18. Who and What is "Negro"?

One of the most difficult features of Locke's complex explication of race and culture is his insistence that they were not always identical. "The fallacy of the 'new' as of the 'older' thinking is that there is a type Negro who, either qualitatively or quantitatively, is the type symbol of the entire group. To break arbitrary stereotypes it is necessary perhaps to bring forward counter-stereotypes, but none are adequate substitutes for the whole truth." The counterstereotypes Locke refers to are the simplistic pictures of blacks as emotive and spiritual that are the dominant images of blacks in his *The New Negro* (1925). Locke was promoting black proletarian folk art at the writing of this article, but not because it represented the "real Negro." What makes a work of art or literature Negro, that is, socially African or Afro-American, are primarily its main theme, idiom, style, and form, which are not biological products, unchanging social phenomena, or the necessary property of a race.

Locke explores how artistic works are characterized as peculiarly Negro African because of their theme, author, or idiom. Negro art, as a social medium for Locke, is continually engaged in a search for what is truly Negro. The search is itself one of the defining characteristics of Afro-centric art.

This is the last yearly retrospective review of black literature Locke wrote for *Opportunity*. He argued in "Jingo, Counter-Jingo and Us: Retrospective Review

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of the Literature of the Negro: 1937," *Opportunity* 16 (January-February 1938), 7–11, 27, 39–42, that focusing on black contributions to civilization was not a form of ethnic chauvinism or harmful to the unity of workers. In "Jingo, Counter-Jingo and Us" he was arguing against Bernard Stolberg's "Minority Jingo," a review of Benjamin Brawley's *Negro Builders and Heroes* in the *Nation*, October 23, 1937. Locke had also argued against Richard Wright's characterization of the Negro as a function of folk art in "Freedom Through Art: A Review of Negro Art, 1870–1938," *The Crisis* 45 (July 1938), 227–229. Locke's argument in "The Contribution of Race to Culture" for the legitimacy of differentiation and unity without uniformity, provides a basis for entering into an explication of a particular group.

Who and What is "Negro"?

PART I

A Janus-faced question, "who and what is Negro"—sits like a perennial sphinx at the door of every critic who considers the literature or the art of the Negro. One may appease it, as many do, with literary honey-cakes and poppy-seed, but hackneyed clichés and noncommittal concepts only postpone the challenge. Sooner or later the critic must face the basic issues involved in his use of risky and perhaps untenable terms like "Negro art" and "Negro literature," and answer the much-evaded question unequivocally,—who and what is Negro?

This year our sphinx, so to speak, sits in the very vestibule with almost no passing space; for several of the most important books of 1941 pose this issue unavoidably. It is useless to throw the question back at the sociologist or the anthropologist, for they scarcely know themselves, having twin sphinxes in their own bailiwicks. Indeed it is a pertinent question in its own right whether the racial concept has any legitimate business in our account of art. Granted even that folks are interested in "Negro art" and "Negro literature," and that some creative artists consciously accept such a platform of artistic expression, it is warrantable to ask whether they should and whether it should be so. After all, mayn't we be just the victims of an ancient curse of prejudice in these matters and so, unwittingly blind partisans of culture politics and its traditional factionalisms?

Let us take first the question "Who is Negro," provocatively posed by the challenging foreword of Richard Wright's *Twelve Million Black Voices*. "This text," he says,

> while purporting to render a broad picture of the processes of Negro life in the United States, intentionally does not include in its considerations those areas of Negro life which comprise the so-called "Talented Tenth," or the isolated islands of mulatto leadership which are still to be found in many parts of the South, or the growing middle-class professional and business men of the North who have, in the past thirty years or more, formed a certain liaison corps between the whites and the blacks. Their exclusion from these pages does not imply any invidious judgment, nor does it stem from any desire to underestimate their progress and contributions; they are omitted in an effort to simplify a depiction of a complex movement of debased

feudal folk toward a twentieth-century urbanization. This text assumes that those few Negroes who have lifted themselves, through personal strength, talent or luck, above the lives of their fellow-blacks—like single fishes that leap and flash for a split second above the surface of the sea—are but fleeting exceptions to that vast tragic school that swims below in the depths, against the current, silently and heavily, struggling against the waves of vicissitudes that spell a common fate. It is not, however, to celebrate or exalt the plight of the humble folk who swim in the depths that I select the conditions of their lives as examples of normality, but rather to seize upon that which is qualitatively and abiding in Negro experience, to place within full and constant view the collective humanity whose triumphs and defeats are shared by the majority, whose gains in security mark an advance in the level of consciousness attained by the broad masses in their costly and tortuous upstream journey.

