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Chapter 18XVIII

At the beginning of the year 1917 Negro Harlem was well along the road of development and prosperity. There was plenty of work, with a choice of jobs, and there was plenty of money. The community was beginning to feel conscious of its growing size and strength. It had entirely rid itself of the sense of apology for its existence. It was beginning to take pride in itself as Harlem, a Negro community.

But it was far from being complacent. It was alive and quick with enthusiasm and energy. Plans were being drawn that took in many things which hitherto had been considered to lie in the field of the impossible. Even its members from the darkest South felt strange stirrings of aspiration and shed that lethargy born of hopelessness which so often marks Negroes from sections where they have for generation after generation borne physically and spiritually an unrelieved weight of white superiority. Harlem had begun to dream of greater and greater things.

There had also taken place a birth of new ideas--232---- new, at least, to Negroes. There were Negroes in Harlem who envisaged the situation of the race in the light of economic and social revolution. Radicalism in the modern and international sense of the term was born. Nightly along Lenox and Seventh avenues dozens of speakers could be heard explaining to listening groups the principles of socialism and the more revolutionary doctrines; trying to show them how these principles applied to their condition; hammering away at their traditional attitude of caution. These were some of the important forces at work in Harlem when the United States declared war against the German Empire.

Like the average American community, Harlem did not exhibit any great enthusiasm about the war. However, the war for months had been a topic of discussion among high and low, educated and uneducated. As the probabilities that this country would be embroiled became greater, the discussions increased in frequency and intensity. Among those who had a knowledge of affairs outside of the United States, there had all along been deep sympathy for France, as the most liberal of all great white nations towards black peoples. Among others there had been little concern one way or the other. The matter did not touch their lives; and when they were brought face to face with it, they were apt to brush it aside with characteristic Negro humour. One coloured man came into a Harlem barber-shop where a spirited discussion of the war was going on. When asked if he wasn't going to join the Army and fight the Germans,--233--he replied amidst roars of laughter: "The Germans ain't done nothin' to me, and if they have, I forgive 'em." Nevertheless, after the declaration of war, patriotism was fanned to a flame as quickly in Harlem as in the average American community. Indeed, six years before the United States entered the World War, steps were taken, led by the Equity Congress, a civic organization, to form a regiment of state militia. A provisional regiment was formed with Charles W' Filmore as provisional colonel. But a great deal of unwillingness and opposition developed on the part of state authorities to the mustering of the regiment. Several bills to that end were introduced in the Assembly, and those behind the proposal worked without ceasing; but it was not until July 2, 1913 that legislation

authorizing the Fifteenth Regiment as a unit of the New York National Guard was passed. Immediately after the declaration of war the Federal Government recognized the regiment as a National Guard unit; and four months later, it was called to arms. It was the first regiment of the New York Guard to reach the required war strength.

The Fifteenth Regiment, under the command of Colonel William Hayward, after being awhile at Peekskill and at Camp Whitman, was sent to Spartanburg, South Carolina, where other units of the New York Guard were encamped. One day Sergeant Noble Sissle (the same Sissle of later *Shuffle Along* fame) went into the lobby of the local hotel, where there was a news-stand, to buy New York papers for--234--himself and some of the men. The proprietor demanded of him why he did not take off his hat. Sergeant Sissle, in ignorance or defiance of the local *mores*, replied that he was a United States soldier and did not have to take off his hat. His hat was knocked off and he was kicked into the street. When the news of this incident reached camp, the men of the Fifteenth were for going into town and retaliating; but they were restrained by discipline. Men of other regiments of the New York Guard were indignant over the matter. The upshot of it all was that the Fifteenth Regiment was quickly ordered away and brought up to Camp Mills, on Long Island, where they were quartered with state troops from Alabama and Mississippi. The first night in camp trouble broke out over the discrimination against Negro soldiers in the canteen. The next day the regiment was hurriedly embarked. It sailed for France on November 12, 1917, being one of the first units from the National Guard of the whole country to go overseas; and this was, of course, long before any drafted troops were sent.

When the Fifteenth reached France there was further embarrassment. What to do with this Negro regiment became a serious question. Naturally, it should have remained a contingent of the New York National Guard; but for reasons held sufficient by those in high command, this could not be permitted. A way out was found by brigading the regiment with French troops. It was attached as a combat regiment to the Eighth Corps of the Fourth French Army. So, wholly under French command and carrying its state--235--colours, it fought through the war. It was the only American unit to do either of these things. But "the stone that the builders rejected . . ." The first soldier of the entire American Expeditionary Forces to receive the Croix de Guerre with star and palm was Sergeant Henry Johnson of the Fifteenth Regiment, New York National Guard. The entire regiment was cited for exceptional valour in action during the Meuse-Argonne offensive, and its colours were decorated with the Croix de Guerre. The Fifteenth was under shell-fire 191 days, and held one trench ninety-one days without relief. At the declaration of the armistice, the French command gave it the honour of being the first of all the Allied forces to set foot on enemy territory; it went down as the advance guard of the French army of occupation. On this side, no single regiment in the A. E. F. was more often heard of or better known than the Fifteenth.

The regiment, now the 369th Infantry, arrived back in New York on February 12, 1919. On February 17 they paraded up Fifth Avenue. New York had seen lots of soldiers marching off to the war, but this was its first sight of marching veterans. The beautiful Victory Arch erected by the city at Madison Square as a part of the welcome to the returning troops was just nearing completion, and the old Fifteenth was the first body of troops to pass under it. The parade had been given great publicity, and the city was anxious and curious to see soldiers back from the

trenches. The newspapers had intimated that a good part of the celebration would be hearing the--236--now famous Fifteenth band play jazz and seeing the Negro soldiers step to it. Those who looked for that sort of entertainment were disappointed. Lieutenant Jim Europe walked sedately ahead, and Bandmaster Eugene Mikell had the great band alternate between two noble French military marches. And on the part of the men, there was no prancing, no showing of teeth, no swank; they marched with a steady stride, and from under their battered tin hats eyes that had looked straight at death were kept to the front.

But before the Fifteenth left for France, while they were in camp, training to go, there was another parade. On July 28, 1917 ten thousand New York Negroes silently marched down Fifth Avenue to the sound of muffled drums. The procession was headed by little children dressed in white, followed by the women in white, the men bringing up the rear. They carried banners. Some of them read: "Unto the Least of My Brethren," "Mother, Do Lynchers Go to Heaven?" "Give Me a Chance to Live," "Mr. President, Why Not Make America Safe for Democracy?" "Treat Us so that We May Love Our Country," "Patriotism and Loyalty Presuppose Protection and Liberty," "Pray for the Lady Macbeths of East St. Louis." In front of the man bearing the flag of the United States went a banner with the inscription: "Your Hands Are Full of Blood." This was the "Silent Protest Parade," organized by Negro leaders in Harlem, and one of the strangest and most impressive sights New York has witnessed. They marched in silence and they were watched in silence; but some of--237--those who watched turned away with their eyes filled. Negro boy scouts distributed to the watchers circulars which, under the caption: "Why We March," stated these reasons for the demonstration:

We march because by the Grace of God and the force of truth, the dangerous, hampering walls of prejudice and inhuman injustices must fall.

