Zdzisław Głębocki

ENTER THE NEW NEGRO:

Cultural Dimensions of the Harlem Renaissance

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To my Mother

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PREFACE

The creative outburst of the artistic movement known as the Harlem Renaissance has recently attracted the attention of numerous scholars and resulted in a number of collections, anthologies, bibliographies, and historical and literary studies. A mere glance at the titles of recently published books and articles gives proof of a true renaissance of the Renaissance: *Double-take: a Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology* (2001), *Rereading the Harlem Renaissance* (2002), *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance* (2003), *Harlem Renaissance Lives* (2009), *African American Art: Harlem Renaissance, The Civil Rights Movement, and Beyond* (2012).[1] These studies have brought about a revision of the previously established canon of artistic output and resulted in a wave of new interpretations focused mainly on race, class and gender, while at the same time attempting to introduce into the established cultural mainstream new or often marginalized authors and fresh new interpretations.[2] Renaissance authors are seen here as those who

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[1] Venetria K. Patton and Maureen Honey, eds. *Double-take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology,* Rudgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J, 2001; Sharon L. Jones, *Rereading the Harlem Renaissance: Race, and Gender in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West,* Greenwood Press, Westport, 2002; Genevieve Fabre and Michel Feith, eds. *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2003; Richard J. Powell, Virginia Mecklenburg, Theresa Slowik, *African American Art: Harlem Renaissance, The Civil Rights Movement, and Beyond*, New York 2012; Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, eds. *Harlem Renaissance Lives*, Oxford University Press, USA, 2009.

[2] Examples of recent publications presenting this perspective: A.B. Christa Schwarz, *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2003; Thomas H. Wirth, ed. *Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance: Selections from the Work of Richard Bruce Nugent*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002; Stephen Knadler , "Sweetback Style: Wallace Thurman and a Queer Harlem Renaissance" in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 48.4, 2002, p. 899-936; Elisa F. Glick, "Harlem's Queer Dandy: African-American Modernism and the Artifice of Blackness, in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 49.3, 2003, p. 414-442; Ula Y. Taylor, "Negro Women are Great Thinkers and Doers: Amy Jacques-Garvey and Community Feminism in the United States, 1924-1927", in *Journal of Women's History*, 12.2, 2000, pp. 104-126.

"fought against narrow-mindedness and bigotry in an attempt to transcend racial, class, and gender boundaries that [...] constrained them"[3]; furthermore, one of the new roles of research is to "restore and underline the importance of women's writing"[4] and sexual orientations of the Harlem Renaissance.

This demonstrates that the Harlem Renaissance as a movement and, in particular, the works of art (both literary and visual) that were created while it flourished are still present in cultural circulation and continue to inspire both contemporary artists and critics. Janusz Sławiński has observed that a work of art (in his analysis he specifically refers to literary works but the argument may be extended to encompass other cultural manifestations), exists not only in the historical context in which it came into being (was shaped and nourished) but is constantly being reformulated, reshaped, and assigned new meanings and values. It is eminently "open" and remains "alive" under the condition that its existence is extended through continuous reinterpretations. During this process which takes place in completely new contexts (historical, social, intellectual), the work of art is saturated with new and often multiple meanings which are as if implanted into it.[5] As has been observed above, the artistic achievements of the Harlem Renaissance are presently undergoing the process of numerous reinterpretations.

In the midst of all this discussion – which in fact echoes general critical tendencies of recent years – the wider, more complex cultural contexts in which the Renaissance was born and flourished are often overlooked.

Recent criticism of the Harlem Renaissance focuses predominantly on the strictly literary or historical dimensions of the movement while often neglecting other, equally important, cultural manifestations such as the visual arts and music, and particularly the context of the developing mass society and mass culture in the United States. At the beginning of the twentieth century, industrialisation, urbanisation, and commercialism brought to light the emerging mass society and culture. The process of reshaping the "old", predominantly oral forms of communication, into the dynamically developing mass communication of the press, phonograph records, radio and film was on the way, and the African

[3] Jones, op. cit., p. 3.

[4] Patton and Honey, op. cit., p. xx.

[5] Janusz Sławiński, *Próby Teoretycznoliterackie*, Warszawa, 1992, p. 94; Janusz Sławiński, *Dzieło, Język, Tradycja*, Warszawa, 1974, p. 57.

American[6] minority was influenced by these forces just as strongly as the white majority.

This study is an effort to re-examine African American culture at the beginning of the twentieth century, and specifically the Harlem Renaissance, in terms of its manifold social and artistic dimensions and to suggest that a study of African American culture without viewing it from the broader social and cultural perspective of the dominant American reality has to be limited. The fundamental issue being addressed here is whether African American culture was able to retain its racial and cultural identity or rather was acculturated into the dominant American white culture, losing in the process some characteristic features.

The Harlem Renaissance, like the whole of African American culture, needs to be viewed not as a stable entity but as a dynamic process. Cultural anthropology sees dynamism and change in cultures as the basic concepts of its inquiry. Early twentieth-century cultural anthropologists, criticizing earlier concepts of stable, homogeneous forms of culture and their slow evolutionary features, introduced the idea of diffusionism as an attempt to understand the nature of culture in terms of the origin of culture traits and their spread from one society to another.[7] The 1930s brought studies focused on the concepts of acculturation and cultural patterning which had replaced diffusion as the main topics of anthropological research. Following this approach, Richard Thurnwald defined acculturation as "a process of alteration to new conditions of life"[8]; other critics emphasized that not only is acculturation a process, but it is a "dynamic process".[9] Melville J. Herskovits notes that the study of acculturation is concerned with the interaction of cultural groups and defines the concept as "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand

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6 Being aware of the historical evolution and emotional charge of words "Negro" and "black" I will use the recently accepted expression "African Americans". However, "Negro" and "black" will also be used synonymously reflecting their historical context usage without any intended derogatory meaning.

7 Ewa Nowicka, *Świat człowieka – świat kultury. Systematyczny wykład problemów antropologii kulturowej.* Warszawa, 1991, pp. 102-108.

8 Richard Thurnwald, "The Psychology of Acculturation", *American Anthropologist*, 1932, no. 34, p. 557.

9 Melville J. Herskovits, "The Significance of the Study of Acculturation for Anthropology", *American Anthropologist*, 1937, vol. 2, pp. 259-264; Bernard J. Siegel, Evon Z. Vogt, James B. Watson, Leonard Broom, "Acculturation: An Exploratory Formulation", *American Anthropologist*, 1953, no. 55, pp. 973-1002.

contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups".[10] "First-hand contact" is seen by most critics as a prerequisite for acculturation. The question has been raised whether acculturation is a one-way, unidirectional process of change or a two-way process. A majority of critics view acculturation as a two-way, reciprocal process featuring "subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups". Herskovits adds that "acculturation has to do with continuous contact and hence implies a more comprehensive interchange between two bodies of tradition".[11] The close proximity of different cultural groups results in continual interaction with each other, cultural mixture and cultural borrowings which in recent studies find their manifestations in the development of concepts of cultural syncretism, hybridity and creolization.[12]

To repeat the main argument, this study will attempt to investigate to what degree African Americans as a group underwent the process of acculturation and to what degree they retained their racial and cultural identity in the dominant white culture.

Narrowing the argument, this study surveys the social and cultural dimensions of the Harlem Renaissance in the span of time between the years 1900 and 1929. In the first two chapters, which are more sociologically and historically focused, the author traces the history of the Negro quarter in Harlem: the reasons for the migration to the North, the waves of migration of Negroes and their impact on the lives of other ethnic groups, the emergence of the African American community with its social and cultural institutions and outlines the turbulent process of the formation of racial self-consciousness. Chapters three and four are devoted to the cultural movement of the Harlem Renaissance. Specifically, they concentrate on the identity quest of African American artists and intellectuals, survey the African American culture prior to the movement, and analyse, among others, the two most significant publications of the Harlem Renaissance: the Harlem issue of *The Survey Graphic* and the anthology *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Finally, in chapter five, the three decades in the history of African Americans as an experience

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[10] R. Redfield, R. Linton, and M.J. Herskovits, "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation", *American Anthropologist,* 1936, vol . 38, p. 149.

[11] Melville J. Herskovits, *Acculturation: The Study of Culture Contacts*, Gloucester, Ma., 1958, p. 15.

[12] For example see: Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London, 1995; Mike Feartherstone, ed., *Global Culture*, London, 1990.

within the American reality both in cultural and economic dimensions are examined. It is an attempt to find out to what extent the Harlem Renaissance and the years preceding it were the fruit of the black race itself and to what degree the product of the intellectual, artistic and economic forces of the epoch.

The multidiscipline approach[13] of this study necessitates the implementation of diverse forms of inquiry which include sociologically and historically oriented research tools (including a quantitative approach – especially in reference to the presented demographic and statistical data of the first two chapters), elements of literary[14], fine arts and aesthetics criticism, but predominantly, relies on cultural and media studies analysis.

[13] This sociologically oriented analysis of culture reflects the recent tendency of the breakdown of some of the disciplinary barriers between the humanities and the social sciences, opening a completely new spectrum of inquiry in cultural studies.

[14] The author will attempt to identify and reconstruct literary "contexts" in which the works of the Harlem Renaissance were created. This will be in accordance with the concept of "historical-literary contexts" developed by Janusz Sławiński (*Miejsce Interpretacji*, Gdańsk, 2006) who maintains that works of art are strongly imbedded in historical, literary, social and psychological circumstances which have accompanied their creation.

NOTE ON SOURCES, ANNEX AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

The most difficult problem of research of the Harlem Renaissance is the lack of a central repository for the papers devoted to the movement. The principal locations of materials relating to the Renaissance include the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library; the Countee Cullen Memorial Collection in Special Collections at the Trevor Arnett Library of Atlanta University; the Countee Cullen Papers in the Amistad Research Center, Tulane University; the Zora Neale Hurston Collection at the University of Florida; the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection in the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library at Yale University; the Alain Leroy Locke Papers in the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University; the NAACP Collection in the Library of Congress; the William Stanley Braithwaite Papers in the Houghton Library at Harvard University; the Jean Toomer Collection in Special Collections at Fisk University; the Carl Van Vechten Collection in the Manuscript Division at the New York Public Library; and the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin.[1]

This study primarily relies on the materials collected in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library and the Special Collections and Archives at the W.E.B. Du Bois Library (University of Massachusetts, Amherst).

An Annex supplements the study and supplies an additional context. It contains a set of visual representations of African American sculptures, illustrations and press advertisements.