Here is a clear and bravely worded challenge. Who is the real Negro? Well, not only the mass Negro as over against both the culturally "representative" elite or Talented Tenth and the "exceptional" or "untypical" few of the bourgeoisie, but that "mass Negro" who in spite of the phrase about what is "qualitative and abiding in Negro experience," is common denominator proletarian rather than racially distinctive. For all its local and racial color, then, this approach practically scraps the racial factor as inconsequential and liquidates that element culturally as well as sociologically.

As I shall say later, this is an important book, a valuable social analysis, dramatically exposed and simplified, more than that,—a sound working hypothesis for the proletarian artist who has a right to his artistic *Weltanschauung*. But a school of thought or art or social theory that lays claim to totalitarian rectitude must, I think, be challenged. The fallacy of the "new" as of the "older" thinking is that there is a type Negro who, either qualitatively or quantitatively, is the type symbol of the entire group. To break arbitrary stereotypes it is necessary perhaps to bring forward counter-stereotypes, but none are adequate substitutes for the whole truth. There is, in brief, no "*The Negro*." More and more, even as we stress the right of the mass Negro to his important place in the picture, artistically and sociologically, we must become aware of the class structure of the Negro population, and expect to see, hear and understand the intellectual elite, the black bourgeoisie as well as the black masses. To this common stratification is added in the Negro's case internal

splits resulting from differential response to particular racial stresses and strains, divergent loyalties which, in my judgment, constitute racial distinctiveness, not by some magic of inheritance but through some very obvious environmental conditionings. For just as we have, for comparative example, the orthodox and the assimilate, the Zionist and anti-Zionist Jew, so in Negro life we have on practically all of these levels, the conformist and the non-conformist strains,—the conformist elite and the racialist elite, the lily-white and the race-patriotic bourgeois, the folk and the ghetto peasant and the emerging Negro proletarian. Each is a significant segment of Negro life, and as they severally come to articulate expression, it will be increasingly apparent that each is a representative facet of Negro life and experience. For a given decade one or the other may seem more significant or "representative," chiefly as it may succeed to the historical spotlight or assume a protagonist role in group expression or group movement. However, as our historical perspective lengthens and our social insight deepens, we should no longer be victims of the still all-too-prevalent formula psychology. Common denominator regional and national traits are there to be taken into account, as are also, more and more as overtones, the factors of group and racial distinctiveness. In cultural and creative expression, the flavor of idiom seems to count especially, which to me seems a valid reason for not scraping the racialist emphasis, provided of course, it does not proceed to the isolationist extreme of ghetto compartmentalization. But more important even than this emphasis is the necessity of an objective but corrective insistence on the variety of Negro types and their social and cultural milieu.

Turning to the other basic question,—what is Negro, we may ask ourselves what makes a work of art Negro, if indeed any such nomenclature is proper,—its authorship, its theme or its idiom? Different schools of criticism are obviously divided on these criteria. Each has had its inning, and probably no one regrets the comparative obsolescence of the artificial separatist criterion of Negro authorship. Only in the hectic early striving for credit and recognition could it be forgotten that the logical goal of such a viewpoint is an artistic Ghetto of "Negro art" and "Negro literature," isolated from the common cultural heritage and the vital and necessary fraternalisms of school and generation tendencies. The editors of the

brilliantly panoramic anthology, *The Negro Caravan*, pose the issue this way:

> In spite of such unifying bonds as a common rejection of the popular stereotypes and a common racial cause, writings by Negroes do not seem to the editors to fall into a unique cultural pattern. Negro writers have adopted the literary traditions that seemed useful for their purposes. They have therefore been influenced by Puritan didacticism, sentimental humanitarianism, local color, regionalism, realism, naturalism, and experimentalism. . . . The editors do not believe that the expression "Negro literature" is an accurate one, and in spite of its convenient brevity, they have avoided using it. "Negro literature" has no application if it means structural peculiarity, or a Negro school of writing. The Negro writes in the forms evolved in English and American literature. A "Negro novel," "a Negro play" are ambiguous terms. If they mean a novel or play by Negroes, then such works as *Porgy* and *The Green Pastures* are left out. If they mean works about Negro life, they include more works by white authors than by Negro, and these works have been most influential upon the American mind. The editors consider Negro writers to be American writers, and literature by American Negroes to be a segment of American literature. . . . The chief cause for objection to the term is that Negro literature is too easily placed by certain critics, white and Negro, in an alcove apart. The next step is a double standard of judgment, which is dangerous for the future of Negro writers.