We march because we want to make impossible a repetition of Waco, Memphis, and East St. Louis, by rousing the conscience of the country and bringing the murderers of our brothers, sisters and innocent children to justice.

We march because we deem it a crime to be silent in the face of such barbaric acts.

We march because we are thoroughly opposed to Jim-Crow Cars, Segregation, Discrimination, Disfranchisement, LYNCHING and the host of evils that are forced on us. It is time that the Spirit of Christ should be manifested in the making and execution of laws.

We march because we want our children to live in a better land and enjoy fairer conditions than have fallen to our lot.

We march in memory of our butchered dead, the massacre of the honest toilers who were removing the reproach of laziness and thriftlessness hurled at the entire race. They died to prove our worthiness to live. We live in spite of death shadowing us and ours. We prosper in the face of the most unwarranted and illegal oppression.

In view of the temper of the times, the Protest Parade was a courageous form of action to take. Behind all lay a culminating series of causes: lynchings, disfranchisement in the South, discriminations of many kinds, all of which assumed a magnified and more ironic cruelty in the

face of the fact that--238--Negroes were being called upon like all others to do their full part in the war as American citizens. But more immediate were the humiliations and injustices to which Negroes who had answered the call to arms were being subjected. And the cup overflowed with the East St. Louis massacre of July 2, 1917, in which four hundred thousand dollars' worth of property was destroyed, nearly six thousand Negroes driven from their homes, and hundreds murdered, a number of them burned alive in houses set afire over their heads. A resolution was introduced in Congress calling for an investigation of the East St. Louis riots. Some idea of the unbelievable savagery and its reaction upon the coloured people of the country may be gained from statements made at a hearing before the Committee on Rules of the House of Representatives by members of Congress.

Mr. Dyer of Missouri said in part:

I have visited out there and have interviewed a number of people and talked with a number who saw the murders that were committed. One man in particular who spoke to me is now an officer in the United States Army Reserve Corps, Lieut. Arbuckle, who is here in Washington somewhere, he having come here to report to the Adjutant General.

At the time of these happenings he was in the employ of the Government, but he was there on some business in East St. Louis. He said that he saw a part of this killing, and he saw them burning railway cars in yards, which were waiting for transport, filled with interstate commerce. He saw members of the militia of Illinois shoot Negroes. He saw policemen of the city of East St. Louis shoot negroes. He saw this mob go to the homes of these Negroes and nail--239--boards up over the doors and windows and then set fire and burn them up. He saw them take little children out of the arms of their mothers and throw them into the fires and burn them up. He saw the most dastardly and most criminal outrages ever perpetrated in this country, and this is undisputed. And I have talked with others; and my opinion is that over five hundred people were killed on this occasion.

Mr. Rodenberg of Illinois (East St. Louis is in Illinois), among other things, said:

Now, the plain, unvarnished truth of the matter, as Mr. Joyce told Secretary Baker, is that civil government in East St. Louis completely collapsed at the time of the riot. The conditions there at the time beggar description. It is impossible for any human being to describe the ferocity and brutality of that mob. In one case, for instance, a little ten-year-old boy, whose mother had been shot down, was running around sobbing and looking for his mother, and some members of the mob shot the boy, and before life had passed from his body they picked the little fellow up and threw him in the flames.

Another colored woman with a little two-year-old baby in her arms was trying to protect the child, and they shot her and also shot the child, and threw them in the flames. The horror of that tragedy in East St. Louis can never be described. It weighted me down with a feeling of depression that I did not recover from for weeks. The most sickening things I ever heard of were described in the letters that I received from home giving details of that attack.

The Silent Protest Parade had hardly disbanded when there flashed up from Texas the news of the "Houston affair." A battalion of the Twenty-fourth Infantry, one of the Negro regiments of the regular Army, was stationed at the time at Houston,--240--and during their service there a number of the men had been assaulted by the Houston police. The friction grew out of the fact that, instead of having the soldiers of the camp policed by the usual method of establishing a provost guard, that duty was placed in the hands of the local police. The most popular non-commissioned officer, and one of the most experienced soldiers in the regiment, Corporal Baltimore, had been seriously beaten; news reached the camp that he had been killed. On the night of August 23 the city of Houston was shot up; two Negroes and seventeen white people were killed, five of the latter being Houston policemen. As a result, sixty-three members of the battalion were court-martialled at Fort Sam Houston, and, on December 11, 1917, thirteen of them were hanged. A wave of bitterness and anguish, made more acute by a sense of impotence, swept over the coloured people. They did not question the findings of the court martial, but they did feel that the men should have been accorded their right of appeal to their Commander-in-Chief, the President. And they knew so well the devilish and fiendish baiting by which the men had been goaded.

A second court martial sentenced five more to be hanged and in addition sentenced fifty-one to life imprisonment and five to long terms. At this point a committee of four representatives from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People -- the Rev. George Frazier Miller, the Rev. Frank M. Hyder, the Rev. F. A. Cullen, and James Weldon Johnson, secretary of the association -- proceeded--241--from New York to Washington to see President Wilson, taking with them a petition signed by twelve thousand New York citizens asking executive clemency for the condemned men. Mr. Johnson acted as spokesman and in presenting the petition said:

"We come as a delegation from the New York Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, representing the twelve thousand signers to this petition which we have the honour to lay before you. And we come not only as the representatives of those who signed this petition, but we come representing the sentiments and aspirations and sorrows, too, of the great mass of the Negro population of the United States.

We respectfully and earnestly request and urge that you extend executive clemency to the five Negro soldiers of the Twenty-fourth Infantry now under sentence of death by court martial. And understanding that the cases of the men of the same regiment who were sentenced to life imprisonment by the first court martial are to be reviewed, we also request and urge that you cause this review to be laid before you and that executive clemency be shown also to them.

We feel that the history of this particular regiment and the splendid record for bravery and loyalty of our Negro soldiery in every crisis of the nation give us the right to make this request. And we make it not only in the name of their loyalty, but also in the name of the unquestioned loyalty to the nation of twelve million Negroes -- a loyalty which today places them side by side with the original American stocks that landed at Plymouth and Jamestown.

The hanging of thirteen men without the opportunity of appeal to the Secretary of War or to their Commander-in-Chief, the President of the United States, was a punishment so drastic and so unusual in the history of the nation that the execution of additional members of the Twenty-

fourth--242--Infantry would to the coloured people of the country savour of vengeance rather than justice.

It is neither our purpose nor is this the occasion to argue whether this attitude of mind on the part of coloured people is justified or not. As representatives of the race we desire only to testify that it does exist. This state of mind has been intensified by the significant fact that although white persons were involved in the Houston affair, and the regiment to which the coloured men belonged was officered entirely by white men, none but coloured men, so far as we have been able to learn, have been prosecuted or condemned.

We desire also respectfully to call to your attention the fact that there were mitigating circumstances for the action of these men of the Twenty-fourth Infantry. Not by any premeditated design and without cause did these men do what they did at Houston; but by a long series of humiliating and harassing incidents, culminating in the brutal assault on Corporal Baltimore, they were goaded to sudden and frenzied action. This is borne out by the long record for orderly and soldierly conduct on the part of the regiment throughout its whole history up to that time.