The study is based predominantly on primary sources which include newspapers, journals and magazines published in the United States in the first three decades of the twentieth century. These are both paper editions as well as editions in digital form (eg. *The Complete New Yorker*) and on-line resources (eg. *Historical New York Times – 1851-2001*).

[1] This note is partly based on C.D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston, 1988, p. 233.

In some instances, such as for example in the case of the magazine *The Crisis*, the author perused whole yearbooks but in other cases examined only particular issues. Primary sources also include autobiographies, memoirs, novels, visual art representations, audio recordings, census reports and other published and unpublished documents. The study is supplemented by secondary literature which contains a selected bibliography of Polish translations of African-American writers.

All quotations from the sources retain their original spelling.

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INTRODUCTION

Although African Americans have been present in American society since the beginning of the colonization of the New World (the first slaves were brought to Jamestown in 1619), it was during the first decades of the 20th century that they gained the wider attention of their fellow citizens.[1] This new interest was a result of the cultural re-awakening of the African American population as well as of changes taking place in American society. During a relatively short period of time, there sprang up a lively movement in literature, music and the visual arts closely connected with the New Negro concepts of racial awareness and black pride, never before experienced by this ethnic minority.

At the turn of the century, waves of migrating "black folk" from the rural South began to reach the industrial cities of the North. With the change of residence, rustic social bonds were transferred and acquired new qualities. The rural Negro represented a traditional peasant culture inhabiting societies closed in enclaves, isolated from one another. This "ecological isolation" irrevocably vanished on contact with the industrial civilization.[2] The removal from the "little community" to condensed urban agglomerations brought about changes in all spheres of the lives of African Americans.[3] The urban society, seen here as a process in the making, was a new value not only to the individuals but to the race as a whole. The African American was beginning to develop a sense that his race had in common something of value. The isolation of this ethnic group in urban ghettoes, as Yankley, Ericson and Juliani argue,

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1 One should have in mind that the Negro problem was a permanent topic recurring at the turning points of American history: during colonial times when the "Black Codes" were formulated prior to and during the Revolution and the Civil War as well as during Reconstruction.

2 Jerzy J. Wiatr, *Społeczeństwo. Wstęp do Socjologii Systematycznej*, Warszawa, 1981, p. 140.

3 R. Redfield, *The Little Community*, Chicago, 1960.

intensified the ethnic bond.[4] The new conditions forced the Negro from a simple to a complex life, from a rustic homogeneous social and cultural environment to urban pluralism. The Negro peasant culture, being a distinctly regional folk product, in the urban reality underwent drastic changes to emerge as an outstanding form of the culture of the race. The "handicapped start" of African Americans in the New World, as M.J. Butcher states in *The Negro in American Culture*, turned out to be productive. The group experience of the slave era was followed by a race experience which city life imposed on the peasant newcomers.

A process of racial integration began; the place where it was most clearly visible was Harlem. The prosperous years of the black race lasted there only about three decades. The last Tuesday of October 1929, named Black Tuesday, was a turning point in American modern history heralded by the collapse of Wall Street. With this date the hardships of the Great Depression began. "Black Tuesday", writes Jervis Anderson, "looked to be much a white occasion. The looks were deceiving, to be sure – as Harlemites were to realize when the aftermath of Black Tuesday began to be felt – for Harlem was to be more badly hit by the Depression than any other section of New York City."[5] The Harlem Renaissance, with its unique flowering of African American art, the surprising issue of African Americans' new experience, was shattered by the Depression.[6] "The Depression, the human misery in Harlem and New York, brought the social disparity sharply home [...]. It was difficult to write about the mystery and mysticism and spontaneous harmony of Negroes' souls when what they really shared was cold and hunger and despair."[7]

The traces of social collectivity typical of modern urban communities were visible in black Harlem at the beginning of the 20th century. Similarly as in other urban communities, Harlemites were also "joiners"[8], setting up "voluntary associations" which were "proper means of opposing/neutralizing the atomizing tendencies of the urban life" (my translation – Z.G.)[9]. The social conditions of the Northern cities – with their

4 W. Yankley, E. Ericson, R. Juliani, "Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation", in *American Sociological Review*, 41, 1976, pp. 391-403.

5 Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem,* New York, 1982, p. 235.

6 Nathan I. Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, New York, 1971, p. 303.

7 Ibid., p. 134.

8 D. Bell, *The End of the Age of Ideology*, Glencoe, 1960.

9 Antonina Kłoskowska, *Kultura masowa. Krytyka i obrona,* Warszawa, 1980, p. 140.

refined forms of discrimination, hostility and rejection – forced African Americans to work out their own forms of survival through such institutions as various social organizations, the church, and the press.

The church especially played an essential integrating role in the Negro community. Between 1911 and 1922, almost all the major black churches moved to Harlem and had considerable influence on the Harlemites. "The most highly developed and characteristic expression of Negro life [...] is the Negro Church." It is "[...] much more than a religious organization, it is the chief organ of social and intellectual intercourse."[10] Richard Wright, the eminent black novelist who began his career when the Harlem Renaissance had already faded away, saw the importance of the Negro church, when he wrote in *12 Million Black Voices*: "Our churches are where we dip our tired bodies in cool springs of hope, where we retain our wholeness and humanity despite the blows of death from the Bosses [...]."[11] The church became a community center where, aside from religious services, the congregation met for recreational activities: "the church like the barbershop and the pool parlor, is a place to which one wanders when he has nothing else to do."[12]

The large migration of blacks from the South consisted mainly of the illiterate, with some sprinkles of the educated and talented. These were the "better" elements of the race, as W.E.B. Du Bois noticed. They had their conspicuous share in the shaping of the new race-proud image of the blacks and unquestionably contributed to the maturity of black art. The influence of the "talented tenth"[13], though, as the further argumentation of this study will show, did not reach beyond the intellectual and artistic circles sensitive to their political and artistic ideas.

The one man who really did reach the frustrated and disillusioned masses in the ghettoes was a native of Jamaica – Marcus Garvey (1887-1940). E. David Cronon, Garvey's biographer, notes that at the time of the growing mood of frustration and despair during which the "Black Moses" (as Garvey was referred to) promoted his nationalistic ideas of

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10 *W.E.B. Du Bois On Sociology and the Black Community,* edited by D.S. Green and E.D. Driver, Chicago, 1978, p. 190.

11 Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, New York, 1941, p. 131.

12 Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma, The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, New York, 1962, p. 939.

13 The phrase "talented tenth" first appeared in the essay by Du Bois "Talented Tenth" included in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of To-day,* New York, 1903.

race redemption, Negroes were "ready for any program that would restore even a measure of their lost dignity and self-respect." [14]In forming the Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.) and its weekly paper, *Negro World*, he built the largest and most powerful all-black organization the American nation had ever seen. "He managed to convince masses of ordinary black men and women of their own collective potential. For a time, many Negroes believed that they could weld themselves into a powerful race and nation through the agency of Garvey's Association."[15] "Up you mighty race", and "Africa for Africans", were slogans of his Back-to-Africa movement. The movement provided a compensatory escape of African Americans to whom the urban promised land had materialized into a hopeless ghetto. He "personified a new stirring, a vision of black pride sweeping through Harlem like a fresh breeze blowing north from Jamaica".[16] Although his dream turned out to be impractical and unreal, he was able to convey the message that black is beautiful – "[...] that a black skin was not a badge of shame but a glorious symbol of national greatness."[17]

The social and intellectual ferment of the first two decades of our century – especially the activity of Locke, Johnson, Du Bois and Garvey – attracted many young African Americans to New York, and specifically to Harlem. The district began to function as a symbol of the new spirit and became synonymous with the New Negro. A second generation was coming into the scene – a generation expressing itself not through political, social and intellectual activity, but through artistic self-expression.

The first signs of the new artistic movement can be traced to the years immediately following the First World War, but it was not until the mid-twenties that the Harlem Renaissance started to bloom. However, chronological limits on the movement are difficult to define. Most scholars maintain that the Harlem Renaissance flourished bounded on one side by the First World War and the Stock Market crash in 1929 on the other. Some, for example Abraham Chapman[18] and Henry Louis

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[14] E. David Cronon, *Black Moses. The Story of Marcus Garvey*, Madison, 1969, p. 36.

[15] Huggins, op. cit., p. 46.

[16] Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror. A History of Multicultural America*, Boston, 1993, p. 355.

[17] Cronon, op. cit., p. 4.

[18] "The Harlem Renaissance in Literary History", *CLA Journal*, September, 1976, pp. 44-45.

Gates, Jr.[19] see signs of the Renaissance as early as the end of the nineteenth century. John Hope Franklin[20] and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., argue that the Renaissance continued as far as the 1960s. The author of this study is of the opinion that the first signs of the movement were noticeable at the beginning of the twentieth century (eg., the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903). The Renaissance fully bloomed in the 1920s and following 1929 signs of a decline became evident.

In the fall of 1925 in New York, a publication appeared which was to be a turning point in the cultural history of African Americans. *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, a collection of stories, poems and illustrations of African American life, was edited by Alain Locke, whom some critics view as the father of the Harlem Renaissance. In the foreword to the book, Alain Locke wrote the often quoted words:

> Negro life is not only establishing new contacts and founding new centers, it is founding a new soul. We have, as the heralding sign, an unusual outburst of creative expression. There is renewed race spirit that consciously and proudly sets itself apart. Justly then, we may speak of this book, embodying these ripening forces, as culled from the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance.[21]

Like the intellectual generation before them, the creative artists manifested black pride and race awareness just as distinctly. Langston Hughes, the pre-eminent poet of the Harlem Renaissance, declared in the *New Nation* (June, 1926): "We young Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark skinned selves without fear or shame."[22]

Artists of the Renaissance aimed at gaining self-consciousness and self-confidence but also noticed the importance of rediscovery of their ethnic heritage. Consequently, they turned their attention to Africa in search of the origins of their cultural roots, a foundation on which they were to build their own artistic expression.

However, the Harlem Renaissance would never have been what it was without the promoting role of the press, especially without such magazines as the *Crisis, Messenger* and *Opportunity*. The editors of these

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19 "Harlem on our Minds", *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 1997, pp. 3-4.

20 *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, New York, 1980, p. 382.

21 *The New Negro*, edited by Alain Locke, New York, 1925, p. XI.