Again, these are brave and necessary words. But there is a trace in them of corrective counter-emphasis, and the objective truth lies probably somewhere between, as indeed the dual significance of the anthology itself evidences. Simultaneously, a segment of American literature and a special chapter of racial expression and reaction, most of the materials in this same anthology have a double character as well as a double significance. The logical predicament is in not seeing the complete compatibility between nationally and racially distinctive elements, arising from our over-simplified and chauvinistic conception of culture. Neither national nor racial cultural elements are so distinctive as to be mutually exclusive. It is the general composite character of culture which is disregarded by such over-simplifications. By that logic, a typical American character could never have been expected as a modification of English artistic and institutional culture, but there it is, after some generations of divergence, characteristically Anglo-Saxon and American at the same time. Strictly speaking, we should consistently cite this

composite character in our culture with hyphenate descriptions, but more practically, we stress the dominant flavor of the blend. It is only in this same limited sense that anything is legitimately styled "Negro"; actually it is Afro- or Negro-American, a hybrid product of Negro reaction to American cultural forms and patterns. And when, as with many of our Negro cultural products, it is shared in the common cultural life,—our jazz music, as a conspicuous example,—it becomes progressively even more composite and hybridized, sometimes for the better, sometimes not. For we must abandon the idea of cultural purism as a criterion under the circumstances just as we have abandoned the idea of a pure race under the more scientific and objective scrutiny of the facts of history.

Thus the interpenetration of national and racial characteristics, once properly understood, resolves the traditional dilemma of the racialists and on the cultural level puts an essential parity on racial, national and regional idioms. As the point of view matures, perhaps we shall regard all three as different dimensions of cultural variation, interchangeably blended in specific art forms and combinations. Such reciprocity actually exists, and would have been recognized but for our politically minded notions of culture, which flatter majority strains in our culture and minimize minority culture elements. As a matter of fact, the racial evolves by special emphasis from the general cultural heritage and in turn flows back into the common culture. With neither claiming more than its proper due, no such invidious and peculiar character accrues to the racial, and, on such a basis, it should not be necessary to play down the racial contribution in order to prove the essential cultural solidarity of Negro creative effort with American art and letters. The position leads, if soundly developed, not to cultural separatism but to cultural pluralism. To be "Negro" in the cultural sense, then, is not to be radically different, but only to be distinctively composite and idiomatic, though basically American, as is to be expected, in the first instance.

According to such criteria, the critic has, like the chemist, the analytical job of breaking down compounds into their constituent culture elements. So far as characterization goes, this involves the task of assessing the accent of representativeness among the varying regional, racial and national elements. Theme and idiom would bulk

more significantly than source of authorship, and important expressions of Negro material and idiom by white authors would belong as legitimately in a Negro as in a general anthology.

Turning to the novels of the year, the most publicized of them all, Mrs. Wheaton's *Mr. George's Joint*, Jefferson Prize Award winner, turns out by my analysis as Negro in theme only but unrepresentative in idiom, despite its laboriously studied local color and dialect. It is comforting to learn that since the decision, the editor of the *Virginia Quarterly Review* has disavowed further responsibility for the award series. Far too often, as in this case, meticulous photographic reporting passes in these days of realism for vital interpretation. At best a second-rate regional novel of small-town Texan life, there is nothing deeply interpretative of Negro life in the book; there is more insight in single short stories of Faulkner or Caldwell, who know how to find the human significance of the sordid and otherwise trivial.

Julian Rayford's *Cottonmouth*, however, for all its slight sketchiness, has much of the genuine feel and tempo of the deep South, and an emotional insight into Negro-white relationships. The regional Southern novel has not had a particularly good yield: only Idwal Jones' *Black Bayou* and the late William Percy's *Lanterns on the Levee* approach any close companionship with the previous high levels in this genre. In initiating a new approach, Arthur Kuhl's *Royal Road* is significant, but it is scarcely a full realization of its potentialities at that. A melodrama with dimensions of moral symbolism, it fails to convince either in the realistic vein or in its symbolic overtone. And so the tragedy of Jesse Stewart, born of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, Pa., scarcely warrants the atonement motive insinuated into a sad story of persecution, false witness and miscarriage of judicial procedure. The social forces responsible are not sufficiently delineated; so that Jesse's electrocution seems more a bizarre accident than a racial tragedy.

