

(Other)

The New Negro

No one who has paid the least attention to the Negro in America is unaware of certain definite changes that have been taking place. These changes have been ~~both~~ wide-spread and profound. Discussion is high; at no period since that which marked the severest last struggle of opinion and economy, ~~advantage~~ or the question of Negro slavery, have there appeared so many books on the subject. No corner of Negro life is unaffected. Suddenly and without explanation, new figures have leaped to the horizon; new poets have appeared almost full grown; new writers have emerged from the darkness, interpreting a life which has been very real to them, but little known to the rest of the world. Nor has the ~~fermentation~~ germination limited itself to letters; art, music and even

the dance have shared in this sudden awakening.

The strange concourse of widely different interests has in it an element of fascination and mystery. Take the field of art. For years there lay about in the curio shops of Paris great heaps of queerly grotesque brass, iron and wood pieces with strange designs. Twelve years ago, Paul Guilla^{me}man picked up a few of these, casually bought some for a song, and carried them away. The designs were more than queer. They held his interest with a subtle message, for he was discovering in these apparently crude pieces the language of an utterly new art form. The patterns were elaborations of complex gemotric designs which could yield an almost infinite variety. Their utility became apparent. Their fetches and idols interpreted a sense of aesthetes² with which they had never been credited. The vast

to the outside concerns

diversity of these objects of art, the penetration of every institution and corner of life with these carefully perfected expressions of a real and vital skill, pointed to the existence of a thing very rare among peoples, a living folk art.

A group of young independent European artists saw them. They were searching for new molds sufficient to contain a st raceless creature ^{it may} just unsatisfied by the conventional forms brought to perfections hundreds of years ago. They got the form of these new patterns and they adopted them. The modern art of ^{Picasso} Litasso, ^{Modigliani} Modigliani, Soutine, ^{Lipstah} Lipstah, began to ^{reflect} replace this. It spread - it became a vogue; it appealed - it still continues. ^{Contemporary Negro intelligentsia have blended these influences with}

For fifty years, the music of Negroes held a pleasant but slight interest.

This is the present "renaissance"

There a few collections of spirituals
and about three recognized troupes of
singers. Dvorak came and studied it.
He left America saying that it was the
only real American music - the basis of
the country's greatest development of the
future . (There must be some explanation
of this sudden pausing after fifty years,
to collect these remnants of this poetry
of slavery before it disappears forever.
In the past two years there has appeared
about ten books on this music, almost as
many as were published in the full period
before. It has not stopped with the
spirituals. Interest has extended to in-
clude the common snatches of work songs,
sentimental ballads, work songs and even
street cries of Negro peddlars.

There must be some explanation of the
strange and sudden (fascination) for syn-
copation - jazz. The mad hectic rhythm
has swept both America and Europe.

Gilbert Seldes was the first to point out the irony that Paul Whiteman should become the supreme figure in this field of music.

Handy's blues created twelve years ago, sold a half million copies for the piano and a million and a half records.

^{has} It ~~is~~ replaced the stately waltz and mazurka; it has overridden the objection of music critics who would "beat our swords into plowshares and our jazz-bands into unconsciousness." It has become a new international word, queerly it reflects the tempo of American life.

Again, it is difficult to explain the sudden flare of new rhythmic forms in the dances that have come the soil - the Charleston, Black Bottom - which with their broken rhythm strangely like the syncopation of the music has lured into its grip the smart dances here and in Europe. As an illustration of change, Josephine Baker, who was an almost obscure figure ~~xx~~ in Negro musical shows, gets this ecstatic review from a Parisian critic:

"Her lithe young body, looking like a Venetian bronze come to life, seemed to incarnate the spirit of unrestrained joy. It is a wild thing, yet graceful and harmonious - a demon unchained, yet delicate in its sleek symmetrical beauty."

These have a suddenness because we have obscured until recently the real development of Negroes with the manufactured stereotyped.

I spoke two days ago about the evolution of attitudes which have characterized thinking on the question of the Negro. Beliefs concerning their mentality, criminality, morality temperament and beliefs concerning racial instincts. These have all had their effect in warping the nature of Negroes and I propose to offer an explanation of the nether side of this growth - that is, the reaction through the stages of growth on the part of Negroes .

Back to work

In literature