22 Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", *The Nation*, 122, no. 3181, (June 28, 1926).

magazines saw as a part of their role to encourage Negroes' artistic efforts and to publish their achievements for black and white alike. Black artists were strongly motivated by the sophisticated whites who patronized them artistically as well as economically. Thanks to that help, African American artists gained economic security. Langston Hughes speaks of an individual sponsor's generosity in his autobiographical *The Big Sea*: "I was fascinated by her, and I loved her. No one else had ever been so thoughtful of me, or so generous toward me."[23] Paradoxically, therefore, the race-proud Harlem Renaissance was largely created by white interest. N.I. Huggins notes that the Renaissance was not only a black affair: "If black New York had been left alone, it all would have been different – how, who knows? But that was impossible because Negro life and culture and art were important to white men."[24] The expectations of publishers as well as the public influenced the artistic production. From this point of view, works created in this period could not escape the general mercantile and consumerist pressures of the developing mass culture.

Alexis de Tocqueville in his two volumes of reflections on the American experience, under the title *Democratie en Amerique*, published in 1835 and 1840 – the first broad analysis of the American experience from a foreign perspective – noticed "the inordinate love of material gratification"[25] among Americans. According to him, it was democracy itself that was responsible for such a state. "When the reverence that belonged to what is old had vanished", he explained, "birth, condition, and profession no longer distinguish men [...] [H]ardly anything but money remains to create strongly marked differences between them and to raise some of them above the common level."[26] Money had become the bond through which social relations were now implemented. "When all the members of the community are independent of or indifferent to each other, the co-operation of each of them can be obtained only by paying for it: This infinity multiplies the purposes to which wealth may be applied and increase its value."[27] Laws which bound the society in the Old World obtained new qualities in America, transforming the country into a highly complex new economy.

[23] Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*, New York, 1940, p. 239.

[24] Huggins, op. cit., p. 136.

[25] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* New York, translated by Henry Reeve, 1945 (originally published in 1835), vol. 2, p. 23.

[26] Ibid., p. 239.

[27] Ibid., p. 137.

A precursor of future theories of mass culture, Tocqueville's work noted many novelties in American social life, not yet visible in the Europe of his time. Although the American society of the 1830s which he examined was still in the main a rural society, it was beginning to demonstrate certain qualities typical of the future mass society, urbanized and industrialized. Tocqueville noticed several characteristics which augured this tendency: 1) the urban dress and language of American farmers, 2) a commercial attitude toward labour, and 3) mobility, resulting in the atomization and breaking up of previous social ties. In effect, Tocqueville most frequently implements the expressions of "multitude" and "masse" to characterize the new social reality. But what seems even more important is that along with the advancement of democracy, art and culture also underwent a process of democratization. The growing circulation of newspapers and magazines containing serialised novels, the popular theatre, lithography and photography – all, in effect, preceded the future development of the popular magazine, the record industry, radio, television, and mass communication technologies.

The evaluation of the movement displays a spectrum of opinions. The previously quoted Nathan Huggins in *The Harlem Renaissance* (1971), presents the most critical voice. Although he acknowledges that "black Harlem was as white a creation as it was black"[28], he further, rhetorically, asks: "Whose sensibilities, tastes and interests were being served by such art, the patron or the patronized?"[29] According to Huggins, whites were the ones who dictated the interest in the primitivism of the Renaissance artists; he makes the masterminds of the movement (Du Bois and Locke) responsible for dictating a preference for high culture while neglecting the genuine expression of African American culture. In his view, the Renaissance artists imitated mainstream American cultural standards, ignoring the essential cultural elements of their own racial group, as well as all the problems which it faced in the urban environment.

As noted earlier, most critics have viewed the Harlem Renaissance as mainly a literary movement not giving full credit to the role of music in its development. Samuel A. Floyd Jr., editor of *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance* (1993), echoes Martin Blum's thesis that music not only contributed to and benefited from the Renaissance but in fact

[28] Huggins, op. cit. p. 85.

[29] Ibid., p. 128.

spearheaded it by example.[30] In fact, "[r]agtime, blues, and jazz were the wells to which the Renaissance artists went for the substance – the themes, rhythms, and "feel" – of their "high art". This is true whether we are speaking of the musical compositions or the novel, painting, or anthology of poetry and folklore."[31]

A majority of critics are enchanted by the uncommonness of the movement. To a large extent, the Renaissance was in fact "[...] an awakening of creative energy among Blacks, but its influence was so electrical it began to reach a generation of Americans of many kinds who were glad to plug into its power source. Others came from Europe and caught the beat."[32] The "plugging into the power source" can be understood in at least two ways: the first is that many artists tied themselves to the movement which had already a distinct identity, hoping for artistic inspiration; the second interpretation perceives in the motivation the seeking of material profits flowing from the promising development of the movement.

From this perspective, critics of the Renaissance recognize the source of failure as stemming from the inability of the elite and artists to find an appropriate place for the cultural manifestations of the black community in the aesthetics of the Renaissance and in the artistic productions of the epoch. Robert Bone rightly observes that the "mass movement of the urban immigration of Negroes" was "projected on the plane of an increasingly articulate elite"[33] which neither understood fully African American problems nor relied on their cultural potential. Richard Wright strongly criticized the philosophy of the elite and of the whole "Harlem School of expression", as he calls it, basing his critique on Marxist social and economic theories. In his "Blueprint for Negro Writing" published in the *New Challenge* (1937), he argued:

> Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, decorous ambassadors who go a-begging to white America. They entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the

[30] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., ed., *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance*, Knoxville, 1993, p. 3; Martin Blum, "Black Music: Pathmaker of the Harlem Renaissance", *Missouri Journal of Research in Music Education,* 3, no. 3, 1974, p. 75.

[31] Jon Michael Spencer, *The New Negro and Their Music. The Success of the Harlem Renaissance*, Knoxville, 1997, p. xx.

[32] Arna Bontemps, "The Black Renaissance of the Twenties", in *Black World*, 20, No. 1, Nov. 1970, p. 8.

[33] Robert Bone, *The Negro Novel in America*, New Haven, 1958, p. 53.

> knee-pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people. These were received as poodle dogs who have learned clever tricks.
> White America never offered them any serious criticism. The mere fact that a Negro could write was astonishing. Nor was there any deep concern on the part of white America with what role Negro writing should play in American culture; and if there was any role, it was through accident rather than intent or design. It crept in through the kitchen in the form of jazz and jokes.[34]

This opinion of the elitism of the movement is also shared by David L. Lewis *(When Harlem was in Vogue*, 1982), who however, has a more balanced view in reference to the issues of white patronage and, in general, a more positive view of the movement. For their part, militant critics of the 1960s (LeRoi Jones, or Harold Cruse), completely discredit the achievements of the Harlem Renaissance as mere fake products of a white culture. For these critics, the Renaissance "[...] was nothing more than a puff of smoke in a Harlem cabaret. The music was real; the cabarets were real; the white people slumming in Harlem were real; but the literary movement was not."[35]

What then, are the unquestionable achievements of Harlem Renaissance? Does it still exert any influence on present-day African American culture? Does it inspire artists and critics to re-evaluate and re-interpret anew its accomplishments? Is it still alive? Allon Schoener maintains that it is:

> So Harlem lives. It has stood for too much in the minds and the hearts of Afro-Americans to die. It will never again be seen as the "Mecca of the New Negro"; we are too old for such dreams. Harlem will be more than that and like the rest of Afro-American life, it will make you laugh and it will make you cry.[36]

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[34] Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing", (originally published in *New Challenge* in 1937), *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader,* David L. Lewis, ed., New York, 1994, p. 194.

[35] Ibid., p. 22.

[36] Allon Schoener, "Introduction' in Allon Schoener, ed., *Harlem On My Mind. Capital of Black America 1900-1968*, New York, 1978, p. 3.

1. THE GREAT MIGRATION TO THE PROMISED LAND

1.1. African Americans in Harlem: The Beginnings

The first inhabitants of Harlem, as of all of America, were Native Americans, who had their village on the banks of the Harlem River between today's 110th and 125th Streets. Henry Hudson was the first white man to sail the river, later to be given his name, under the Dutch flag in 1609. Five years later the Dutch West Indian Company was established. This led to the foundation of the colony of New Netherlands with the establishment of the settlement named New Amsterdam on the southern tip of the Manhattan Island. In 1658 Dutch settlers named the community in the northern part of the island Nieuw Haarlem. Three years after the foundation of the colony, the Dutch West Indian Company transported to the colony the first Africans who, as James Weldon Johnson states in *Black Manhattan*, were captured seamen.[1] In 1628 they were joined by three Negro women thus setting the nucleus of the future black population on the island. In the next decades, the company continued the practice of importing slaves, so their number increased to about one hundred in 1655.

Under Dutch rule, Negroes had the status of indentured servants, and received fairly humane treatment, where "manumission was not an uncommon reward for long or meritorious service".[2] A logical explanation of the basis for such treatment is offered by Johnson who argues that slavery was not a profitable institution under the Dutch, the basic reason why it never flourished.[3]

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1 James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, New York, 1968, p. 4.

2 Mabel M. Smythe, ed., *The Black American Reference Book*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976, in the Introduction, p. 12.

3 Johnson, op. cit., p. 5.

In 1664, in the context of the Anglo-Dutch War, Charles II granted the territory to his brother James, the Duke of York: the British fleet then sailed to New Amsterdam forcing the Dutch to capitulate. Along with the new political conditions, the status of Negroes underwent a transformation as well. After their experiments with black labour in the Virginian colony, where the English found the slave system highly profitable, this form of human exploitation was also introduced into the former Dutch colony. It was not until 1684, however, that slavery was recognized as a legal institution in the province of New York. "Under the English rule", writes Johnson, "the trade in black human beings was extended and became lucrative".[4] The available statistical data reflects a rising interest in the black labour force: in 1698 the census noted 2170 Negroes, the number grew to 6 171 in 1723, and reached 19 883 in 1771.[5]

With the increasing number of slaves in the settlement, some members of the white population became apprehensive of the possible dangers flowing from the fact of having non-white neighbours. The year 1712 was marked by the growing discontent of the Negroes, which resulted in an open insurrection where 23 armed slaves killed nine whites and injured six. In the trial that followed 21 were found guilty and executed. There were no more serious racial riots during the colonial period, and by the time of the American Revolution, citizens of New York had begun to recognize the moral and economic drawbacks of the institution of slavery.

Quakers were the first to oppose slavery openly, criticizing it in religious and moral terms. As early as 1767, a group from the Society of Friends "[...] urged fellow members to free their slaves. Some Quakers failed to adhere to this request, therefore in 1776 the Society of Friends resolved that it would not accept contributions from slaveholders".[6] In the following years, Quakers strongly advocated the manumission movements. Through their hard work – and the efforts of such activists, as for example John Gray, the Governor of New York elected in 1795 – a gradual abolition act was passed in 1799. In effect slavery as an institution was slowly dying out in New York City.