William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge*, however, fully evokes its milieu and also most of its characters. The story of the three Morse brothers, temperamentally so different, tragically caught in the slum-ghetto of a Pennsylvania steel-mill town, fighting rather blindly the tides of labor feuds just as they had previously struggled with the tragic precariousness of their Kentucky sharecropper farm is a contribution to the still small stock of Negro social analysis fiction.

The stock of slave-trade fiction, with its romantic appeal is, on the contrary, overfull. As these lurid historical canvasses multiply, one marvels at the general state of the reading public that apparently so avidly consumes them. *The Sun Is My Undoing* promises to become another *Gone With the Wind* sensation. Interspersed with its romance and adventure is some rather unorthodox truth about the slave trade's social complications, its intrigue, concubinage and miscegenation, but the endless rehearsing of these particular chapters of history seems worse than gratuitous. *The Unquiet Field* is a much more sober and integrated account of the same materials, but it will in all likelihood be much less popular than its glamorous competitor.

With the postponement of Langston Hughes's *Shakespeare in Harlem*, the poetry output dwindles to almost negligible proportions. Several books of verse in the category of children's verse will be considered later; and even Arna Bontemps' *Golden Slippers* anthology is gauged for youthful readers, with emphasis on the lighter lyric vein. He has nevertheless had the taste to include principally the better poets, so that the book becomes an acceptable anthology of the lighter genre apart from age limitations. Surely the poetic lull must have some other explanation than a creative drought; probably the disinclination of publishers to venture verse publication for "fledgling" poets, but just possibly also the distraction and disillusionment prevailing in the ranks of Negro youth.

One of the major contributions of the year thus becomes the very comprehensive and much needed anthology of Negro authors in all the literary forms which Sterling Brown, Arthur Davis and Ulysses Lee have collated in *The Negro Caravan*. Here is definitive editing of the highest order, combined with authoritative historical and critical annotation. For years to come it will be the indispensable handbook for the study of the Negro's contribution to the literature of the Negro. In the critical introductions to the various literary types, brief mention is wisely added to give some notion of the important correlation of Negro creative effort with that of white authors treating Negro themes; which somewhat offsets the inconsistency of the anthology's non-racialist critical platform and its actual restriction to Negro authorship.

Steig's *Send Me Down* is a very authentic and penetrating analysis of Negro jazz and jazz-makers, proving that in competent hands even

the picturesque side of Negro life can be instructively presented. In blatant contrast is the elaborate but superficial *Harlem* of Saroyan and Albert Hirschfeld. The flippancy, both literary and artistic, is condescending, and though the types have changed in the decade that has elapsed, Miguel Covarrubias's *Negro Drawings* still remain the unchallenged superior version of Harlem types and atmospheres. Hirschfeld has caught only surface values, with little psychological or social penetration; clever as caricatures, his drawings only occasionally [are] apt as type portraiture.

Victor Lawson's maiden critical effort is a very competent analysis of Dunbar as man and poet; the one from a not too insistent or enlightening psycho-analytic approach and the other from a rather illuminating analysis of the strains of sentimental romanticism from which his literary pedigree derives. The study quite outdistances the only other extant critical study and biography of this poet, and should supersede it with students of Dunbar or his period of race poetry.

In the field of drama, the joint version of *Native Son* by Richard Wright and Paul Green is the highpoint of the dramatic crop. Oddly enough the climaxes of the drama toward the close die down to dramatic monologues and tableau, while earlier scenes are electric with the best of both drama and melodrama. This only accentuates in some ways the faults of the novel itself, which is more skillfully contrived in its earlier chapters. But no dimuendo of values in the sequence can stifle the power and veracity of the material, which after all is one of the most incisive versions of contemporary Negro life and its social implications. The success of the drama with audiences of all types has already demonstrated the importance of such frank veracity and such uncompromising vitality.

Shirley Graham's full length drama of the West Virginia coal mines, *Dust to Earth*, was elaborately presented by the Yale University Theatre group. Its social background reporting is unfortunately overlaid by a melodramatic plot interest which does not gain force by the defeatist sacrifice of the hero, a denouement which decidedly takes the edge off a play that could have been a pioneering essay in Negro labor tragedy. Our dramatists have on the whole not yet shaken off the timidity which once so banefully beset our novelists. In *On Strivers Row*, Abram Hill has written a good groundbreaking

excursion into social comedy. It still remains to be seen what success this type of play will have with Negro audiences, who have yet to become conditioned to dramatic self-criticism. It is to be hoped that the Harlem Peoples Theater will have eventual success in so obvious a need of the Negro drama.

