

White people began to come to Harlem in droves. They packed the expensive Exton Club on Lenox Avenue. But I was never there because the Cotton Club was a Jim Crow club for gangsters and movie stars. They were not cordial to Negroes except celebrities like Bojangles. (Continued on page 64)

street. In those days Fitchel Waters was the girl who could thrill Harlem. Butterbeans and Susie could lay them in the ashes. Jackie Mabry could stop any show. Evelyn Proctor and Laura Bowtman did all right in *Salome* once at the Lafayette for a short run. However, Snakehips was a permanent solid sender, and Louis Armstrong a killer. But who wanted *The Emperor Jones* running through the jungles? Not Harlem.

wanted none of *The Emperor Jones*—their manner had been all right at all the other shows at the Lincoln where they took part in the performance at will, encouraging or discouraging the spectators as they chose. So when Bruns continued his flight, the audience again howled with laughter. That was the end of *The Emperor Jones* on 135th

a cough at the mention of whisky, but he stopped dead in his tracks, advanced to the footlights, and lectured his audience on manners. But the audience

True or not, I don't know. But I do recall once a sinécure but unfortunate attempt on Jules Bleasoe's part to bring "Art" to Harlem. He appeared in Eugene O'Neill's *Empedocles* at the old Lincoln Theatre on 135th Street, a theatre that had, for all its noble name, been devoted largely to libal but highly entertaining vaudeville of the Butterbeans and Sueie type. The audience didn't know what to make of *The Empedocles* on a stage where "Shakespeare" was formerly the rage. And when the Empedocles started running naked through the forest, hearing the Little Highlender weep, naturally they howled with laughter. "Them ain't no ghosts, fool!" they cried from the orchestra. "Why don't you come on out o' that jungle back to Harlem where you belong?"

In the manner of Stokowski hearing a member of the Academy of Ancient Music

And down Seventh Avenue in a long red car with solid ivory trimmings. It was the first car Harlem had seen that could be turned into a sort of Pullman sleeper. Another car that excited the colored world was that of Julius Bledsoe, who originated "Ol Man River" in *Shaw Boat*. One day he appeared in the streets of Harlem with a very expensive, high-powered motor driven by a white chauffeur in livery. Mr. Bledsoe, who is very dark, explained that he had a white uniformed chauffeur so that the public could tell which was the chauffeur and which the owner. But Harlem gossip, laughing at Mr. Bledsoe's humor, nevertheless claimed that the white chauffeur was a necessity with so expensive a car, and because the chauffeur was supplied by the company to safeguard the motor until a certain amount had been paid.

those days most of Harlem's actors kept busy on the Broadway stage, nightclubs, or in London or Paris.

was a honey of a show. Swift, t, funny, and rollicking, with a 1 dançable, singable tunes. Besides, who were in it: the now famous director, Hall Johnson, and the most, William Grant Still, were of the orchestra. Lubie Blake, and e Sissle wrote the music and played ired in the show. Miller and Lyles the comics. Florence Mills' sky- ed to fame in the second act. e Smith, sang "E!e May Be your but He Comes to See Me Some- " Catrina Jarboro, now a Euro- prima donna, and the internation- celebrated Josephine Baker were dy in the chorus. Everybody was in medence. People came back to see in- mervable times, if they could get in. nearly two years it was always od. It gave just the proper push- Charleston kick—to the vogue that and to books, African sculpture, es, and dancing.

gan with *Shuffle Along*, *Kumming* *id*, and the Charleston. Perhaps people would say with *The Em-fines*, but certainly it was *Shuffle* *g* that gave a schottish-sound-*e* Negro vogue in Manhattan that

Although illustrating foreign (sweet and Low Down), shows Harlem might be as known to most whites; the reality notes beneath stand for more getting; unmet Harlem functions

Langston Hughes

MEN HARLEM

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Harlem Negroes did not like the Cotton Club. Nor did Harlem like the growing influx of whites after sundown, flooding the little cabarets and bars where formerly only colored people laughed and sang, and getting the best tables so as to sit and stare smiling at the Negro customers as if watching animals in a zoo.

Some of the Harlem clubs, failing to realize that their colored customers were a large part of their attractiveness to whites, made the grievous error of harring their own race, after the manner of the Cotton Club. Most of these quickly folded up, especially the smaller ones which had no big floor shows or name bands and therefore, without black patronage, were not amusing at all.