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4 Ibid., p. 5.

5 *Black American Reference Book*, op. cit., p. 13.

6 Seth M. Scheiner, *Negro Mecca*, New York, 1965, p. 3.

The proportion of Negroes classified as free comprised 37 per cent of the overall black population and rose to 84 per cent in 1820.[7] The strong abolitionist cause and a growing consciousness that "all men were created equal", led to the passing of an act on the 4th of July, 1827, by which all slaves were emancipated and slavery was abolished in the state of New York. Three years after this date, 15 983 Negroes inhabited New York City (i.e. 7.3 per cent of the total population), and 13 976 (i.e. 6.9 per cent of the total population) on Manhattan.[8]

Before the Civil War, most of New York's Negro citizens tended to live in close proximity to the wealthier whites (that is, scattered around Manhattan) whom they served as domestics and common laborers. But, as their numbers grew due to natural increase and intensifying southern migration, the existing forms of discrimination also intensified. As has been observed by a number of scholars (Myrdal, Baker), the growth of the Negro population led in effect to the lowering of the status of black people – and in general to the increase of anti-Negro sentiment. The growing discrimination manifested itself most visibly in the form of residential segregation.

By 1860 New York's Negro population did not inhabit one single area but rather a number of enclaves consisting of a few blocks. Seth M. Scheiner remarks: "The hostility of the white landlords and tenants restricted the Negro to a specific district. Occasionally he broke out of the ghetto and moved to another section of the city; however, it was not long before that section became segregated".[9]

During the decade of the 1860's the pressure of the white residents of Manhattan intensified and signs of the northward movement of the black population within the city could be traced. "By 1890 almost 80 per cent of Manhattan's Negro citizens lived above Fourteenth Street. The area South of Fourteenth Street contained only 20.7 per cent of the city's Negro inhabitants, a decrease of 38.5 per cent from the 59.2 per cent of 1870."[10] A major factor which compelled the Negroes to move were the new European immigrants infiltrating the Negro neighborhoods. These were arrivals from Southern and Eastern Europe – from countries such as Greece, Poland, Italy, Russia – and Jews from various nations. Mostly,

7 Ibid., p. 4.

8 Ibid., p. 221. Johnson, op. cit., gives different data : 14 083 in the city, p. 13.

9 Scheiner, op. cit., p. 16.

10 Ibid., p. 17.

the new immigrants tended to flock in urban centers because the city tempted them with relative comfort; moreover, here they found security among fellow migrants speaking their language – or they simply may have lacked the money necessary to move away from the port of entry. In effect, at the end of the 19th century, as Tom Kinnersley observes in *The Evolution of Mass Culture in America – 1877 to the Present*, American urban centers had a higher percentage of foreign-born inhabitants than at any previous time in their history and New York may stand as the most representative example, where 80 per cent of the overall population was foreign born or second generation.[11]

The section of Greenwich Village once called "little Africa", because of the large concentration of Negroes, later with the migration of Italians began to be known as "Little Italy". The author of an article published in *New York Age*, (Dec. 20, 1890), had noticed the previously mentioned mechanism: "This section [i.e. Greenwich Village] is largely losing its distinctive features as an Afro-American district, and many portions of it have been flooded by the sons of sunny Italy." Concluding, it should be stressed that the mobility of the Negro minority was constant, dependent on the pressure of "the incoming white immigrants, expansion of industry and commerce, or their own desire for better housing".[12] The northward movement within the city persisted throughout the 1870's and 1830's and the destination was Harlem.

At that time Harlem was exclusively white. Before the American Revolution, gentlemen farmers had developed country estates here, and wealthy merchants built stately houses. As the nineteenth century arrived, the community had still its rural character. Gradually, however, the surrounding farmland was transformed into residences and as a result of this change in 1873 the village of Harlem became part of the city of New York as its first suburb.

Negroes had moved into scattered sections of Harlem as far back as the late 1880's. The more prosperous Negroes possessed the financial means to rent better apartments on 122nd Street, but in the years that followed other sections of Harlem were filled by African Americans to such an extent that the *New York Times*, as early as the year 1901, referred to 130th Street, between Amsterdam Avenue and Broadway as

[11] Tom Kinnersley, *The Evolution of Mass Culture in America. 1877 to Present*, St. Louis, 1982, p. 8.

[12] Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem*, New York, 1982, p. 5.

"Darktown"[13]. But the relatively slow growth of the Negro population of the 1880's and 1890's would not equal the demographic explosion of the 1900's. In 1906, a reporter of *The Tribune* noticed the "general exodus of negroes from all other neighborhoods to Harlem".[14] It was this district into which black downtown residents moved together with the majority of recent migrants from the southern states. Statistics clearly demonstrate this sudden growth: in 1820 the Negro population of Manhattan consisted of 10 886 and grew to 36 246 in 1900 to number 109 133 in 1920.[15]

1.2. The "Push" and "Pull" Forces of the Great Migration

Attention should be paid to the political as well as social reality which surrounded the southern Negro; thus, the objective reasons for the migration North should be considered. In this study, we are obliged to direct our attention to the pre-Civil War years, the Civil War (1861-65) and Reconstruction (1865-67), when "once and only once, did the Negro problem become the focus of national attention".[16] Although American historians, as Myrdal further argues, "stressed that the North did not fight the Civil War to free the Negro slaves" in "the deeper reality [...] there would have been no Civil War had there been no Negroes in the South, and had not Negro slavery stamped its entire social fabric." He concludes: "The economic, ideological, and political rivalries between the two regions all mainly derived from, or were greatly determined by the fact of slavery [...]."[17] On July 10, 1858, Abraham Lincoln delivered a speech (as transcribed here) in Chicago, Illinois that clearly focused the issue:

> A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free." [Applause.] "I do not expect the Union to be dissolved," – I am quoting from my speech -" I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the spread of it, and place it where the public mind

[13] *New York Times*, Dec. 26, 1901.

[14] Quoted in Scheiner, op. cit., p. 19.

[15] Ibid., Tables, p. 221.

[16] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, New York, 1962, p. 431.

[17] Ibid., p. 431.

> shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward until it shall become alike lawful in all the States, North as well as South." [Good, good.][18]

The Negro problem had to be perceived by all Americans, Yankees as well as Confederates, as the focal factor.

In the autumn of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that slaves in all states still in rebellion, on January lst, 1863, would be set free. As he was signing the final document he was to say: "I never in my life felt more certain that I was doing right than I do in signing this paper".[19] Freedom materialized for four million slaves. Their reaction to this historical event was described by W.E.B. DuBois:

> The mass of slaves even the more intelligent ones, and certainly the group of field hands, were in religious and hysterical fervor. This was the coming of the Lord. This was the fulfillment of prophecy and legend. It was the golden Dawn, after chains of a thousand years. It was everything miraculous and perfect and promising. For the first time in their life, they could travel, they could see, they could change dead level of their labor, they could talk to friends and sit at sundown and in moonlight, listening and imparting wonder-tales. They could hunt in the swamps, and fish in the rivers, and above all, they could stand up and assert themselves. They need not fear the patrol, they need not even cringe before a white face, and touch their hats.[20]

Close to the end of the war, three amendments were added to the Constitution of the United States which legally eliminated slavery as an institution. The Thirteenth, adopted in 1865 read:

> Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been dully convicted; shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

The Fourteenth:

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[18] Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. Volume 2. New Brunswick, N.J., 1953, p. 491.

[19] Abraham Lincoln, quoted in W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880,* New York , 1935, p. 122.

[20] Quoted in *Black American Reference Book*, op. cit., p. 33.

> All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States, nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law.

And the Fifteenth:

> The right of the citizen of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state, on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.[21]

In the years 1866 to 1875, national implementation of civil rights legislation was enacted to give effect to these newly adopted constitutional provisions. Constitutional Conventions were organized to give new laws to the Confederate states and in effect prepare new documents forbidding any form of discrimination, provide for a common school system, the right to travel, to a proper trial, and the fair administration of justice.

Time has shown that the laws and guarantees granted to the Negroes proved to be ineffective in protecting African Americans against social, political, and economic injustice. Even before the Congressional Reconstruction began its work on implementing the recent Constitutional Amendments, the so-called "Black Codes" were institutionalized by eight southern states which, according to Charles S. Mangum, Jr.:

> [...] gave the Negro population very little freedom. The colored man was free in name only in many cases. The [...] provisions of these statutes forced the Negro into situations where he would be under the uncontrolled supervision of his former master or other white men who were ready and willing to exploit his labour.[22]

Although these laws had been nullified by the previously mentioned Constitutional amendments, in the years following Reconstruction, they reappeared in the form of what became known as the Jim Crow laws – "[...T]heir spirit prevailed in the complex of the laws protecting

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[21] *The Constitution of the United States*, http://www.house.gov/paul/constitutiontext.htm, accessed 25.09.2006.

[22] Charles S. Magnum, Jr., *The Legal Status of the Negro*, 1940, p. 27, quoted in Myrdal op. cit., p. 228.

the planters' interests [...]"[23] Slave heritage proved to be much too deeply rooted in the consciousness of the southerners, so a sudden break with it turned out to be impossible.

> Emancipation was not related to any change of mind on the part of the white people. The reform was thrust upon the South and never got its sanctions. It became rather a matter of sectional pride to resist the change to the utmost [...] the white South found a revenge for the defeat in the war by undoing as far as possible the National legislation to protect freedom.[24]

Many groups in the South actively opposed the ideas of Reconstruction and tried to convince other Americans that it brought only losses and no gains.

In the attempt to drive both Negroes and Reconstructionists from power and regain control, a considerable number of Southerners joined together in various secret societies such as the "Pale Faces", "The Knights of the White Camellia" and, most infamous of all, the "Ku Klux Klan". These associations "claimed for themselves the mission of defending the Union and the Constitution and declared a dedication to the supremacy of the white race"[25] soon to degenerate into a terroristic organization encouraging violence and murder.[26]

The Federal Administration and the Supreme Court endorsed various strategies that southern states devised to disenfranchise African Americans. In particular the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case (1896) was the most dramatic of a series of decisions which legitimized laws segregating public facilities – from schools, railroads cars, and restrooms to public parks and residential neighborhoods. Simultaneously, these decisions undermined the guarantees just given in the three recent amendments to the Constitution.[27] The case is described by the authors of *The Black American Reference Book* :

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[23] Myrdal, op. cit., p. 558.

[24] Ibid., p. 223.

[25] Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1610 to the Present*, Cambridge, Mass., 1967, p. 62.