PART II

Neither history nor sociology nor even anthropology have as yet any definitive answer to our eternal question. But they are steadily though not directly approaching that goal. Progress toward such an objective, it seems, cannot follow the bee-line, but must go, like the sailboat, on a tactical course, now overshooting the mark and tacking back on a counter zig-zag in the other direction. Out of successive emphases and from the polemical clash of differing interpretations, we are finally getting where the objective truth about the Negro can be pieced together and put into a clear and meaningful perspective.

In what is one of the richest seasons of sociological yield, we have in the factual literature of 1941 several cases in point,—as an important historical example, the corrective counter-statements of Buckmaster's unconventional history of the anti-slavery movement, *Let My People Go*; or in the sociological field, the unorthodox approaches and conclusions of the current American Youth Commission studies of Negro youth; or again, in the case of anthropology, the provocative counter-statements of Herskovits' *The Myth of the Negro Past.* The older commonplaces about the Negro are being challenged on every hand, and the last phase,—let us hope, of the generation-long polemics of race theory is coming to a head. As I have already stated, there is often over-emphasis and over-simplification in these new provocative counter-statements; and they, too, in many cases lack the full objectivity and final equilibrium of the ultimate truth. However, they are far more objective and realistic than the points of view and theories which they challenge and threaten to displace or modify, and unlike them, are not grounded either in majority bias or minority apologetics. Two very vital requisites for scientific objectivity and final truth are rapidly establishing themselves,—race scholarship is shedding its protective sentimen-

talities and apologetic bias, while white scholarship, on the other hand, both by more sympathetic penetration and through wise interracial collaboration, is getting almost for the first time an "inside" view of Negro life. Such collaboration, in fact, is becoming the order of the day, as will be even more apparent when the full series of the Carnegie-Myrdal monographs becomes published. The American Youth Commission series is another notable example of this warrantable and fruitful type of collaborative study.

As such scholarship matures, scientific integration removes more and more the isolation and the "peculiar" uniqueness of the Negro's situation and its problems. Common denominator forces and factors are increasingly used to explain and interpret Negro life. The *en bloc* conceptions of the Negro are breaking down gradually into proper and realistic recognition of the diversifications as circumstances and environment vary from place to place, or from generation to generation. Both sociologists and anthropologists are beginning to recognize the complementary effect of the Negro on whites as well as the effects of the white on the Negro; class stratification among Negroes is at last being taken into serious account, and general economic and social factors are coming to the fore as transcending in influence the traditionally "racial." A book like *Color and Human Nature*, as last year's *Children of Bondage*, introduces the welcome novelty of the case study approach and psycho-analytic interpretation, as well as the diversification of individuality alongside those of class stratification and type of community environment. *Thus Be Their Destiny* specifically stresses community structure and the part it plays in racial and interracial reactions. *Color, Class and Personality* not only takes into account all these vital variables, but poses the basic problems of Negro youth over the common denominator of the cognate issues in the life of American youth generally. Community studies of the Negro, like that on the *New Haven Negroes*, wisely styled a "social history," take on increasingly what the Chicago school calls an "ecological" approach, that is, revealing the influence on the Negro of the immediate environment and its socio-economic forces. Indeed some of them treat the Negro condition as one of the significant indices of these common community factors. Even Professor Herskovits' study, in spite of its emphasis, (indeed, I would say, its overemphasis) on the hypothesis of African culture

survivals, uses the Negro as a base for the study of general sociological and cultural phenomena, and thus makes the analysis yield something beyond the mere explanation of the Negro's own situation in terms of insight into the general nature of social forces and cultural process. The positive side of *The Myth of The Negro Past* thus becomes its analysis of the interplay of the forces of cultural survival and assimilation and its evidence about the general character of acculturation. A book like *When Peoples Meet*, sub-titled "A Study in Race and Culture Contacts," generalizes even further, and places the so-called race question in a universal context of culture contacts and conflicts, emphasizing the common features and forces involved in majority and minority relations and their interaction on a world scale. In a period of world crisis, precipitated by a global war, it is particularly significant and promising when the study of race and interracial problems broadens out into an integrated analysis, on the one hand, of basic problems of human group relations and on the other, of wide-scale comparative study of universal forces in group interaction.