A few, however, had people like the singing pianist, Gladys Bentley, who was something worth discovering in those days before she got famous and acquired an accompanist. For two or three amazing years, Miss Bentley sat at a big piano from ten until dawn playing and singing songs like "The St. James Infirmary" with scarcely a break between the notes, sliding from one song to another, with a powerful and continuous underbeat of jungle rhythm. She was an amazing exhibition of musical energy—a large, dark, masculine lady whose feet pounded the floor while her fingers pounded the keyboard—a perfect piece of African sculpture animated by her own rhythm.

But with success, she left the piano, began to sing with an accompanist, became a star, moved to a larger place, then downtown, then to Hollywood. The old magic of the woman and the piano and the night and the rhythm being one is gone. Lots of fine things in Harlem night life have disappeared since it became utterly commercial and planned for the downtown tourist trade, and therefore dull.

All of us know that the gay and sparkling life of the so-called Negro Renaissance was not so gay and sparkling beneath the surface as it looked. Carl Van Vechten, in the character of Byron in *Nigger Heaven*, captured some of the bitterness and frustration of literary Harlem that Wallace Thurman later so effectively poured into his *Infants of the Spring*—the only novel by a Negro about that fantastic period.

It was a period when, at almost every Harlem upper-crust dance or party, you would be introduced to various distinguished white guests; when almost any Harlem Negro of any social importance at all could speak casually of Heywood or George Gershwin; when local and visiting royalty were not at all uncommon in Harlem; when the parties of A'Lelia Walker, the Negro heiress, were filled with guests whose names would turn any Nordic social climber green with envy; when Harold Jackman, a handsome young Harlem schoolteacher of modest means, could calmly announce that he was sailing for the Riviera to attend Princess Murat's yachting party; when at least one charming colored chorus girl, amber enough to pass for a Latin-American, was living in the Ritz Tower with all her bills paid by a nice white gentleman whose name was banker's magic on Wall Street; when every season there was at least one hit play with a Negro cast; when books by Negro authors were being published with much more frequency and publicity than ever before, or since; when white writers wrote about Negroes more successfully (commercially speaking) than Negroes did

F. W. DEMAREST



An old Dutch painting and 18th century faience stoves from the Hearst Collection in a foyer décor by McMillen, Inc., designed for an International Studio Art Corporation exhibition. The walls are gray with taupe borders, niches blue-green, floor marbled green. From July 14th through August 30th the gallery will show Greek and Roman sculpture and antique ornaments suitable for modern gardens

WHEN UPTOWN WAS IN VOGUE

about themselves; it was the period (God help us!) when Ethel Barrymore appeared in blackface in *Scarlet Sister Mary*.

Some Negroes thought the millennium had come. They thought the race problem had at last been solved through Art plus Gladys Bentley. They were sure the New Negro would lead a new life from then on in green pastures of tolerance created by Countee Cullen, Snakehips, Ethel Waters, Claude McKay, Duke Ellington, Bojangles, and Alain Locke. I don't know what made them think that except that they were mostly intellectuals. The ordinary Negroes hadn't heard of the Negro Renaissance, and if they had, it hadn't raised their wages any. As for all those white folks in the speakeasies and nightclubs—well, maybe a colored man could find some place to have a drink that the tourists hadn't yet discovered. Ordinary Negroes wanted to pray and drink, at least, in peace.

THEN it was that house-rent parties began to flourish—not always to raise the rent, but, as often as not, to have a get-together where you could do the black bottom with no Nordics behind you trying to do it too. The Saturday night rent parties were often more amusing than any nightclub. They were given in small apartments where God knows who lived—because the guests seldom did—but where the piano would often be augmented by a guitar, or an odd cornet, or somebody with a pair of drums walking in off the street. And where awful bootleg whiskey and good fried fish or steaming chitterlings were sold very cheap.

These parties—often termed whist parties or dances—were usually announced by cards stuck in the grilling of Harlem apartment-house elevators. Almost every Saturday night, whenever I was in Harlem, I went to a house-rent party. Swell people went: ladies' maids and truck drivers, laundry workers and shoe-shine boys, seamstresses and porters. I wrote lots of poems about house-rent parties in my youth, and ate therat many a fried fish and pig's foot—with liquid refreshments on the side. I can still hear

the music in my ears and feel the floor shaking as the dancers danced. Hey! Hey! . . . Hey, lawdy, mama! . . . Hey! Hey!

