world.

--271--But an end to the blatancy of all this was at hand. For now were developing the circumstances that would strip Negro life, in Harlem and elsewhere, of almost all that was extraneous to mere survival; circumstances, indeed, that would bring to the general American life the kind of revolution that might have spelled -- and seemed for a time actually to spell -- the demise of all those attitudes embodied in phrases like "the American way" and "rugged individualism." The revolution promoted the implementation of a strange political philosophy. It unleashed amorphous forces to counteract the collapse of the familiar philosophy of abundance. It necessitated the restatement of the relations of man to government and of man to man. The revolution was good for the Negro. It was good for America.