[26] For a comprehensive account of the objectives and activities of these associations consult: Walter L. Fleming, *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, New York, 1950, vol. II. pp. 347-359.

[27] For further discussion of the deterioration of the racial situation following reconstruction see: August Meier, *Negro Thought in America. 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies*

> In 1890 Louisiana had enacted a law providing that "all railway companies carrying passengers in their coaches in this state shall provide separate but equal accommodations for white and colored races." When Plessy, whose appearance was as white as that of any person in New Orleans but who was known to have Negro blood, boarded the coach reserved for whites, he was ordered to the "colored" coach. When he refused to move, he was arrested and charged with violating the law. Plessy argued that the Louisiana statute was in conflict with the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery and the 14th Amendment, which prohibited certain restrictive legislation on the part of the states. The Supreme Court did not agree. Speaking for the court, Mr. Justice Bradley interpreted the statute as intending to enforce "absolute equality of the two races before the law", while recognizing fundamental distinctions between them. Thus the doctrine "separate but equal" became the law of the land and gave moral support to those who ware engaged in enacting segregational statutes. [28]

Henry W. Grady's voice may represent the argumentation of a number of southern intellectuals that, "segregation is not offensive to either race"; he further notes: "[...W]hites and blacks must walk, in separate paths in the South. As far as possible these paths should be made equal – but separate they must be now and always. This means separate schools, separate churches, separate accommodation everywhere [...]"[29]

The expansion of Jim Crow legislation which became the manifestation of the "white supremacy" doctrine that Negroes should be "kept in their place" was an essential "push" force out of the South. Also in the sphere of political rights, Negroes met growing restrictions. The poll tax, the Grandfather Clause and many other suffrage amendments brought about the effective disfranchisement of Negroes. In effect, by the end of the century, Negroes had lost most of the civil rights guaranteed to them by the United States Constitution. Frederick Douglass, the outstanding Negro leader of the Reconstruction period, recapitulated the accomplishments of the post-Civil War decades: "[...I]t practically enslaves the Negro and makes the Proclamation of 1863 a mockery and delusion."[30]

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in the Age of Booker T. Washington, Ann Arbor, 1968, pp. 69-82, 161-63, and Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery,* New York, 1979.

28 *Black American Reference Book*, op. cit., p. 42.

29 Henry W. Grady, *The New South*, New York, 1890, p. 244-46.

30 Frederick Douglass quoted in Meier A, Rudwick E., eds., *From Plantation to Ghetto*, New York, 1970, p. 152.

The Emancipation Proclamation gave freedom to those American Negroes predominantly concentrated in the rural South, where they functioned as an essential element of the southern economic system. The Eighth Census of the U.S. 1860, Vol. I, p. xiii, reports that 94.9% of the Negroes in the United States lived in the South (including Missouri). Only one-tenth of one per cent lived in non-southern states west of the Mississippi River, and the remaining five per cent lived in the northern states east of the Mississippi. As the previously quoted Nobel Prize laureate in economics Gunnar Myrdal states in his monumental work *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, first published in 1944, theoretically there were four directions in which the Negro population could translocate. Emancipation removed the existing legal restrictions imposed on the Negro prior the Civil War and now they were free to move wherever was their wish, without being repressed by any form of regulations.

First, they could leave the U.S., and a number of Negroes set out to Liberia on a wave of the back-to-Africa movement, or to the West Indies – but this number was not significant. Second, the Western frontier was open to them, but as statistics show, there were only 100 986 Negroes in the West in 1890 and the number grew slightly to 135 872 in 1910. Third, they could move to the growing cities of the South, and a considerable number of Negroes did move in that direction to become mainly unskilled laborers or servants, not sharing the expanding opportunities of the South after the Civil War. It was the North, with its outburst of industrial production, that offered economic opportunities not to be found elsewhere. In effect many abandoned farming for the urban life.

Before this took place, however, many had attempted to gain economic independence. Uneducated, knowing no trade except farming and lacking the money to buy their own land – the majority of southern Negroes became tenant farmers, working the poorest land in the South, whose economy had been crushed by the war. This was the sharecropping arrangement practiced in the southern states following the Civil War under which Negroes, instead of working for a wage, rented a plot of land and paid to the plantation owner a certain proportion of the grown crop. Poor harvests in 1866 and 1867, and thus a great shortage of cash, resulted in the introduction of the crop lien system.

> Buying food and clothing on credit with the crop as lien, they [Negroes] were charged high prices, and outrageous interest rates, were forced to

> depend upon the planter's rendition of accounts. After the crop was sold, they were likely to end up in debt to the planter, particularly in a poor year. Out of this arose the system of debt peonage, whereby insolvent croppers, unable to repay debts from one year to another, were required by the law to work indefinitely for the same unscrupulous planter.[31]

Several other economic factors coincided, causing great discontent and the decision to migrate North. The "push" circumstances from the South, aside from those mentioned previously, were accelerated by the repeated crop failure caused by the boll weevil – a small destructive insect that infests cotton plants, the most important southern crop. As Myrdal relates, "the destruction was terrible. In many places, particularly in Georgia and South Carolina, farms and plantations were permanently abandoned." Cotton production fell drastically and employment opportunities automatically decreased. A second factor was destructive land use, causing irreversible soil erosion. It is generally assumed that the

> [...] soil in the South originally had a relatively high fertility. [...] The traditional concentration upon cash crops such as cotton and other plants, which fail to bind the top soil and rapidly deplete fertility without a rational scheme of crop rotation, or other preventive measures – is a chief causal factor behind soil erosion. The high rate tendency, leaving the immediate care of the land to people who are not only utterly dependent and ignorant but also lack an individual economic interest in maintaining the productivity of the land is another cause.[32]

Added to this, repeated droughts, especially in 1916 and 1917, stimulated Negro population migration. Documents of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census point out this significant trend when they state that in reference to the overall United States Negro population, the rural population in 1910 amounted to 72.7%, in 1920 – 66% and in 1930 – 56.3%. At the same time, the urban Negro population in the years 1920-1930 increased from 3,559,473 to 5,193,913.[33]

The changing economic and social conditions in the South after the Civil War, in the words of E.F. Frazier, shaped the "migratory habits" of the Negro ethnic group, whose mobility started immediately after

[31] Ibid., 157.

[32] Myrdal, op. cit., p. 232.

[33] *Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Washington, 1935, p. 48.

the Civil War, when "thousands of Negro men and women began to wander aimlessly about the country in search of adventure and work."[34] Therefore, we may conclude that the reasons for migrating were mainly economic. W.E.B. DuBois in his early sociological work , "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study", (1893), in connection with conditions of domestic service, noted: "[T]he result is the [...] wholesale emigration of the better class of servants to the North, where they can earn three and often four times the wages for less work."[35] In the South, where unemployment was high, especially among the black population, there existed a great "demand for steady employment".

> One of the principal causes of idleness is the irregular employment. A really industrious man who desires work is apt to be thrown out of employment from one-half to one-third of the year by the shutting up of tobacco factories, the brickyards, or the cannery. If he wants to get on in the world or accumulate property, he often finds that he must seek better wages and steadier employment elsewhere.[36]

Gunnar Myrdal suggests that all the external and objective forces, even when closely studied, will not give us an accurate picture if we do not examine the actual and concrete motivation of the individuals.[37] As he maintains, in not every case was economic pressure the primary factor of migration. Letters sent by friends and relatives who "made it" in the North; editorials and comments – even advertisements! – on the better conditions of life in the North published in the African American press; the enormous influence of agents sent by Northern businesses (especially during the boom year of 1917), enhanced by rumors of the great possibilities waiting in the northern cities: all created an irresistible atmosphere for moving. Living in the rural communities of the South "[...] they could hear from the mouth of some "Black Ulysses", fabulous stories of the outside world. Once having caught a glimpse of the world beyond the dull routine of country life, these men and women were lured on to the world beyond these small towns where they might enjoy even greater freedom and more exciting adventure."[38]

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[34] E.F. Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*, Chicago, 1966, p. 209.

[35] *W.E.B. DuBois. On Sociology and the Black Community*, ed. D.S. Green, Chicago, 1978, p. 142.

[36] Ibid., p. 180.

[37] Myrdal, op. cit., p. 193.

[38] Frazier, op. cit., p. 210.

The Chicago Defender, owned by African American editor Robert Abbott, which circulated widely in the South, ran advertisements, news columns, help-wanted ads and editorials which explicitly urged migration. The advertisement published on February 10, 1917, announces: "*The Defender* invites all to come North. Plenty of room for good, sober, industrious men. Plenty of work [...] Come join the ranks of the free. Cast the yoke from around your neck. See the light. When you have crossed the Ohio river, breathe the fresh air and say, 'Why didn't I come before?'". The headlines of *The Chicago Defender* announced: "More positions open than men for them" and numerous articles described great labour shortages and the willingness of employers to "give a chance to learn a trade at $2.25 a day". In general, the ads offered wages much higher than those in the South. For example, women domestics, who received $2.50 per week in the South, could earn from $2.10 to $2.50 per day in the North. Classified ads announced:

> Wanted – 10 molders. Must be experienced. $4.50 to $5.50 per day. Men wanted at once. Good steady employment for colored. Thirty and 39½ cents per hour. Weekly payments. Good warm sanitary quarters free [...] Towns of Newark and Jersey City. Laborers wanted for foundry, warehouse and yard work. Excellent opportunity to learn trades, paying good money. Start $2.50 – $2.75 per day. Extra for overtime. $3.60 per day can be made in steel foundry in Minnesota, by strong, healthy, steady men. [39]

As the first waves of migrants arrived in northern cities, they wrote their families and friends reporting of their experiences, often in an enthusiastic tone. Following the encouragement given, many others followed to the Promised Land. Emmett Scott in "Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916-1918" published in *The Journal of Negro History* (1919) quotes letters of recent migrants with original spelling and grammar. One of them reads: "People are coming here every day and are finding employment. Nothing here but money and it is not hard to get."[40] Another reports: "I am well and is doing fine plant to eat and drink and is making good money."[41] And still another precisely echoes *The Chicago*

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[39] Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920,* Chicago, 1967, p. 135; Emmett Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, London, 1920, pp. 17,18.

[40] Emmett Scott in "Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916-1918" published in *The Journal of Negro History*, 4 July, 1919, p. 333.

[41] Ibidem.