There were also in those days of the late 1920s a great many fashionable parties, in Harlem and out, to which various members of the New Negro group of writers were invited. These parties, when given by important Harlemites (or by Carl Van Vechten), were reported in full in the society pages of the Harlem press, but best in the sparkling Harleminese of Geraldyn Dismond, who wrote for *The Interstate Tatler*. On one of Taylor Gordon's fiestas she reports as follows:

"What a crowd! All classes and colors met face to face, ultra-aristocrats, Bourgeois, Communists, Park Avenuers galore, bookers, publishers, Broadway celebs, and Harlemites were giving each other the once over. The social revolution was on. And yes, Lady Nancy Cunard was there all in black (she would) with 12 of her grand bracelets. . . . And was the entertainment on the up and up! Into swell dance music was injected African drums that played havoc with blood pressure. Jimmy Daniels sang his gigolo hits. Gus Simons, the Harlem crooner, made the River Stay Away From His Door and the Taylor himself brought out everything from 'Hot Dog' to 'Bravo' when he made high C!"

A'Lelia Walker was the then great Harlem party-giver, although Mrs. Bernia Austin fell but little behind. And at the Seventh Avenue apartment of Jessie Fauset, literary soirées with much poetry and but little to drink were the order of the day. The same was true of Lillian Alexander's, where the older intellectuals gathered. And also at Dr. E. P. Robert's.

A'Lelia Walker, however, big-hearted, night-dark hair-straightening heiress, made no pretense at being intellectual or exclusive. At her at-homes Negro poets and Negro number-bankers mingled with downtown poets and brokers. Countee Cullen would be there and Witter Bynner, Taylor Gordon, and Muriel Draper, Nora Holt and Carl Van Vechten, Andy Razaf and Aaron Copeland. The Walker apartment held

perhaps a hundred people usually issued several invitations. Unless you went it was no possible way of getting in. Entrance, lobby, steps, hall, apartment were a milling crowd, they say, some royal personage, a Scandinavian prince, I believe his equerry saw no way of getting through the crowd, so wrote in to A'Lelia Walker that His Highness was waiting without sent word back that she saw getting His Highness in, no herself get out, but she offered refreshments downstairs to

A'Lelia Walker was a Amazon in a silver turban. town house in New York apartment where she preferred and a country mansion at on the Hudson with pipe-ograms each morning to aw guests gently. Her mother great fortune from the Madam Hair Straightening processes worked wonders on unruly hair in the early 1900s—and still daughter used much of that fun. She was the joy-goddess of the 1920s.

WHEN A'Lelia Walker in 1931 she had a grand funeral invitation only. But, just as parties, a great many more had been issued than the exclusive Seventh Avenue funeral could provide for. Hours before the funeral, the street in front of the undertaker's chapel was crowded; doors were not opened until the arrived—and the cortège. When it came, there were enough family mourners, a and honorary pallbearers in session to fill the room, plus representatives of the various Walk parlors throughout the country there were still hundreds outside waving in vain their grave invitations.

Once the last honorary pall had marched in, there was crush at the doors. Muriel Rita Romilly, and I were an fortunate few to achieve an. We were startled to find standing over A'Lelia's silver was truly an amazing illusion. time *The Green Pastures* was height of its fame, and there Lawd in the person of Rev. E. Powell, a Harlem minister who exactly like Richard B. Harris famous rôle in the play. (He offered the part of De Law motion picture version.)

Soft music played and it solemn. When we were seated chapel became dead silent. I said, "The four Bon Bons sing." A nightclub quartette, often performed at A'Lelia's, arose and sang Noel Coward's "You Again," and they swung ly, as she might have liked a grand funeral and very much party. Mrs. Mary McLeod spoke in that great deep voice as only she can speak. She recalled mother of A'Lelia Walker, who had labored to the gift of beauty to Negro women and had taught them the care skin and their hair and had great business and a great for the pride and glory of the Negro—and then had given all this daughter, A'Lelia.

Then a poem of mine was Edward Perry and the girls of Walker Beauty Shops laid their on the bier.