Henrietta Buckmasters' well documented story of the "Underground Railroad" and the Abolition movement, in addition to being the most outspoken evaluation of the part played by the Negro himself in the struggle for freedom, rightly stresses the sustained and widespread collaboration of the white and Negro anti-slavery forces. Historically authoritative, the narrative is lifted from the level of dead history to its proper plane of a great national crusade. Even more than in the previous studies of slave revolts and insurrections, the figure of the militant Negro is strikingly documented and vindicated in his all too underestimated role of co-author of his own freedom; the Negro abolitionists, Purvis, Forten, Redmond, Lenox, Wells Brown, Delaney, Douglass and Harriet Tubman are properly paired with their white sponsors and collaborators,—Garrison, Tappan, Coffin, Parker, Burney and John Brown. Carrying the same heroic story, with less documentation and somewhat less accurate perspective, Anna Curtis' *Stories of the Underground Railroad* performs a similar service for the less sophisticated reader.

In a more traditional historical vein, A. A. Taylor continues his reconstruction period studies with a factual but not too interpretive narrative of *The Negro in Tennessee*; important principally for its

documentation of the Negro factors in the politics of a border state. Of decidedly different scope and interpretative power is the social history already mentioned of *New Haven Negroes* by Robert A. Warner. Here, with the aid of obviously competent Negro research assistance, the life story of a Northern Negro community has been illuminatingly told from colonial times to the present day. This is a type of story sorely needed despite the somewhat discouraging revelation in this instance of a group tragedy of economic displacement downward to marginal and less skilled labor, typical, we fear, of the older Northern centers of the Negro population and especially of New England. More and more Negro studies will need, as in this case, to be put on an intensive regional or local basis, both for historical and sociological accuracy and for the correct evaluation of interracial reactions.

Two pioneer chronicles of the history of Wilberforce and Howard Universities open up the lagging field of institutional history. Each garners the materials needed for the definitive histories that must eventually be written of these institutions, which in that case, must discuss them more penetratingly in terms of their contemporary social conditions and educational policies. The Howard narrative, product of a lifetime's avocational interest on the part of Professor Walter Dyson, though cast in the reminiscent "alumni mould," more nearly approaches a generally useful and interesting public chronicle of one of our most important educational centers. In a documentary way, it has performed a very necessary service.

But history has long since outgrown the traditional job of factual chronicling; the modern brand stands or falls by interpretation. In a less traditional, in fact in a provocatively unorthodox vein, Richard Wright has attempted in *Twelve Million Black Voices* a folk history of the Negro. His identification of the mass Negro with the whole historical Negro cause has already been discussed; with the qualified reservation that however over-generalized, a neglected segment of our problem and an important economic analysis of our disadvantaged minority status is not to be ignored. But although such a gift horse is not to be looked at too much askance, from the point of view of a complete and objective historical story the work has to be challenged and taken with the reservations necessary to polemical and *partis pris* interpretations. Frankly stated as a thesis at the out-

set, the reader knows, however, precisely what assent or discount to apply; certainly Mr. Wright cannot be accused of sailing or riding under false colors.

In the field of biography a wide gamut is covered by a minimum of publications; at least they do not overlap in type. One of the most significant is the timely re-publication by the Pathway Press of one of the few classics of Negro autobiography,—Frederick Douglass's *Life and Times*. Here, of course, we not only have this heroic past and its still pertinent example, but the field of statesmanship and public movements. At the other pole of achievement, we have an intimate and first-hand account of Marian Anderson's mid-career by her friend and accompanist, Kosti Vehanen. This authentic record of her phenomenal and rather sudden international success after years of painstaking preparation becomes a rare item of Negro biography in the field of formal music, and preserves the record in undisputed inside documentation. It also gives us inspiring glimpses of the imperturbable personality around which the exciting drama seems to revolve without considerable change or effect; to the extent that the symbolic element rather than the human eventually dominates the book, particularly with that historically symbolic climax with which the narrative ends,—the Easter Sunday Lincoln Memorial concert.