Defender's advertisement: "I'm tickled to death over this place. Sorry I was not up here years ago".[42]

The attempt to improve their lives in the economic sense coincided with a desire for social improvement as well. The racist system of the South was still maintained by legislation and brute force ranging from insult through sadistic lynchings. The number of Negroes lynched, according to Meier and Rudwick, rose to 100 a year in 1880 and 1890, and even rose to 162 in 1892.[43] The persons lynched were accused in 38 per cent of cases of homicide, 6 per cent for felonious assault, 16 per cent for rape, 7 per cent for attempted rape, 7 per cent for theft, 2 per cent for insulting a white person, and 24 per cent for miscellaneous offenses, or for no offense at all.[44] As a result, as the sociologist Charles S. Johnson has demonstrated, the largest black migration was from counties with the highest incidents of mob violence and lynchings.[45]

> Yes, we are going to the north!
> I don't care to what state,
> Just so I cross the Dixon Line,
> From this southern land of hate,
> Lynched and burned and shot and hung,
> And not a word is said. [46]

African Americans left the South in search of what DuBois called "the possibility of escaping caste at least in its most aggravating personal features".[47] "Why stay in the South" asked *The Chicago Defender*, "where your mother, sister and daughter are raped and burned at the stake; where your father, brother and sons are treated with contempt and hung to a pole, riddled with bullets at the least mention that he does not like the way he is treated"? [48]

It also should be mentioned that southern racist prejudice, which depicted African Americans as inferior and immoral who would never achieve parity with whites, found strong support in biological and social

[42] Ibid., p. 334.

[43] Meier, Rudwick, op. cit., p.186.

[44] Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* , Chapel Hill, 1933, p. 36..

[45] Meier, Rudwick, op. cit., p. 214.

[46] Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, *Anyplace but Here*, New York, 1945, p. 163.

[47] Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, New York, 1890-1930, New York, 1966, p. 23.

[48] Quoted in Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line*, New York, 1964 (originally published in 1908), p. 112.

science publications of the time. *The Negro, Beast or in the Image of God* (1900) by Charles Caroll or *The Negro: A Menace to Civilization* (1907) by Robert W. Schufeldt combined scientific and biblical evidence to argue that Negroes were a subhuman hybrid species who lacked souls but had been granted the power of speech so that they might better serve the white race. Anti-Negro propaganda, concepts of Negro inferiority and open racism were also popularized by the then widely read books of Thomas Dixon: *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905) which provided the script for the still controversial motion picture of D.W. Griffith *The Birth of the Nation* (1915).[49] "Some southern writers", notes Cary D. Wintz, in *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance,* "even justified lynching as the only effective check against the black man's increasing tendency to rape, and argued that the only solution to the race problem was either colonization or extermination."[50] Reviewing all the reasons, it may be concluded that in most cases, migration was synonymous with the biological survival and psychological integrity of the African-American.

1.3. In the "Promised Land" of the North

By the year 1900, 27.7 per cent of the nation's Negro population lived in the cities, whereas in 1860, only 16 per cent had.[51] The overall black population of the northern states, according to the U.S. Bureau of Census, amounted to 340 240 in 1860, climbing to 1 027 674 in 1910.[52] The largest out-migration in the decade of 1910-1920 was noticed in Mississippi (-129 600), Georgia (-74 700) and South Carolina (-74 500); in contrast, the largest in-migration was reported in the states of New York (63 100) and Illinois (69 800).[53] As reflected by the statistics, the First World War was a turning point in the history of the Negro migration northward. The war, with its general prosperity in the economy, forced northern industry to look toward the South with its reservoir of black labour. The massive flow of foreign immigrants, mainly from Europe,

[49] For a survey of racial thought in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Dwight W. Hoover, *The Red and the Black,* Chicago, 1976, pp. 164-90, 218-52.

[50] Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston, 1988, p. 10.

[51] *Black American Reference Book*, op. cit., p.49.

[52] Ibid., p.172.

[53] Ibidem.

who had constituted industry's dominant labour force before the war, came to a halt. Many foreigners working in New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit and other northern industrial centers returned to their homelands and left vacant countless positions.[54] African Americans could thus fill the existing vacuum in the expanding industrial machine. To meet the labour demands created by decreasing European migration, business representatives of the northern industrial establishment deployed recruiting agents to the South to help fill the labour vacuum.[55] The majority of male migrants though semi-skilled or unskilled, reinforced the working class, at the same time becoming porters, waiters, messengers, elevator operators, and janitors.[56] Female migrants, on the other hand, were predominantly employed as domestics. Unlike white women, "whose entry into the factories [...] coincided with industrialism, black women were excluded from virtually all areas of employment, except domestic service."[57] In 1925, for example, 60 percent of New York's black female population worked as either laundresses or servants.[58]

For the Negroes of the South – especially young, adventurous ones – despite the low status of jobs offered, this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. New possibilities were opening in the North – and not only in industry. "[I] didn't want to remain in one little place all my days,"[59] said one of the recent migrants. "I wanted to get out and see the world", said another.[60] A young aspiring Richard Wright, who went North in the 1920s, recalls: "I went to Chicago as a migrant from Mississippi [...] and there in that great iron city, that impersonal, mechanical city, amid the steam, the smoke [...] there in that self-conscious city, that city so deadly dramatic and stimulating, we caught whispers of the meanings that life could have [...]"[61] Similarly, the heroes of Toni Morrison's *Jazz*,

54 St. Clair Drake, Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, New York, 1962, p. 58.

55 Daniel M. Johnson, Rex R. Campbell, *Black Migration in America. A Social Demographic History*, Durham, 1981, p. 72.

56 Charles S. Johnson, "The Black Worker in New York City", *The Survey Graphic*, March, 1925, p. 643.

57 Betina Aptheker, *Women's Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex and Class in American History*, Amherst, 1982, p. 113.

58 Ibidem.

59 Osofsky, op. cit. p. 21.

60 Ibidem.

61 Richard Wright, "Introduction", in Drake and Cayton, op. cit. p. xvii.

Joe and Violet, leave their rural environment in Virginia and move to New York City responding to the inner urges of "their stronger, riskier selves". Arriving in their Promised Land, they shout: "At last, at last, everything's ahead".[62]

The migration experience was frequently perceived in religious dimensions, with biblical metaphors of the "Promised Land", "Flight out of Egypt", "Going into Canaan" often made use of. Here are just a few examples: Jeremiah Taylor's son, on his return from a nearby town, told that black folks were leaving "like Judgment day"; after a group of migrants crossed the Ohio River, they knelt down in prayer and sang "I Done Come out of the Land of Egypt with the Good News". "The cry of 'Going Nawth' hung over the land like the wail over Egypt at the death of the first-born", reported a sharecropper's daughter.[63] "Railroads, hardroads, dirt roads, side roads: roads were in the minds of the black South and all roads led North."[64]

The dynamically developing industry of the North attracted Negroes effectively, although voices were heard, like that of Giles G. Johnson, a Negro lawyer from Virginia, who pointed out in the *New York Times* that, according to the data available to him, the economic and financial conditions created by the post-Reconstruction period in the South were promising and could not explain the massive migration northward.[65]

New York City especially caught the imagination of African American migrants from the South and became a significant "pull" factor. The metropolis, as related in P.L. Dunbar's novel, *The Sport of the Gods*, "[...] was for the migrants vague and far away, a city that, like Heaven, to them had existed by faith alone. All the days of their lives they had heard about it and it seemed to them the center of all the glory, all the wealth and all the freedom of the world."[66] Again, we may support this claim with statistical data from documents of the U.S. Census Bureau which reveal that the African American population of New York City as a municipality numbered 91,709 in 1910, 152,467 in 1920 (the increase was of 60,758, which constituted a rise of 66.3 per cent), to reach 327,706 in 1930. The population growth between 1910 and 1930 was 250 percent.

62 Toni Morrison, *Jazz*, New York, 1992, p. 33, 7.

63 Spear, op. cit. p. 136, 137.

64 Zora Neale Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine,* New York, 1990, originally published in 1934, p. 151.

65 *The New York Times*, Nov. 11, 1917, p. 10.

66 P.L. Dunbar, *The Sport of Gods*, New York, 1970, p. 10.

The data referring to Manhattan also reveal the significant rise from 109,133 in 1920 to 224,670 in 1930.[67]

For suppressed southern Negroes, the North was *the* land, the Promised Land, whither they turned with hope for more equality and a better life. The following traditional blues captures the hopes and expectations of recent migrants:

> I'm a poor boy and I'm a stranger blowed into your town,
> Yes, I am,
> I'm a poor boy and I'm a stranger blowed into your town,
> I'm a poor boy and I'm a stranger blowed into your town,
> I'm goin' where a friend can be found.

In reality, however, a considerable (and perhaps more refined) discrimination existed in the North as well, especially in districts with greater concentrations of African Americans. As the Negro population grew, the existing forms of social rejection intensified. "Upon the ideological plane the ordinary northerner is [...] apparently conscious that social discrimination is wrong and against the American Creed, while the average Southerner tries to convince himself and the nation that it is right or, in any case, that it is necessary."[68] Antagonism on the side of ethnic whites greeted the large groups of recent migrants to northern cities. Prejudice and fear of mixed neighborhoods sparked off the summer riots of 1919. The most violent, the Chicago riot, lasted 13 days and left 15 white and 23 negro dead and almost thousand families homeless.[69] From the start of the great migration, growing anti-Negro sentiment took the form of residential segregation.

The Negro ethnic group in the cities of the North experienced a similar social mechanism as had other incoming minorities, resulting in an enclosing of the population in ethnic enclaves. But in comparison to white immigrants – who after a generation or so, once familiar with the language and customs (factors previously constituting an unsurpassable barrier), could disperse into other sections of the city – the Negroes were trapped in ghettoes permanently. The reasons were multiple, but

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[67] *Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Washington, 1935, p. 62.

[68] Myrdal, op. cit., p. 600.

[69] John H. Franklin, Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom. A History of African Americans,* New York, 1994, pp. 350, 351.

what seems to be essential was their "inescapable social visibility".[70] Allan H. Spear in his *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto. 1890 – 1920*, published in 1967, remarked that the black ghetto had features differentiating it from a white one:

> The Chicago experience, therefore, tends to refute any attempt to compare Northern Negroes with European immigrants. Unlike the Irish, Poles, Jews, or Italians, Negroes banded together not to enjoy a common linguistic, cultural, and religious tradition, but because a systematic pattern of discrimination left them no alternative. From its inception, the Negro ghetto was unique among the city's ethnic enclaves. It grew in response to an implacable white hostility [...] it was less the product of voluntary development within – than of external pressure from without.[71]

Another factor differentiating the white migration from the Negro one was a feature noticed by the *Report of the Committee on the Negro Housing*, a study conducted in 1931 and presented to President Hoover, stating that the white migrant could escape the ghetto "[...] with improvement in economic status in the second generation to a more desirable section of the city."[72]

African Americans also experienced discrimination from the incoming European immigrants. Myrdal comments that "the development of prejudice against the Negroes is usually one of the first lessons in Americanization. Because of the low status, they like to have a group like the Negroes to which they can be superior."[73]

This was the reality which the recent southern Negro migrants encountered in New York and other northern cities. The large black communities that have sprung up in Chicago and New York were shaped by the growing prejudice of the whites and the desire of the Negroes themselves to live near members of their own race, Myrdal calls this an "ethnic attachment".[74] "It was a sort of huddling for self-protection, a thing that has very often occurred in the South. It was a purely economic movement because the Negroes saw they could do better there. By huddling together they got the sort of protection that they otherwise

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70 Ibid., p. 601.