That was really the end of times of the New Negro era.

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TALES OF A TRAVELER



I dashed madly into the surf

Here at The Traymore, the daily dip is extra enjoyable—with a special elevator that whisks you directly to and from your room. The Lido Beach itself has a noticeable air of peaceful detachment. Colorful cabanas, of course—and a dining cabana to keep you beached for the whole day. Spacious rooms in which you sleep like a babe. It's living like a king at rates most people agree are most moderate, from \$5 daily European, \$8 with meals.

Large and comfortable outside rooms with hot and cold fresh and salt water baths, delicious food skillfully prepared and appetizingly served, broad sun decks fronting the ocean, beach cabanas, bathing direct from your room, Cocktail Lounge and Gentlemen's Grill, dancing and music in the Patio del Sol and Stratosphere Room. Health Baths.

Cruise Ashore at The
TRAYMORE
 on the Boardwalk
 ATLANTIC CITY

Ronnett E. Tousley, General Manager



she was a Negro teacher of French and Spanish who later got a leave of absence from her school work to play Cain's Gal in *The Green Pastures*.

Once when Mr. Van Vechten gave a bon voyage party on the Prince of Wales Suite aboard the *Comardor* on which he was sailing, as the champagne flowed, Nora Holt, the scintillating Negro blonde from Nevada and entertainer de luxe, sang a ribald ditty called, "My Daddy Rocks Me With One Steady Roll." As she ceased, a well-known New York matron cried ecstatically with tears in her eyes, "My dear! Oh, my dear! How beautifully you sing Negro spirituals!"

Carl Van Vechten moved about filling glasses and playing host with the greatest of zest at his parties, while his tiny wife, Fania Marinoff, looking always very pretty and very gay, when the evening grew late would sometimes take Mr. Van Vechten severely to task for his drinking—before bidding the remaining guests goodnight and retiring to her bed.

Now Mr. Van Vechten has entirely given up drinking (as well as writing books and smoking cigarettes) in favor of photography. Although his parties are still gaily liquid for those who wish it, he himself is sober as a judge, but not so solemn.

For several years, he gave an annual birthday party for James Weldon Johnson, Alfred A. Knopf, Jr., and himself, for their birthdays fell on the same day. At the last of these parties, the year before Mr. Johnson died, on the Van Vechten table there were three cakes, one red, one white, and one blue. They honored a Gentile, a Negro, and a Jew—friends and fellow Americans.

HARLEM likes spectacles. On Sunday afternoons in the spring, when the lodges have their turnouts, it is good to stand on the curb and hear the bands play and see the women pass in their white regalia with swinging purple capes, preceded by the brothers in uniform with long swords at their sides and feathered helmets, or else in high hats, spats, and cutaway coats. Once Rose McClendon and I saw such a lodge parade with an a-listing band leading the procession, violins and mandolins and banjos and guitars playing in the street. It was thrilling and the music was grand.

Since almost all Harlemites work in the daytime, many of the Harlem funerals take place at night so that the friends and lodge brothers of the deceased may attend. Sometimes at eleven at night you hear a funeral march filling the air on Seventh Avenue.

The Florence Mills funeral was on a Sunday afternoon. The procession was beautiful, with the chorus girls from her show marching all in gray, and an airplane releasing flocks of blackbirds overhead.

The Countee Cullen wedding was another spectacle that had Harlem talking for a long time—the wedding of the leading lyric poet of the Negro Renaissance to the daughter of the leading old-guard Negro writer, Yolande DuBois. It was the social-literary event of the season, and very society. (I was an usher by virtue of being a poet.) It was an Easter-time wedding, held at dusk in the church pastored by Countee Cullen's father—one of the largest Negro churches in the world, but it didn't begin to hold the crowd. The first floor was given over to those with engraved invita-

tions, the balcony to the general public, and both were packed to capacity.

The bride had been teaching in Baltimore, and her bridesmaids all came from Maryland in a special car, looking very charming and pretty. I didn't own a suit of tails, so I had to rent one. In the rental shop the suit looked black, but once outside, it looked a rusty green. I felt very self-conscious in a green rented pawnshop dress suit. But I nevertheless enjoyed being in the wedding.