And to the end that you extend the clemency which we ask, we lay before you this petition signed by white as well as coloured citizens of New York; one of the signers being a white man, president of a New York bank, seventy-two years of age, and a native of Lexington, Kentucky.

And now, Mr. President, we would not let this opportunity pass without mentioning the terrible outrages against our people that have taken place in the last three-quarters of a year; outrages that are not only unspeakable wrongs against them, but blots upon the fair name of our common country. We mention the riots at East St. Louis, in which the coloured people bore the brunt of both the cruelty of the mob and the processes of law. And we especially mention the savage burnings that have taken place in the single state of Tennessee within nine months: the burnings at Memphis, Tennessee; at Dyersburg, Tennessee; and only last week at--243--Estill Springs, Tennessee, where a Negro charged with the killing of two men was tortured with red-hot irons, then saturated with oil and burned to death before a crowd of American men, women, and children. And we ask that you, who have spoken so nobly to the whole world for the cause of humanity, speak against these specific wrongs. We realize that your high position and the tremendous moral influence which you wield in the world will give a word from you greater force than could come from any other source. Our people are intently listening and praying that you may find it in your heart to speak that word."

The President received the delegation very cordially and granted them an audience lasting half an hour. He assured them, in effect, that he would carefully examine the record in the case of the condemned men and would give the whole matter his sympathetic attention. A surprising incident of the interview was that the President declared that he had not heard anything about the Estill Springs burning. He asked the committee to state the facts for him. His comment was that he could hardly believe that such a thing had happened in the United States. He promised to seek an opportunity and later he did make a strong statement against lynching.

President Wilson prohibited the execution of any more American soldiers -- except in General Pershing's forces abroad -- before the sentences of the courts martial had been reviewed by the War Department. Eleven more men of the Twenty-fourth, making sixteen, were condemned to die. The President, after review of their cases, commuted ten death-sentences and affirmed six. The men who were sent to prison--244--finally had their sentences commuted and were released on parole through the efforts of the Advancement Association.

Exactly what happened at Houston on that night in August will probably never be known. The executed men went to death and the fifty-odd to prison without "talking." According to the military investigation that was made, Bartlett James, one of the white officers, a West Pointer and a splendid soldier, Captain of Company L, was in the company street that night with his men gathered round him; a detail from the men who had left camp came back to induce the rest of the battalion to join them; the corporal in charge of the detail is said to have appealed to the men of Company L to follow, but none made a move; in reply to an appeal to him, Captain James was reported as saying: "The men of Company L are going to stay with their captain"; and he did hold his company practically intact. Captain James was down as one of the most important witnesses in this remarkable military trial. But on Wednesday night, October 24, seven days before the date set for the trial to begin, he went to his tent and blew out his brains. So the one officer of the line who could have told a great deal about the matter did not testify.

These were some of the depressing happenings at home after our entry into the war. From the other side came tidings far from being glad. There came back reports of the practices of discrimination and "Jim Crowism" against Negro soldiers; of the efforts to belittle and discredit their fighting qualities; of the--245--ceaseless endeavours at every turn on the part of many of the white American troops to create a prejudice against them where none had existed. By one means or another, copies of the order entitled "Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops" found their way from France into the United States. This order, issued at the instance of American authorities and through the French military mission, was for the instruction of French officers in dealing with American Negro troops. It deprecated any intimacy between French officers and black officers. Specifically it said: "We may be courteous and amiable with these last, but we cannot deal with them on the same plane as with the white American officers without deeply wounding the latter. We must not eat with them, must not shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside of the requirements of the military service." Regarding credit for what the black American troops might accomplish through their courage or sacrifice, the order said: "We must not commend too highly the black American troops, particularly in the presence of (white) Americans. It is all right to recognize their good qualities and their services, but only in moderate terms, strictly in keeping with the truth." Out of such an order the great taboo could not be left: "Make a point of keeping the native cantonment population from 'spoiling' the Negroes. (White) Americans become greatly incensed at any public expression of intimacy between white women and black men." All these "dont's" had a familiar, homelike ring. Their origin and authenticity could not be doubted.--246—

With the close of the war went most of the illusions and high hopes American Negroes had felt would be realized when it was seen that they were doing to the utmost their bit at home and in

the field. Eight months after the armistice, with black men back fresh from the front, there broke the Red Summer of 1919, and the mingled emotions of the race were bitterness, despair, and anger. There developed an attitude of cynicism that was a characteristic foreign to the Negro. There developed also a spirit of defiance born of desperation. These sentiments and reactions found varying degrees of expression in the Negro publications throughout the country; but Harlem became the centre where they were formulated and voiced to the Negroes of America and the world. Radicalism in Harlem, which had declined as the war approached, burst out anew. But it was something different from the formal radicalism of pre-war days; it was a radicalism motivated by a fierce race consciousness.

A new radical press sprang up in Harlem, and those periodicals that were older took on fresh vigour. Among the magazines and newspapers published were: *The Messenger, Challenge, The Voice, The Crusader, The Emancipator*, and *The Negro World*. These periodicals were edited and written by men who had a remarkable command of forcible and trenchant English, the precise style for their purpose. And the group was not at all a small one; in it were: A. Philip Randolph, Chandler Owen, George Frazier Miller, W. A. Domingo, Edgar M. Grey, Hubert Harrison,--247-- William H. Ferris, William Bridges, Richard B. Moore, Cyril V. Briggs, William N. Colson, and Anselmo Jackson. Two of these men, A. Philip Randolph and W. A. Domingo, wrote in a very close-knit, cogent manner. The utterances of these publications drew the notice of the Federal Government, and under the caption "Radicalism and Sedition among the Negroes as Reflected in their Publications" they were cited in a Department of Justice report made by Attorney General Palmer in 1919. The report of the Lusk Committee in New York State devoted forty-four pages to them. The radicalism of these publications ranged from left centre to extreme left; at the extreme it was submerged in what might be called racialism. It was to be expected that at such a time an organization like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People would not escape scrutiny. The utterances of Dr. Du Bois in the *Crisis*, the organ of the association, brought a visit to the office from agents of the Department of Justice. In reply to the query: "Just what is this organization fighting for?" Dr. Du Bois said: "We are fighting for the enforcement of the Constitution of the United States." This was an ultimate condensation of the program of the association.

The Messenger preached socialism and the social revolution. It was the most widely circulated of all the radical periodicals and probably the most influential. In an editorial, "The Cause of and Remedy for Race Riots," it said in part:--248—

The solution will not follow the meeting of white and Negro leaders in love feasts, who pretend, like the African ostrich, that nothing is wrong, because their heads are buried in the sand.

On the economic field, industry must be socialized, and land must be nationalized, which will thereby remove the motive for creating strife between the races. . . .

The people must organize, own and control their press.

The church must be converted into an educational forum.

The stage and screen must be controlled by the people.

This editorial offered an "immediate program," which was summed up in the following paragraph:

Lastly, revolution must come. By that we mean a complete change in the organization of society. Just as absence of industrial democracy is productive of riots and race clashes, so the introduction of industrial democracy will be the longest step toward removing that cause. When no profits are to be made from race friction, no one will longer be interested in stirring up race prejudice. The quickest way to stop a thing or to destroy an institution is to destroy the profitableness of that institution. The capitalist system must go and its going must be hastened by the workers themselves.