71 In Stanley Lieberson, *A Piece of the Pie. Blacks and White Immigrants Since 1880*, Los Angeles, 1980, p. 13.

72 *Report of the Committee on Negro Housing*, 1931, p. 5.

73 Myrdal, op. cit., p. 603.

74 Ibid., p. 619.

could not get."[75] They soon discovered that adjustment to the new urban conditions was easier in insulated black communities where they clustered for convenience.[76]

Much like other urban districts populated by African Americans, Harlem, once a "city of refuge", soon became "a city within a city" showing the visible signs of an emerging ghetto. Rudolph Fisher in his short story "City of Refuge", captures this aspect when he describes Harlem seen through the eyes of a recent arrived southern black:

> Gills set down his tan-cardboard extension case and wiped his black, shining brow. Then slowly, spreadingly, he grinned at what he saw: Negroes at every turn; up and down Lenox Avenue, up and down One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street; big, lanky ones; men standing idle on the curb, women, bundle-laden, trudging reluctantly homeward, children rattle-trapping about the sidewalks; here and there a white face drifting along, but Negroes predominantly, overwhelming everywhere. There was assuredly no doubt of his where-abouts. This was Negro Harlem.[77]

Another factor, equally important, closely connected with that mentioned above and determining the residential concentration in one community, was the poverty of the majority of the recent migrants who poured into the cheapest tenements available.[78] It should be stressed that the flocking into segregated communities was in some small degree a matter of choice, but mostly a reaction to the strong pressure of external factors. The same mechanisms have been noticed in reference to Jewish immigrants escaping the pogroms of Eastern Europe, huddled in segregated communities much like African Americans from the Jim Crow South. Abraham Cahan and Walter White described the Jewish Lower East Side as "a city within a city".[79] The same metaphor is used by Ralph Ellison in the *Invisible Man* (1952).[80] One thing is certain, segregation

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75 *W.E.B. Du Bois. On Sociology and the Black Community*, op. cit., p. 155.

76 This is well in line with what Robert E. Park and H.A. Miller viewed as the "spontaneous" reproduction of the home community and the temporary "huddling together in the alien land" in *Old World Traits Transplanted*, New York, 1921, p. 146. The idea was also put forth in Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted*, Boston, 1951.

77 Rudolph Fisher, "The City of Refuge", in the *New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke, New York, 1925, p. 57-58.

78 Myrdal, op. cit., p. 619.

79 A. Cahan, *Yekl*, New York, 1896, p. 51; W. White, *Flight*, New York, 1926, p. 187.

80 R. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, New York, 1952, p. 122.

was not created by the Jews or Negroes – it was the consequence of deeply embedded racial and ethnic prejudice.

As early as 1925, conducting studies of the growth of Chicago's black ghetto, the outstanding Chicago University scholar Ernest W. Burgess came to the conclusion that, as a result of the expansion of population, "a process of distribution takes place which shifts and relocates individuals and groups by residence and occupation." In effect, the "population tends to assume definite and typical patterns".[81] Scholars quoted by Frazier distinguish 7 zones about 1 mile in length. In the first zone over three-fourths of the heads of the families were born in the South. In successive zones the proportion of Southern-born heads of families declines until it reaches less than two-thirds of the overall population in the seventh zone. The same work remarks that there was a tendency of the higher occupational classes to move toward the periphery of the Negro community. We shall study to what degree these patterns fit the Harlem African American community.

1.4. African Americans in Harlem: The Next Phase

On July 10th, 1906, the *New York Herald Tribune* predicted: "It is generally believed by the residents [...] that the establishing of the Negroes in 135th Street is only the nucleus of a Negro settlement which will extend over a very wide area of Harlem within the next few years". The statement, as time has shown, turned out to be prophetic. The first apartments rented to black tenants were located on 134th Street, near 5th Avenue, reports Claude McKay in his book *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, "[...] and like a pebble making ripples in a pool, Aframericans [!] began spreading away from that first block into others."[82]

In spite of the attempts of white residents to block the African American invasion of Harlem through various means – among others, by establishing associations aimed at protecting the neighborhood – the battle was hopeless. The *Harlem Home News*, dated April 7th, 1911, proposed that Negroes "should buy large tracts of unimproved land near the city and there build up colonies of their own". An even more fantastic idea was put forward by John G. Taylor, director of the Harlem

[81] R.E. Park, "The Urban Community as a Special Pattern and Moral Order", in *The Urban Community*, ed. Ernest W. Burgess, 1926, p. 3, quoted also in Frazier, op. cit., p. 232.

[82] Claude McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, New York, 1940, p. 17.

Property Owners' Improvement Association, who suggested building a twenty-four foot fence setting the boundary beyond which the unwelcome blacks would not pass.[83]

The ingress of African Americans into Harlem, like all movements of population into new areas, had strong economic motivation behind it. To the property and real estate speculators, the racial sentiments of the majority of whites were not a barrier in the developing estate business. The movement of African Americans to Harlem was partly made possible due to the real estate depression of 1902, which followed the intensive growth of the previous years, stimulated in large degree by speculators. Harlem had been overbuilt with new apartment houses but the transportation facilities had not kept pace, hence the vacant apartments forced landlords to rent them to blacks. A colored estate businessman, Philip A. Payton proposed, to several landlords, renting the vacant apartments to Negroes, which was accepted and a number of "steady colored tenants" moved in. The sudden decline of rents in 1903 and the suggestion of Negro occupancy (who were to pay about 5 dollars a month more than whites) compensated, to some extent, the economic losses of the investors.[84]

White Harlemites reacted instantly to the growing black migration into their overwhelmingly white community. The following is the account of J. W. Johnson of this reaction:

> The whole movement in the eyes of the whites, took on the aspects of an "invasion", they became panic-stricken and began fleeing as from a plague. The presence of one colored family in the block, no matter how well bred and orderly, was sufficient to precipitate a flight. House after house and block after block was actually deserted.[85]

As has been said, the majority of whites left in panic, opening the district to further Negro inhabitation.

The adjustment of the newcomers was extremely difficult because of the striking contrasts in the level of civilization of southern and northern Negroes. A description of a newcomer was published in the *New York Times*:

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[83] Anderson, op. cit., p. 53.

[84] C.V. Kiser, *Sea Island to City. A Study of St. Helena Islanders in Harlem and Other Urban Centers*, New York, 1932, p. 20.

[85] James Weldon Johnson, in "The Making of Harlem", *Survey Graphic*, op. cit., p. 637 and later in "Harlem: The Cultural Capitol", in *The New Negro*, op. cit., p. 304.

> He is a seedy, collarless fellow, wearing a battered old soft hat. Slow in motion, He is constantly buffeted by the swift black tide of the avenue that sweep past him . [...] A product of the plantation, he shakes his head in puzzled fashion as he surveys the hurrying throngs and endless rows of brick and mortar. He has come here as to a promised land [...] As he strolls jauntily along the avenues swinging his cane, with his head erect his most intimate friends of the plantation would not recognize him.[86]

Their being mainly "country bred"[87] of various backgrounds, uneducated, with visible differences in their dress, behaviour, and speech – made acceptance by older residents complicated and delayed. In the words of Frazier, "the sudden descent of this vast human tide upon a few northern cities constituted a flight replete with dramatic episodes, from medieval to modern America."[88]

The southern newcomer had to face not only the discrimination of whites but rejection by members of his own race as well. Especially the more prosperous Negroes of the middle class realized the danger of lowering their status which could be caused by a flood of country-bred blacks of the lower class. Ordinary whites made no distinction among people of Negro background. Harlem was a community where "college graduates and cutthroats are huddled in the same tenements".[89] In spite of his attempts to live in better class apartments, the more prosperous Negro soon found that he was "[...] living among all classes of his people – the rich and indigent, the refined and the vulgar, the honest and criminal".[90] These segregational forces restricted the affluent as well as poor Negroes to specific districts. W.E.B. DuBois, being a member of "the better element of the race", found that both, the "competent and incompetent, the industrious and lazy, the law-abiding and the criminal"[91], came to New York City.

A strong tendency could be observed among New York Negroes to discourage their southern kinsmen from undertaking the journey North. Booker T. Washington, not himself a true New Yorker, yet had considerable control over *The Age* in the early 1900's, and through this

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86 *The New York Times*, April 17, 1927.

87 *The New York Times*, Nov. 17, 1901.

88 Frazier, op. cit., p. 225.

89 G.I. Collins, "The City Within the City", *Outlook*, LXXXIV, Sept. 29, 1906, p. 274.

90 *The New York Times*, Nov. 17, 1901.

91 Ibidem.

newspaper urged the prospective migrant to stay on the southern farm. In general, Washington demonstrated a preference for the farm over the factory, for the country over the city, for the South over the North, accepting the Jeffersonian belief that God dwelled on the farm and the devil inhabited the city.[92]

The same spirit was advocated by *The Colored American Review*, insisting in 1915 that "the colored race thrives better in the suburban and rural communities. The city, with its injustice, its temptations, [...] its unhealthy, poorly ventilated buildings, often prove too powerful a foe for the race to combat."[93] Mary Ovington remarked that the more established viewed the in-migration as a menace to their position.[94] Some of the New York City born manifested their hostility toward southern newcomers by excluding members born out of New York from their societies. The above enumerated trends, however, were not dominant. The NAACP and National Urban League were among those organizations which not only encouraged migration but also assisted newcomers. Time has shown that the shared experience of Negroes from such diverse backgrounds resulted in race-building tendencies in the near future.[95]

Rural culture – an expression of the needs and consciousness of small, local communities – could not flourish in the new dynamically developing urban surrounding. The process of urbanization influenced social ties, changing them drastically. The "face to face" type of social bond, typical of the rural social arrangement, along with the changes initiated by the process of industrialization, evolved toward new values typical of the mass society of the urban environment.