Quite more earthly and human in its appeal is the chatty, almost garrulous narrative of W. C. Handy, the *Father of the Blues*. Here is the inning of the Negro folk element and its Cinderella story of early persecution and disdain and eventual fame and glory. The riches of that bonanza of jazz and ragtime were not vouchsafed to Mr. Handy, but at least from an authoritative source the Negro credit for the original contribution that Tin Pan Alley and the commercial music trust have all too glibly claimed is set down beyond all dispute and gainsaying. To have accomplished this culminating task of a lifetime of loyal music pioneering is probably one of Mr. Handy's deepest satisfactions as it will also be one of his most appreciated racial services. In quite another field, that of research science, Dr. Maloney contributes the autobiography of a pioneering pharmacologist. Aside from its personal significance, this book will undoubtedly have inspirational value in documenting the possibilities of Negro success in a field that, as a matter of fact, has had considerable achievement, like

that of Delaney, Turner, Carver, Hinton, Imes, Julian, and Just, but far too little biographical chronicling.

In the historical chapters of the various state guides sponsored by the Federal and now the State Writers' Projects, from time to time the honorable precedent set at the outset of including the Negro has taken firm root and flourished. With variable interpretative power, but almost without exception, such chapters or passing mention have been a creditable feature of this mounting list of publications that now includes almost every state in the union. Two specialized studies of Negro life, both of folk-lore and folkways, have also appeared this year,—Mason Crum's *Gullah* and the Georgia Project's *Drums and Shadows*. They are both acceptable contributions to the documentation of our folk-lore, though in each case, I think they are too naively primitivist in their interpretation of the materials. They do the invaluable service, whatever reservations will ultimately be placed on the commentary, of collating this material before it vanishes completely. But they reveal the South and the Negro that are vanishing.

The South that is still very much with us, and that remains one of the basic concerns of national reconstruction is presented by another series of books, three of which are definitive studies of prime sociological importance. *Sharecroppers All*, the joint work of Ira Reid and Arthur Raper, in addition to being a sound economic and sociological diagnosis of the breakdown of the Southern rural economy, provides a basis of constructive remedy not merely for the economic nub of the "race problem" but of the much needed economic rehabilitation of the entire South. It finds common factors behind the regional as well as the racial differentials, furnishing scientific confirmation of Booker Washington's instinctive common-sense which expressed itself in the epigrammatic—"You can't hold a man down in the ditch without staying down there with him." The book's bold analysis is matched by its brave prophecy, for on the one hand it frankly says:

> The representative of the new South knows that the region is less handicapped by the sharecroppers than by the heritage of the plantation system, less by outside opposition than by inside complacency, less by the presence of the Negro than by the white man's attitude toward him, less by the spectre of class uprisings and Negro domination than by the fear of them

—and then concludes that "the South, by integrating national and community efforts may be able to pay the bills of yesterday's exploitation of land and man, may be able to conserve and use her natural resources and so restore the region to its rightful place in the nation."

With usual statistical thoroughness, but with the implementation of case studies and personality profiles, Dr. Charles S. Johnson adds to his impressive series of studies the latest,—*Growing Up in The Black Belt*. His picture gains an important human dimension thereby, and to the usual analysis of the Southern rural economy is added a picture of a restive, changing though bewildered younger generation. No one reading the analysis can overlook the imminence of momentous psychological change in spite of all the expected provincialisms and inferiority depressions: the almost frightening paradox of a changing Negro in a recalcitrant South that either refuses to change or to recognize change.

The Deep South takes a more academic turn in a painstaking analysis of the structure of what a group of researchers have chosen as the "typical Southern society." As a general thesis the authors emphasize the rigid dominance of the bi-racial "caste system," but in spite of its almost endless documentation have to report from time to time such numerous anomalies and exceptions as almost to invalidate the practical usefulness of this much-mooted "caste theory" for a practical understanding of Southern social code and practise. Both sex and business relations have always had their devious ways of bridging the "great social divide," and the Old South, never any too consistent in its actual practise of race relations, except on the basis of anything pragmatically conducive to dominance and exploitation, should not have been taken so seriously according to the letter of its stock rationalizations. The longer one resides in the South the more conscious one becomes of its inconsistencies and exceptions. Not only more notice should have been taken of these, but also of the forces of insecurity and challenge which the South now faces. Scant attention has been paid, however, to the insecure economic structure of the entire society or to the increasing conflict of economic interests with the traditional social values both among the whites and Negroes. For lack of this, the study is on the whole academic, sterile and retrospective, whereas with emphasis on such economic factors,

it could so easily have been enlighteningly diagnostic and practically helpful.