Challenge was, perhaps, the least restrained of the radical publications. It had no theory of reform like the *Messenger*. It made a direct appeal to the emotions. It assaulted, not the class-line, but the colourline; and so spoke a language that the great majority understood. Its editor, William Bridges, was master of a rhythmic, impassioned prose that possessed the power of stirring masses of people. In the use of this--249--sort of instrument he has been surpassed by few, if any, pamphleteering champions of a cause in this country. In one of his editorials, in which he sought to bring about a union of forces and a united front on the part of American Negroes and West Indians, he said:

There is no West Indian slave, no American slave; you are all slaves, base, ignoble slaves.

There is no more love in the hearts of the British statesmen when passing laws to curtail the liberties of their black subject than there is in the hearts of Americans when passing similar laws to abridge the liberties of theirs.

West Indian Negroes, you are oppressed. American Negroes, you are equally oppressed. West Indians, you are black. Americans, you are equally black. It is your color upon which white men pass judgment, not your merits, nor the geographical line between you. Stretch hands across the seas, with the immortal cry of Patrick Henry: "Give me Liberty or Give me Death."

Prayer will not do all. White men expect to keep you in eternal slavery through superstitions that they have long cast off. They delight in seeing you on your knees. They mean to remain on their feet. They want your eyes kept on the gold in heaven. They mean to keep their eyes on the gold of the world. They want you to seek rest beyond the grave. They mean to have all the rest this side of it.

Can't you see that with every tick of the clock and every revolution of the eternal sun your chains are fastened tighter? You are cursed with superstition and ignorance. You are not taught to love Frederick Douglass, L'Ouverture, Dessalines, and Tubman. You are always taught to love George Washington, Wm˙ Pitt, Abraham Lincoln, and Wm˙ Gladstone. . . .

West Indians, the only things you are wanted and permitted to do that white men do is worship the king and--250--sing "Britannia Rules the Waves," no matter if Britannia rules you more sternly than she ever does the waves.

Americans, the only thing that you are wanted and are permitted to do that white men do is to be loyal and sing, "The Star Spangled Banner," no matter how many Southern hillsides are spangled with the blood of many another innocent Negro. . . .

Negroes of the West Indies and America, Unite! Slavery is just as bad under a king as under a president. We don't want white wives; we don't want to dine in the homes of white men; we don't want the things they have acquired; but by the eternal God that reigns on high listen to the rhythmic voice of the New Negro ringing at the court gates of kings and presidents like a raging tempest wind, furious as a curse of Hell, valorous, determined, unafraid, crying: "Give Us Liberty or Give Us Death."

In each issue of the magazine there was printed "An Oath," which the report of the Lusk Committee listed as "another typical example of inflammatory propaganda." The oath read:

BY ETERNAL HEAVEN --

I swear never to love any flag simply for its color, nor any country for its name.

The flag of my affections must rest over me as a banner of protection, not as a sable shroud.

The country of my patriotism must be above color distinctions, must be one of laws, not of men; of law and not lawlessness, of LIBERTY and not BONDAGE, of privilege to all, not special privilege to some.

Kaiser is not the only word synonymous with IMPERIALISM, TYRANNY, MURDER, and RAPINE.

PRESIDENT AND KING are not the only words synonymous with DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM, PROGRESS.

I shall love not names but deeds. I shall pay homage--251--to any and all men who strive to rid the world of the pestilential diseases of WAR, PREJUDICE, OPPRESSION, LYNCHING.
I am a Patriot.

I am not merely of a Race and a Country, but of the World.

I am BROTHERHOOD.

These journals shook up the Negroes of New York and the country and effected some changes that have not been lost; but able as were most of the men behind them, as radicals, they failed almost wholly in bringing about any co-ordination of the forces they were dealing with; perhaps that was to be expected. This post-war radical movement gradually waned -- as it waned among whites -- and the organs of the movement, one by one, withered and died. The *Messenger*, which continued to be published up to last year, was the longest-lived of them all. The *Negro World* is still being published; but it falls in a classification distinctly its own.

The Harlem radicals failed to bring about a correlation of the forces they had called into action, to have those forces work through a practical medium to a definite objective; but they did much to prepare the ground for a man who could and did do that, a man who was one of the most remarkable and picturesque figures that have appeared on the American scene -- Marcus Garvey.

Marcus Garvey is a full-blooded black man, born, and born poor, in Jamaica, British West Indies, in 1887. He grew up under the triple race scheme that--252--prevails in many of the West Indian islands -- white, mulatto, and black. The conditions of this system aroused in him, even as a boy, a deep resentment, which increased as he grew older. His resentment against the mulattos was, perhaps, deeper than his resentment against the whites. At about the time he became of age, he left Jamaica and travelled in South America. He next went to England, where he stayed for several years. All the while he was seeking some escape from the terrible pressure of the colour bar. In England he met one or two African agitators. He became intimate with Duse Muhamed Effendi, an African political writer, who was running a small revolutionary newspaper in London, and from him learned something about world politics, especially with relation to Africa. It was probably then that he began to dream of a land where black men ruled. England was a disappointment. In 1914 he returned to Jamaica, determined to do something to raise the status of the black masses of the island. He began his public career by organizing the Universal Negro Improvement Association. He was discouraged by the fact that he aroused more interest and gained more support among the whites than among the blacks. He wrote Booker T. Washington about his plans -- plans probably for establishing industrial training for the natives of Jamaica -- and received a reply encouraging him to come to the United States. Before he could perfect arrangements to come, Booker T. Washington had died. But on March 23, 1916 Garvey landed in Harlem.--253—

In some way or other he got about the country, visiting, as he says, thirty-eight states, studying the condition of the Negro in America, and then returned to New York. On June 12, 1917 a large mass meeting, called by Hubert Harrison, was held in Bethel A. M. E. Church in Harlem for the purpose of organizing the Liberty League. Some two thousand people were present, and among them was Marcus Garvey. Mr. Harrison introduced him to the audience and asked him to say a few words. This was Harlem's first real sight of Garvey, and his first real chance at Harlem. The man spoke, and his magnetic personality, torrential eloquence, and intuitive knowledge of crowd psychology were all brought into play. He swept the audience along with him. He made his speech an endorsement of the new movement and a pledge of his hearty support of it; but Garvey was not of the kidney to support anybody's movement. He had seen the United States and he had seen Harlem. He had doubtless been the keenest observer at the Liberty League organization meeting; and it may be that it was then he decided upon New York as the centre for his activities.

He soon organized and incorporated the Universal Negro Improvement Association in the United States, with New York as headquarters. He made his first appeal to the West Indian elements, not only to British, but to Spanish and French, and they flocked to him. He established the *Negro World* as his organ and included in it Spanish and French sections. He built Liberty Hall, a great basement that held five or six thousand people. There the association held its first--254--convention in 1919, during the whole month of August, with delegates from the various states and the West Indies. By this time the scheme of the organization had expanded from the idea of economic solution of the race problem through the establishment of "Universal" shops and factories and financial institutions to that of its solution through the redemption of Africa and the establishment of a Negro merchant marine. At the mass meeting held in Carnegie Hall during this convention, Garvey in his address said:

"We are striking homeward toward Africa to make her the big black republic. And in the making of Africa the big black republic, what is the barrier? The barrier is the white man; and we say to the white man who dominates Africa that it is to his interest to clear out now, because we are coming, not as in the time of Father Abraham, 200,000 strong, but we are coming 400,000,000 strong and we mean to retake every square inch of the 12,000,000 square miles of African territory belonging to us by right Divine."