In the waning days of the New Negro Renaissance, in the same church where our leading poet was married, there occurred a series of the most amazing revivals ever seen in Harlem, conducted by the Rev. Dr. Beeton. Rev. Beeton filled the huge church—because he gave a good show. He had a small jazz band playing church music in syncopated time.

They began to play early in the evening so that the congregation would be in a good mood by the time Rev. Beeton himself arrived. About nine, in a long car with liveried chauffeur and a lighted cross on the hood, Rev. Beeton would appear with two valets. He would enter the church by the side door and, without looking at the right or left, proceed straight to the altar in his long black overcoat. He would come forward to the edge of the platform and, in full view of the audience, silently communicate with God, eyes shut and head back, for perhaps five minutes. Then he would open his eyes and say fervently, "I couldn't wait to commune with God! Oh no! Friends, I couldn't wait!"

Then one valet would step forward and take his hat, his coat, and his gloves; the second would hand him a handkerchief. Then he would take charge of the service, which would go on until midnight, with intervals of preaching and praying broken only by having the audience rise to sing, or to demonstrate who were Christians and who were sinners, or to parade to the altar and put down their money.

Rev. Beeton, I thought, was a very bad preacher, running back and forth across the platform, mouthing inanities and whining for God, but he could make people shout nevertheless. And the stirring rhythms of his excellent gospel swing band would cause many to rise and dance in the aisles for joy.

A great many white people came to watch him put on his show, and churches anywhere in the East fortunate enough to have him grace their rostrums for a month or two were sure to come out of the red. For, besides the collections at the altar, Rev. Beeton had an envelope system called the Consecrated Dime—a Dime a Day for God. And every Sunday he would give out his envelopes. And every Sunday following he would collect hundreds of them from the past week, each with 70¢ therein, from the poor working men and women who made up the bulk of his congregation. Every package of dimes was consecrated to God—but given to Rev. Beeton.

Rev. Beeton lived in a fine house in Harlem with his business manager, his secretaries, his valets, and most of the members of his jazz band. The furnishings were of the finest. There were luxurious drapes at the windows with the cross woven in them. There was a private chapel where Rev. Beeton prayed alone at dawn before a lighted cross. And he slept in a specially built bed with two transparent crystal crosses in the bed panels at

head and feet—crosses that glowed with a soft glow as he slept, and we heard, by God. Those men! congregation most faithful in tions and attendance would sion be shown through this.

As his popularity in Harlem grew, Rev. Beeton started a magazine, not a bad magazine, and it paid rates for material than any magazine in America—because of their pay nothing. Rev. Beeton and *New Republic* bought an article of mine and two poems. One day he sent me of the magazine to ask me if I accept a post on his staff. An hour I happened to see his list.

There he told me of his make of his magazine and the other leaders and papers he picked out not only well-printed gions but intelligent and in once, stressing, of course, the life, but not entirely.

Rev. Beeton told me he had studied of behavioristic psychology a long time—that was why he audience get up and down so to rest them and hold them in his services. And thus (I know) was able to take up more in one evening than if the started to drift out early. Now looking for someone who was with the written word to do with people through the printed page could do with them in person once did he mention God. In it of his study, he talked business no doubt, was for public consumption.

A few years later the Rev. was shot and killed in Philadelphia some say by racketeers. But given a grand funeral, attended great many saints and sinners—memory lives on.

MUSIC

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Clubs of the World. The place been constructed for this occasion, a pity to let it lie idle after, so various civic leaders of the opera company which now times its "87 consecutive sm nights" as "MIGHTY! MIGHTY! MASTODONTIC!"

AFTER a winter of dutifully singing the symphony and applauding conductor Fritz Reiner, the burghers also feel that they are to take their summer music. Local players from the Pittsburgh chrestre from mid-June on so fresco concerts on the Hotel Se laws which have an enthusiastic lowing of nearly 2000. Victor S. the orchestra's solo flutist, is in and turns out everything from a Vienna or Gay Nineties Night grand-opera jamboree.

TWELVE miles out of Denver, setting of natural rock formations as fantastic as anything our parks can offer, they are putting finishing touches on the Red Amphitheatre, which the tower sisted by WPA, expects to inaugurate with a gala performance around Day. Everything about Red Rex on a lavish western scale. The can dwarf even the most preter Wagnerian entrances, and the do self will accommodate between and six thousand people. The acc

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