Color and Human Nature, the parallel story of Negro life in an urban industrial center, furnishes, in marked contrast, a vital, dynamic account of what it means to be a Negro in America of today. The basic forces and reactions to which it calls attention are common even to the rural Southern situation which *The Deep South* so dully anatomizes, but in addition, the peculiar stresses of urban competition, of wider class differentiation and of economic and cultural advancement are illuminatingly reported. Nor are the findings too highly generalized, for case reports emphasize both the successful and the unsuccessful accommodations which circumstance and personality introduce into the racial equation. The reader gets the impression that there are important variables of color, class, economic and educational status, and even of sex and personality which defy any mass or even any regional formula, and make of each individual life a rather unpredictable drama of personality development and adjustment in spite of the handicaps of prejudice. Superimposed, one gets, of course, the other side of the picture, a clear knowledge of the group predicament and its resistant, reactionary traditions and limitations. The net result is a balanced sane perspective.

The Myth of the Negro Past, culminating years of painstaking comparative study of the Negro in Africa, North, Central and South America, is inevitably an important book. In line with the progressive wing of anthropological scholarship, it attempts considerable and vindicating revision of traditional conceptions of the Negro. Over against the stereotype of the Negro's childlike, docile character, it documents the little known facts of considerable social and cultural resistance to slave subordination. Against conventional notions of low-grade African stock and of "inferior," negligible culture background, it advances and justifies the facts of biological hardihood, seasoned social discipline and considerable cultural development in the African racial background. It is argued that a knowledge of this cultural background will lessen prejudice and rehabilitate the Negro considerably in American public opinion,—a strangely moralistic corollary, arguing well for the author's humanity but scarcely realistic enough to justify this moralistic departure from scientific objectivity. What is of most value in the book is neither this cultural

vindication, salutary as it is for the lay public, black and white, nor this moral reformism, but the broadly gauged analysis of the African background and its widespread linkages with all parts of the American continent through the dispersion of the slave trade. This, as has already been said, is a story of reciprocal cultural interchange and influence, of Negro on white, and white on Negro, and constitutes a pioneer contribution to the ground problems of acculturation as it has affected the African peoples and their Western descendants. In this area, the study is as valuable for the lines of prospective research it forecasts as for those it tentatively summarizes.

But here again, a reformist zeal overemphasizes the thesis of African survivals, transforming it from a profitable working hypothesis into a dogmatic obsession, claiming arbitrary interpretations of customs and folkways which in all common-sense could easily have alternative or even compound explanations. Instead of suggesting the African mores and dispositions as conducive factors along with other more immediate environmental ones, the whole force of the explanation, in many instances, pivots on Africanisms and their sturdy, stubborn survival. The extreme logic of such a position might, as a matter of fact, lead to the very opposite of Dr. Herskovits' liberal conclusions, and damn the Negro as more basically peculiar and unassimilable than he actually is or has proved himself to be. As elsewhere, the truth would seem to be in between either extreme of interpretation, either that of the Negro as the empty-handed, parasitic imitator or that of the incurably atavistic nativist. In fact, because of his forced dispersion and his enforced miscegenation, the Negro must eventually be recognized as a cultural composite of more than ethnic complexity and cultural potentiality.

James Saxon Childers in *Mumbo Jumbo, Esquire* recognizes the same growing complexity in the African. Of Africa today he says: "Any book that limits itself to either the primitive or the modern in Africa is unfair; such a book does not tell the whole story. A reporter must leave the city and go into the jungle, leave the jungle and return to the city; he must travel over paved highways in automobiles and over the desert on camels." Sketchy but highly suggestive, and what is more important, open-minded, this enlightened and enlightening travelogue represents a new symptom of broadened interracial and intercultural understanding. Dr. George Brown's competent *Eco-*

nomic History of Liberia is particularly gratifying, as an American Negro's evaluation of this offshoot of American Negro colonization. The Oxford Press reprint of the Baganda scholar's study of his own people's customary law is equally symptomatic; as is also Professor Schapera's comprehensive study of *Married Life in An African Tribe*, a study of constructive modifications of Kgatla tribal customs after the initial forced changes and disruption of colonial South African contact. Such studies are no longer exotica; they are at the heart of our contemporary problems of world crisis and world reconstruction. Though sentimentally interested as Negroes, we should more and more become interested in these issues as world citizens. The international significance and import of Africa today may very well add another dimension to the experience of being Negro, and lead even to the renovation and enrichment of the all too confused and limited current concept of who and what is Negro.

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