Money poured in; war-time prosperity made it possible. Three ships were bought and placed in commission. Garvey had grown to be High Potentate of the association and "Provisional President of Africa." Around him he had established a court of nobles and ladies. There were dukes and duchesses, knight commanders of the Distinguished Order of Ethiopia, and knight commanders of the Sublime Order of the Nile. There were gorgeous uniforms, regalia, decorations, and insignia. There was a strict court etiquette, and the constitution provided that "No lady below the age of eighteen shall be presented at the 'Court Reception'--NA--
--255--and no gentleman below the age of twenty-one." There was established the African Legion, with a full line of commissioned officers and a quartermaster staff and commissariat for each brigade. The Black Cross nurses were organized. In fact, an embryo army was set up with Marcus Garvey as commander-in-chief. A mission was sent to Liberia to negotiate an agreement whereby the Universal Improvement Association would establish a colony there and aid in the development of the country.

Garvey became a world figure, and his movements and utterances were watched by the great governmental powers. (Even today from his exile in Jamaica his actions and words are considered international news.) The U. N. I. A. grew in the United States and spread through the region of the Caribbean. The movement became more than a movement, it became a religion, its members became zealots. Meetings at Liberty Hall were conducted with an elaborate liturgy. The moment for the entry of the "Provisional President" into the auditorium was solemn; a hushed and expectant silence on the throng, the African Legion and Black Cross nurses flanking the long aisle and coming to attention, the band and audience joining in the hymn: "Long Live our President," and Garvey, surrounded by his guard of honour from the Legion, marching majestically through the double line and mounting the rostrum; it was impressive if for no other reason than the way in which it impressed the throng. Garvey made a four months' tour of the West Indies in a Black Star liner, gathering in many--256--converts to the movement, but no freight for the vessel. Of course, the bubble burst. Neither Garvey nor anyone with him knew how to operate ships. And if they had known, they could not have succeeded at the very time when ships were the greatest drug on the market. So the Black Star Line, after swallowing up hundreds of thousands of dollars, collapsed in December 1921. The Federal Government investigated Garvey's share-selling scheme and he was indicted and convicted on a charge of using the mails to defraud. While out of the Tombs on bail, he made an unsuccessful attempt to revive his shipping venture as the Black Cross Line.

Within ten years after reaching New York Marcus Garvey had risen and fallen, been made a prisoner in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, and finally been deported to his native island. Within that brief period a black West Indian, here in the United States, in the twentieth

century, had actually played an imperial role such as Eugene O'Neill never imagined in his *Emperor Jones*.

Garvey failed; yet he might have succeeded with more than moderate success. He had energy and daring and the Napoleonic personality, the personality that draws masses of followers. He stirred the imagination of the Negro masses as no Negro ever had. He raised more money in a few years than any other Negro organization had ever dreamed of. He had great power and great possibilities within his grasp. But his deficiencies as a leader outweighed his abilities. He is a supreme egotist, his egotism amounting to megalomania; and so the men surrounding him had--257--to be for the most part cringing sycophants; and among them there were also cunning knaves. Upon them he now lays the entire blame for failure, taking no part of it to himself. As he grew in power, he fought every other Negro rights organization in the country, especially the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, centring his attacks upon Dr` Du Bois.

Garvey made several vital blunders, which, with any intelligent advice, he might have avoided. He proceeded upon the assumption of a triple race scheme in the United States; whereas the facts are that the whites in the United States, unlike the whites of the West Indies, make no distinction between people of colour and blacks, nor do the Negroes. There may be places where a very flexible social line exists, but Negroes in the United States of every complexion have always maintained a solid front on the rights of the race. This policy of Garvey, going to the logical limit of calling upon his followers to conceive of God as black, did arouse a latent pride of the Negro in his blackness, but it wrought an overbalancing damage by the effort to drive a wedge between the blacks and the mixed bloods, an effort that might have brought on disaster had it been more successful.

He made the mistake of ignoring or looking with disdain upon the technique of the American Negro in dealing with his problems of race, a technique acquired through three hundred years of such experience as the West Indian has not had and never can have. If he had availed himself of the counsel and--258--advice of an able and honest American Negro, he would have avoided many of the barbed wires against which he ran and many of the pits into which he fell.
But the main reason for Garvey's failure with thoughtful American Negroes was his African scheme. It was recognized at once by them to be impracticable and fantastic. Indeed, it is difficult to give the man credit for either honesty or sanity in these imperialistic designs, unless, as there are some reasons to suppose, his designs involved the purpose of going into Liberia as an agent of development and then by gradual steps or a coup taking over the government and making the country the centre of the activities and efforts for an Africa Redeemed. But thoughtful coloured Americans knew that, under existing political conditions in Africa, even that plan could ultimately meet with nothing but failure. Had there been every prospect of success, however, the scheme would not have appealed to them. It was simply a restatement of the Colonization Society scheme advanced just one hundred years before, which had occasioned the assembling of the first national convention of Negroes in America, called to oppose "the operations and misrepresentations of the American Colonization Society in these United States." The central idea of Garvey's scheme was absolute abdication and the recognition as facts of the assertions that this is a white man's country, a country in which the

Negro has no place, no right, no chance, no future. To that idea the overwhelming majority of thoughtful American Negroes will not subscribe. And behind this attitude--259--is the common-sense realization that as the world is at present, the United States, with all of its limitations, offers the millions of Negroes within its borders greater opportunities than any other land. Garvey's last great mistake came about through his transcending egotism. He had as leading counsel for his trial Henry Lincoln Johnson, one of the shrewdest and ablest Negro lawyers in the country. But the temptation to strut and pose before a crowded court and on the front pages of the New York newspapers was too great for Garvey to resist; so he brushed his lawyers aside and handled his own case. He himself examined and cross-examined the witnesses; he himself harangued the judge and jury; and he was convicted.

Garvey, practically exiled on an island in the Caribbean, becomes a somewhat tragic figure. There arises a slight analogy between him and that former and greater dreamer in empires, exiled on another island. But the heart of the tragedy is that to this man came an opportunity such as comes to few men, and he clutched greedily at the glitter and let the substance slip from his fingers.

Chapter 19XIX

The most outstanding phase of the development of the Negro in the United States during the past decade has been the recent literary and artistic emergence of the individual creative artist; and New York has been, almost exclusively, the place where that emergence has taken place. The thing that has happened has been so marked that it does not have the appearance of a development; it seems rather like a sudden awakening, like an instantaneous change. The story of it, as of almost every experience relating to the Negro in America, goes back a long way. For many generations the Negro has been a creative artist and a contributor to the nation's common cultural store. Underlying all these contributions are his folkart creations -- his sacred music: the Spirituals; his secular music: the plantation songs, rag-time, blues, jazz, and the work songs; his folk-lore: the Uncle Remus stories and other plantation tales; and his dances. All of these have gone into and, more or less, permeated our national life. Some of them, various--261--forms of his secular music and his dances, have been completely taken over; they are no longer racial, they are wholly national. Even the Uncle Remus stories have been appropriated and appear, with slight adaptations, in the daily newspapers as popular bedtime stories.

But the individual creative artist is not entirely new. The actual record goes back for more than two hundred and fifty years. In the books it is usually set down as beginning with Phillis Wheatley. Phillis Wheatley was born in Africa. When she was eight or nine years old, in 1761, she was landed in Boston from a slave-ship. Mr˙ Wheatley, a philanthropic Boston gentleman, purchased her as a maid for his wife. Phillis was given an education, and in 1773 she published a volume of poems. Her book was the second volume of poems published by a woman in America. It is needless to say that Phillis Wheatley is not a great American poet -- in her day there were no great American poets -- but judged alongside her contemporaries, she is one of America's important poets. The thread of the story can be traced farther back, however, and when it is, it leads to New York. The first Negro in America to write and publish poems was Jupiter Hammon, a slave belonging to a Mr˙ Lloyd of Queens Village, Long Island. Hammon's poems were published in broadside form

and had a rather popular circulation for ten or fifteen years. His first poem appeared in 1760 and was entitled *An Evening Thought, Salvation by Christ, with Pennettential Cries.* In 1788 he published *An Address to Miss*--262--*Phillis Wheatley, Ethiopian Poetess in Boston, who came from Africa at eight years of age, and soon became acquainted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.* All of Hammon's poems were religious in tone; it is likely that he was a preacher. In distinction, Phillis Wheatley was a classicist and wrote strictly in the form and style of Alexander Pope. Jupiter Hammon was also a man interested in affairs. Before the New York African Society, a Negro organization in Manhattan, he read, in 1784, a paper entitled *An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York*. The address was printed in 1787. Four hundred and fifty dollars was paid for a copy of it for the collection of the late J. Pierpont Morgan. It is interesting to know that the New York African Society is still an active organization.

Few Americans, even the well informed, know anything about Jupiter Hammon. More, of course, know about Phillis Wheatley. And a great many more know about Paul Laurence Dunbar. But it is probable that very few indeed know that between Phillis Wheatley and Paul Laurence Dunbar (who died in 1906) there were thirty-odd Negroes who published volumes of verse. Within the same period there were hundreds of pamphleteers, essayists, and authors of books of various kinds. Of this work, some was good, most was mediocre, and much was bad -- and practically all of it unknown to the general public. The seeming suddenness of the emergence of the Negro in literature is mainly due to the fact that by the work of the Harlem group of writers America at large--263--has, in a very brief time, been made aware that there are Negro authors with something interesting to say and the skill to say it. It was the quickness with which this awareness was brought about that gave the movement the aspect of a phenomenon.

Towards the close of the World War there sprang up a group of eight or ten poets in various cities of the country who sang a newer song. The group discarded traditional dialect and the stereotyped material of Negro poetry. Its members did not concern themselves with the sound of the old banjo and the singing round the cabin door; nor with the successions of the watermelon, possum, and sweet potato seasons. They broke away entirely from the limitations of pathos and humour. Also they broke away from use of the subject material that had already been over-used by white American poets of a former generation. What they did was to attempt to express what the masses of their race were then feeling and thinking and wanting to hear. They attempted to make those masses articulate. And so the distinguishing notes of their poetry were disillusionment, protest, and challenge -- and sometimes despair. And they created, each in accordance with his talent and power, authentic poetry. The poems of the Negro poets of the immediate post-war period were widely printed in Negro publications; they were committed to memory; they were recited at school exercises and public meetings and were discussed at private gatherings. These revolutionary poets made black America fully aware of them.--264—

But there was among them a voice too powerful to be confined to the circle of race, a voice that carried further and made America in general aware; it was that of Claude McKay, of the Harlem group. Here was a true poet of great skill and wide range, who turned from creating the mood of poetic beauty in the absolute, as he had so fully done in such poems as *The Harlem Dancer* and *Flame Heart*, for example, and began pouring out cynicism, bitterness, and invective.

For this purpose, incongruous as it may seem, he took the sonnet form as his medium. There is nothing in American literature that strikes a more portentous note than these sonnet-tragedies of McKay. Here is the sestet of his sonnet *The Lynching:* *

Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds came to view The ghastly body swaying in the sun: The women thronged to look, but never a one Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue; And little lads, lynchers that were to be, Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.

The red summer of 1919 brought from McKay this cry of defiant despair, sounded from the last ditch:

If we must die let it be not like hogs Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot. . . . O 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?--265-- Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack, Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!
But not all the terror of the time could smother the poet of beauty and universality in McKay. In *America*, which opens with these lines,

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness, And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth, Stealing my breath of life, I will confess I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!he fused these elements of fear and bitterness and hate into verse which by every test is true poetry and a fine sonnet. Reading McKay's poetry of rebellion it is difficult to conceive of him dreaming of his native Jamaica and singing:

So much have I forgotten in ten years, So much in ten brief years! I have forgot What time the purple apples come to juice, And what month brings the shy forget-me-not. I have forgot the special, startling season Of the pimento's flowering and fruiting; What time of year the ground doves brown the fields And fill the noonday with their curious fluting. I have forgotten much, but still remember The poinsettia's red, blood-red in warm December.

Mr. McKay was born in Jamaica, British West Indies, in 1890. He came to the United States when he was twenty-one years of age, having already published a volume of verse, *Songs of Jamaica*. He first attracted attention here by two sonnets published in the *Seven Arts* under the name Eli Edwards. What perverse whim could have suggested to a poet named--266--Claude McKay the use of such a pseudonym? Later his work appeared in other magazines, principally in the *Liberator*. He published *Harlem Shadows* in 1922. Claude McKay's poetry was one of the great forces in bringing about what is often called the "Negro literary renaissance." But he is now almost silent as a poet.

In 1922 *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, edited by James Weldon Johnson, was published. This anthology contained an essay on "The Negro's Creative Genius" by the editor, and presented to the general reading public a representative collection of poetry by American Negroes from the earliest writers down to and including that written by Negro poets immediately following the World War. The book was effective in following up the work of making America at large aware.

Within five or six years after the close of the war there had sprung up a group of younger Negro poets. Like the immediate post-war group, they were scattered in different cities. Of these

younger poets there were some fifteen writing verse of distinction; and four-fifths of that number belonged either to New York or to Washington. Two of the poets belonging to the Harlem group rose above the level and gained, almost simultaneously, a recognition for themselves which carried the Negro literary movement far forward and succeeded greatly in focusing national attention upon it. These two poets were Countee Cullen, born in New York in 1903, and Langston Hughes, born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902.--267—

The rise of the post-war poets was a revolt against the sentimentality and imploration that had preceded them. The rise of the younger poets was a revolt against the "propaganda" of the post-war group. The younger group made a natural attempt to get from under the weight that "race" put upon their art. Some of them sought escape by feigning to ignore absolutely the barriers with which "race" hedged them about. This process of auto-hypnosis often resulted in poetry of bravado or, worse, of bombast. It is interesting to note how Cullen and Hughes handled this incubus, for neither of them has escaped "race."

Mr˙ Cullen may with justification chafe under any limitation of art to race, for he is a true lyric poet, a younger brother to Housman. And yet, in my opinion, the best of his poetry rises out of the idea of race and is permeated with it. But it is through his ability suddenly to deepen and heighten these very experiences that his race-conscious poetry becomes the thing of beauty, at times almost insufferable beauty, that it is; it is through this ability that he achieves some of his finest effects. One dares to say that the two most poignant lines in American literature are in a sonnet in which he speaks of the mysteries and paradoxes of life and expresses his faith that God can solve and answer them all, then pours into the final couplet an infinity of irony and bitterness, and pathos and tragedy: *--268—

Yet do I marvel at this curious thing: To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

Or take Mr˙ Cullen's *Heritage*, one of his longer poems, one so dynamically charged with the experiences of race that it quivers. I do not think there is such compelling power and beauty in any purely white poem he has written. A part of the poem is sufficient to demonstrate its quality:

What is Africa to me: Copper sun or scarlet sea, Jungle star or jungle track, Strong bronzed men, or regal black Women from whose loins I sprang When the birds of Eden sang? *One three centuries removed From the scenes his fathers loved, Spicy grove, cinnamon tree, What is Africa to me?* So I lie, who all day long Want no sound except the song Sung by wild barbaric birds Goading massive jungle herds, Juggernauts of flesh that pass Trampling tall defiant grass Where young forest lovers lie, Plighting troth beneath the sky. So I lie, who always hear, Though I cram against my ear Both my thumbs, and keep them there, Great drums throbbing through the air. So I lie, whose font of pride, Dear distress, and joy allied,--269--Is my sombre flesh and skin, With the dark blood dammed within Like great pulsing tides of wine That, I fear, must burst the fine Channels of the chafing net Where they surge and foam and fret. . . . Quaint, outlandish heathen gods Black men fashion out of rods, Clay, and brittle bits of stone, In a likeness like their own, My conversion came high-priced; I belong to Jesus Christ, Preacher of humility; Heathen gods are naught to me. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, So I make an idle boast; Jesus of the twice turned cheek, Lamb of God, although I speak With my mouth thus, in

my heart Do I play a double part. Ever at Thy glowing altar Must my heart grow sick and falter, Wishing He I served were black, Thinking then it would not lack Precedent of pain to guide it, Let who would or might deride it; Surely then this flesh would know Yours had borne a kindred woe. Lord, I fashion dark gods, too, Daring even to give You Dark despairing features where, Crowned with dark rebellious hair, Patience wavers just so much as Mortal grief compels, while touches--270—

Quick and hot, of anger, rise To smitten cheek and weary eyes. Lord, forgive me if my need Sometimes shapes a human creed. *All day long and all night through, One thing only must I do: Quench my pride and cool my blood, Lest I perish in the flood. Lest a hidden ember set Timber that I thought was wet Burning like the dryest flax, Melting like the merest wax, Lest the grave restore its dead. Not yet has my heart or head In the least way realized They and I are civilized.*

Even when he turns to humour, Mr˙ Cullen distils his best brand from the idea of race. Good illustrations are his Baltimore *Incident* and his epitaph *For a Lady I Know:*

She even thinks that up in heaven Her class lies late and snores, While poor black cherubs rise at seven To do celestial chores.

Mr˙ Cullen published his first volume of poems, *Color*, in 1925, when he was twenty-two; the book placed him at once in the list of American poets. He has followed it with *The Ballad of the Brown Girl, Copper Sun, Caroling Dusk*, an anthology of verse by Negro poets from Paul Laurence Dunbar down to and including the younger group, and *The Black Christ*, a long narrative poem.--NA--

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Langston Hughes is a cosmopolite. Young as he is, he has been over most of the world, making his own way. Consciously he snaps his fingers at race, as he does at a great many other things. He belongs to the line of rebel poets. He is a rebel not only in the matter of poetic form, but also in the choice of poetic subjects, for, of subjects, he is as likely to take one from the gutter as from any other place. On this point he has met with the disapprobation and censure of some in his own race who feel that the subject-matter of his poems is not sufficiently elevating. Yet Mr˙ Hughes, too, falls under this idea of race, and most of his best work springs from it. It is by taking this idea and shooting it through with a cynicism and a sardonic humour peculiarly his own that he secures some of his finest effects. These effects are very unlike Mr˙ Cullen's, but have a quality of equal finality.

Mr˙ Hughes writes a poem which has for its title and its subject *Brass Spittoons*. Here, if ever there was one, is an "unpoetic" subject. But the poet takes it and tells of the black porter at his distasteful task of cleaning brass spittoons; tells of him in Detroit, Chicago, Atlantic City, Palm Beach; cleaning spittoons in Pullman cars, clubs, and hotel lobbies; picking up nickels, dimes -- and a dollar, two dollars a day. Then at the end he flashes back over an otherwise sordid poem these bright lines freighted with implications of "race": *--272--

Hey, boy!

A bright bowl of brass is beautiful to the Lord. Bright polished brass like the cymbals Of King David's dancers, Like the wine cups of Solomon.

Hey, boy!

A clean spitoon on the altar of the Lord. A clean bright spitoon all newly polished, -- At least I can offer that.

Com' mere, Boy!

No matter how Mr˙ Hughes handles this idea of "race," he is very seldom sentimental and never pathetic. But this is not due to any flinty quality in his poetry. In much of his work the throb and the tear lie close to the surface. As a conscious artist he has in a large measure adopted the philosophy of the folk-bards, makers of the blues. That philosophy consists in choosing to laugh to keep from crying. Mr˙ Hughes might even subscribe to the philosophy summed up in that line in one of the blues:

Got de blues, an' too dam' mean to cry.

This is the chord played in *Mulatto* and many other of his poems. It is the chord that is struck in his poem *Cross:*

My old man's a white old man And my old mother's black. If ever I cursed my white old man I take my curses back. If ever I cursed my old black mother And wished she were in hell, I'm sorry for that evil wish And now I wish her well.--273-- My old man died in a fine big house. My ma died in a shack. I wonder where I'm gonna die, Being neither white nor black?
But Hughes can also sing. In one of his poems he has the Negro speak of rivers:

I've known rivers: I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young. I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep. I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it. I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset. I've known rivers: Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Mr˙ Hughes has published two volumes of poems: *The Weary Blues* in 1926, and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* in 1927. In the latter year *God's Trombones -- Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, by James Weldon Johnson, was published.

Early in the decade a fresh start was made in fiction. There had been the stories of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles W˙ Chesnutt. And later *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, a novel by W˙ E˙ Burghardt Du Bois, and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, by James Weldon Johnson, appeared.--274--In 1923 Jean Toomer published *Cane*, a string of stories of Negro life, interspersed with original lyrics. The book was in no degree a popular success, but it made a great impression on the critics. It is still often referred to as one of the finest pieces of modern American prose. The poems in the book stamp the author as a lyricist of the first order. Mr˙ Toomer was the prose pioneer in the work done in the past decade to make America in general

aware of Negro artists and what they were doing; it is regrettable that he has written so little since.

In 1924 there appeared a novel that struck both the critics and the general public. It was the first piece of fiction written by an American Negro to accomplish this double feat with so large a degree of success. The book created a sensation and was the subject of heated controversy wherever it was discussed. It was *The Fire in the Flint* by Walter White. *The Fire in the Flint* was a realistic novel dealing in a fearless manner with the contemporary conditions surrounding Negro life in a small town in the South. Mr˙ White was well prepared to write such a book; he was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and educated at Atlanta University. In 1918 he came to New York to become assistant secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In that capacity he travelled through many parts of the South to make investigations of lynchings, race riots, and civil and social conditions among Negroes. Being a man who can be white or coloured as he may choose, he gathered a great deal of curious information. All of this--275--experience he packed into this book and produced a story of extraordinary power. *The Fire in the Flint* was followed by *Flight*, a novel with "passing" as its theme. Last year Mr˙ White published *Rope and Faggot*, the most authoritative study of lynching yet made.

Just prior to *The Fire in the Flint* a novel by Jessie Fauset, *There is Confusion*, made its appearance. Miss Fauset's book was a story of conditions surrounding contemporary Negro life in a Northern city. Her next novel was *Plum Bun*, a story with a similar theme. Until this decade of "literary renaissance" Negro writers had been less successful in fiction than in any other field they had tried. They had to their credit two remarkable autobiographies, several good historical works, some splendid collections of essays, a still larger number of collections of good poetry, and a great mass of volumes of polemical discussions on the race question. One could look back to only one good writer of fiction, Charles W˙ Chesnutt. But now, and for the first time, the output of fiction exceeded that of poetry. Within the past ten years more fiction has been published by Negro writers than had been brought out by them in the preceding two hundred and fifty years. And every bit of this fiction -- that is, every bit that has been published in a way calculated to reach the general public -- has been written by writers of the Harlem group. Nella Larsen published two well-written novels: one, *Quicksand*, the story of a coloured girl, with the scene laid in the South, in New York, and in Europe; and the other, *Passing*, a story of "passing." Eric Walrond--276--published *Tropic Death*, a volume of colourful stories of West Indian and Panamanian life. Rudolph Fisher brought the first light, satirical touch in *The Walls of Jericho*. W˙ E˙ Burghardt Du Bois published *Dark Princess*, a novel that was fantasy and satire. Wallace Thurman published *The Blacker the Berry*. In 1927 *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* was republished in New York. In 1928 Claude McKay broke his silence with a book of prose, *Home to Harlem*, a novel of life in Negro New York. This book appeared on the list of best sellers and was one of the successes of the season. McKay followed with another successful novel, *Banjo*. In 1929 Taylor Gordon published *Born to Be*, a story of his life, but at the same time containing, probably, an element of fiction. William Pickens published *Bursting Bonds*, an autobiography, in 1923. Apart from fiction, but closely related to the literary and artistic movement, were the First and Second Books of *American Negro Spirituals*, edited and

arranged by James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson, and published respectively in 1925 and 1926.

There are writers in Harlem who do a regular newspaper stint and contribute to the magazines; among them is George S. Schuyler, a brilliant writer and a first-class journalist and publicist. J. A. Rogers is another excellent newspaper and magazine contributor. The Negro novel of the World War is still unwritten.

In making America aware of the Negro artist and his work an important part was played by the Harlem--277--Number (March 1925) of the *Survey Graphic*. This number of the *Survey* contained a hundred pages. There were twenty contributors, fifteen coloured and five white; twelve of the coloured contributors belonged to the Harlem group. Some of the articles were: "Enter the New Negro," "The Making of Harlem," "Black Workers and the City," "The Tropics in New York," "The Black Man Brings His Gifts," "Jazz at Home," "Negro Art and America," "The Negro Digs Up His Past," "The Rhythm of Harlem," "Color Lines," and "Ambushed in the City." There were also poems, drawings, and photographs. This issue of the *Survey* had the largest circulation of any in the history of the magazine up to that time; several editions had to be run off before the demand was satisfied. It was a revelation to New York and the country. Later the symposium, somewhat enlarged, was brought out as a book entitled *The New Negro*, under the editorship of Alain Locke. It remains one of the most important books on the Negro ever published.

Another decided impulse to the literary movement was furnished by the establishment in 1924 of cash prizes for original literary work. These prizes were offered through the two New York magazines, the *Crisis*, organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, under the editorship of Dr. Du Bois, and *Opportunity*, the organ of the Urban League, under the editorship of Charles S. Johnson. The *Crisis* prizes were established through the generosity of Mrs. Amy E. Spingarn, and the--278--*Opportunity* prizes through that of Mr. Caspar Holstein. Additional prizes were offered later by Carl Van Vechten through *Opportunity*, and by Carl Brandt through the *Crisis*. Also through the *Crisis* the Charles W. Chesnutt Honorarium was given. These prizes were given for several years and had quite a stimulating effect upon the younger writers. The title poem to Langston Hughes's first volume won an *Opportunity* prize.

In the other arts some advance, though not quite so marked, has been made in the decade just passed. In music the Harlem group has been a strong factor in giving a fresh interpretation and a new vogue to the Spirituals. The Spirituals have been sung before audiences for a long time. It has been sixty years since they were first introduced by the Fisk Jubilee Singers. But a change has been wrought in the reaction they call forth. Fifty years ago white people who heard the Spirituals sung were touched and moved with sympathy for the "poor Negro." Today the reaction is less of pity for the Negro's condition and more of admiration for the creative genius of the race. This higher evaluation and truer appreciation of the Spirituals are due in a very direct way to the work done by the Harlem group. Paul Robeson and Lawrence Brown, and J. Rosamond Johnson and Taylor Gordon have sung programs made up exclusively of Spirituals

before the finest concert audiences in New York and other principal cities of the country. The Hall Johnson Choir has sung with the great orchestras at the--279--Lewisohn Stadium and has appeared in connexion with theatrical productions and on the bills of the big moving-picture theatres. And all of these have broad-cast Spirituals. In addition, soloists like Jules Bledsoe, Charlotte Murray, Minnie Brown, and Abbie Mitchell have included these songs in their concert programs. The efforts of these artists have had a far-reaching effect on this new and popular appreciation of the Spirituals. And behind and supplementing the efforts of these and all other artists who have taken the Spirituals to the public has been the work of Harry T. Burleigh and J. Rosamond Johnson in making large numbers of these songs musically available. Because of their work, between two and three hundred Spirituals are in a form that makes them interesting to musical people.

Some creditable work in painting is being done by younger artists, but neither in Harlem nor in the whole country has there been produced in this decade or any other, for that matter, a Negro painter who has achieved anything like the eminence of H. O. Tanner, for some time now dean of American painters in Paris. Aaron Douglas of the Harlem group has won recognition for his black and white drawings. His work has marked originality and has gained for him a place as an illustrator of books. Some creditable work has been done by several students in sculpture, but here, as in painting, the Negro must go back to a former generation for outstanding achievement. But the strangest and most surprising lack is that with all--280--the great native musical endowment the race is conceded to possess, the Negro in New York has not in this most propitious time produced an outstanding composer. The American Negro composers of prominence belong, too, to a former generation.