African Americans at the beginning of the 20th century, being an inseparable component of American society, experienced these processes with equal intensity. On their migrating into the cities of the North, not only did their place of residence change, but also their culture underwent a transformation. The complex process of adaptation to the new urban environment unavoidably had to take place if the recent migrants were to come into being as city folk. In his foreword to his autobiographical *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Claude Brown declares that

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92 Scheiner, op. cit., pp. 117, 118.

93 *The Colored American Review*, Oct. 1, 1915, p. 13.

94 Quoted in Scheiner, op. cit., p. 117.

95 N.I. Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, New York, 1971, p. 52.

his novel would attempt to trace the history of the first Northern generation of Negroes. Although the book depicts the urban adaptation of post-Depression black migrants, its account may be also representative of the pre- and post-First World War migration. Equally, the Southern Negroes who moved North in the 1900s as well as in the 1940s shared the same sorrows, the same futile rebellions and endless battles to establish their place in Harlem and in other urban centers.[96]

The transition from the rural to the urban was a painful turning point in the lives of many black migrants. Dunbar Barrington in an unpublished M.A. thesis (Columbia University, 1936) studied the complexities of this transformation. His work contains a strong criticism of the reality which the recent migrant encountered in Harlem, a life filled with "[...] unstable family relationships, prostitution, drinking, gambling [...] ."[97] In such circumstances the "[...] attempt to keep the home intact, to define member roles in spite of the disruptive factors of the new environment is perhaps the greatest problem which faces [...] parents of Harlem."[98] Apart from the description of the forming Harlem community, with its restructuring of social values, Dunbar Barrington also refers to one feature of a mass society important in our consideration, when he writes:

> In the small communities from which the aliens in Harlem migrate, people live in a very neighborly fashion. Neighbors call upon each other; help in the solution of each other's problems. [...] Life moves on with an even tempo. In Harlem however life is characterized by a kind of spontaneity quite unlike the sober temper of smaller communities. City ways are "fast ways".[99]

Although the patterns of adjustment of the rural southern Negro to the urban environment have not been closely studied yet, Meier and Rudwick made a few observations on this topic that are worth mentioning. What seems important to the authors is the fact that the migrants brought with them the institution of the church which, in modified form,

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96 Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*, New York, 1965, p. vii.

97 Dunbar Barrington, "Factors in Cultural Backgrounds of the British West Indian Negro and the American South Negro that Condition Their Adjustments in Harlem.", unpublished M.A. Thesis, Columbia University, 1936, found on microfilms in the Schomburg Center for Negro Studies in New York City, p. 4.

98 Ibid., p. 19.

99 Ibid., p.17.

played an essential role in the adjustment of the Negroes to urban life.[100] "Behind the walls of the Negro ghetto, the church was the major institution about which the life of the Negro community revolved."[101] Harlem churches played a multifold and indispensable role in preserving and further developing the social and cultural lives of the newcomers as well as New York born Negroes. Scheiner enumerates these functions: "It ministered to religious needs, served as a social center, supplied relief to the orphaned and aged, promoted educational and cultural activities, stood in the vanguard of many race enterprises, and fostered the expression of a Negro point of view through the leadership of the clergy."[102]

In effect, the major black churches, the mentioned Negro organizations, as well as the black newspapers – all moved into Harlem to be able to appeal directly to the masses, building up race identity and race pride. The district truly became the metaphorical Promised Land[103] for American Negroes. In a few years, relatively isolated from the outside world, Harlem African Americans developed their own social and cultural life (often referred to as the Harlem Renaissance), and became the "symbol of liberty and the Promised Land to Negroes Everywhere".[104] The role of religious and social organizations in the development of the African American community in Harlem and their impact on the rise and the success of the Harlem Renaissance will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

[100] Meier A., Rudwick E., op. cit., p. 230.

[101] Scheiner, op. cit., p. 86.

[102] Ibid., p. 87.

[103] The biblical metaphor "Promised Land" in reference to Harlem was popular at the time and was used by, for example Pastor Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., and in contemporary criticism by Jervis Anderson.

[104] Scheiner, op cit., p. 87.

2. THE AFRICAN AMERICAN URBAN COMMUNITY AND RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN FORMATION

2.1. The Church and Social Organizations: Building a Race Identity

Religion was from the beginning of the Negro experience in the United States an essential social and psychological factor.

> The slaves, who had been torn from their homeland, from family and friends, and whose cultural heritage had disintegrated or had lost its meaning in the new environment, were broken men. The bonds of a common tradition, of religious beliefs and practices, had been broken and the Negroes had become "atomized" in the American environment. Here was an appeal, emotional and simple, that provided a new way of life and drew them into a common union with their fellow men. It [...] formed a strong common bond with members of their race.[1]

At first as slaves, and later as free men, Negroes found in the white evangelical faiths, mainly in Baptist and Methodist congregations, a hope of salvation and an opportunity for emotional expression. As was the case with the white American population, among Negroes also the small upper class tended more than the lower class to belong to the Episcopalian, Congregational and Presbyterian churches. The ministers in these churches were educated men and their sermons had a scholarly character. On the other hand, in Baptist and Methodist churches with their more emotional ambience, the elements of the lower class concentrated.

The rural southern church adopted to the new conditions of urban life, which expressed itself in the forming of many small "storefront" churches and various sectarian congregations. E.F. Frazier gives a convincing explanation of the forces attracting the recent southern

[1] E.F. Frazier, *The Negro in the United States*, New York, 1957, p. 339.

lower-class migrants to the storefront and not to established orthodox churches. "In the large churches the Negro from the South, being lost in the mass of members, has no status and longs for the warmth and sympathetic relationship which is provided in the face-to-face association in the small church."[2]

As a reaction to the growth of storefront churches, the Baptist and Methodist churches in the northern cities underwent gradual changes, adapting themselves to the urban environment. The ministers in the Baptist and Methodist churches to a greater degree represented a more secular attitude toward the problems facing the black minority. The Abyssinian Church in Harlem provided an example of the secularization which took place in all of the orthodox Negro churches in northern cities.[3]

The great migration to the North reflected itself in the growth in number of Negro churches. While in New York in 1865 there were only 13 Negro churches in Manhattan and Brooklyn, increasing to more than 299 in the 1920's.[4] This rapid rise was due to the mushrooming of many storefront churches in Harlem. The number also rose in result of numerous divisions caused by disagreements within the older churches.

The northward movement within the city of New York resulted in the uptown movement of the Negro churches as well. The relocation of downtown congregations forced the clergymen to follow their church members uptown. As noted earlier, the influx of recent migrants from Italy into the previously all black neighborhood of Greenwich Village consequently forced out the Negroes and, in effect, also caused the selling off of the property of the black churches located there. Consequently, a decision had to be undertaken to find new quarters in the growing Harlem community.

In most cases, the church (the orthodox as well as the newly established), became the center for social work in the Negro community. It became thus much more than a place of worship: "The church has been, and continues to be, the outstanding social institution in the Negro community [...] It is a complex institution meeting a wide variety of needs."[5] James Weldon Johnson writes in *Black Manhattan*:

[2] Ibid., p. 355.

[3] Ibid., p. 360.

[4] S.M. Scheiner, *Negro Mecca. A History of the Negro in New York City. 1865-1920*., New York, 1967, p. 87.

[5] Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt*, Washington D.C., 1941, p. 135.

> It is a social center, it is a club, it is an arena for the exercise of one's capabilities and powers, a world in which one may achieve self-realization and preferment. Of course, a church means something of the same sort to all groups, but with the Negro all these attributes ace magnified because of the fact that they are so curtailed for him in the world at large [...] Aside from any spiritual benefits derived, going to church means being dressed in one's best clothes, forgetting for the time about work, having a chance to acquaint oneself with credit before one's fellows, and having the opportunity of meeting, talking and laughing with friends and of casting an appraising and approving eye upon the opposite sex. Going to church is an outlet for the Negro's religious emotions, but not the least reason why he is willing to support so many churches is that they furnish so many agreeable activities and so much real enjoyment. He is willing to support them because he has not yet, and will not have until there is far greater economic and intellectual development and social organization, any other agencies that can fill their place.[6]

It should be stressed that religion in general, and the church in particular, played an essential role in the shaping of the urban community. According to Gunnar Myrdal, the main function of the Negro church "has been to buoy up the hopes of its members in the face of adversity and to give them a sense of community."[7]

The social work of the majority of Harlem churches concentrated mainly on charitable and educational programs addressed to their adherents. The following are some of the examples given by Scheiner: the Abyssinian Baptist Church conducted a Vocational Training School aimed at teaching youth a trade; the Union Baptist Church also operated an industrial school; some churches organized summer camps, still others gave assistance to the aged and those in need. All the activities undertaken by the average Negro church, however, failed to fulfill all of the social needs of the black masses.[8] An exception to the rule can be the examples of St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal Church and the Salem Methodist Episcopal Church – which manifested a deep interest in all aspects of Negro life: beginning with organized activities for youth, aimed at eradicating crime among Negro juveniles, and ending with concern over the problem of prostitution.

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6 James W. Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, New York, 1968, p. 165.

7 Gunnar Myrdal., *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, New York, 1962, p. 936.

8 Scheiner, op. cit., p. 92.

The church was also the guardian of a number of societies, such as fraternal and benevolent organizations. At first these organizations were closely tied with the church, where the members had their meetings, but with time they became more and more independent and relied less on the church as a place to congregate, instead renting or purchasing meeting halls. "Like the church", Scheiner observes, "fraternal societies and social clubs compensated for the Negro's exclusion from the activities of white society"[9], and through their wide work contributed to the further integration of the Negro community. "Through these organizations Negroes gained an expression of race consciousness, a feeling of self fulfillment, a sense of achievement denied them beyond the walls of the ghetto.[10] Exclusion from other forms of organized life in the United States explains to some degree the wide activity of various Negro associations.

The first mutual aid society organized among the Negroes in the United States was The Free African Society, founded in Philadelphia in 1787 to "support one another in sickness, and for the benefit of their widows and fatherless children."[11] Other institutions developed rapidly in the South after Reconstruction, and with migration to the North were transplanted into the urban communities.

The economic insecurity in the large agglomerations where Negroes led a precarious existence because of their inability to compete with European immigrants, led to the widespread development of organizations for mutual aid. As early as 1871, *The New York Times* reported that Negroes possessed a "readiness to enter into every new society"[12], adding that there was scarcely a Negro who did not belong to a society. In 1916, Charles Martin exclaimed that Negroes were simply "lodge mad"[13]. Social clubs, recreational organizations, lodges, fraternities and sororities, civic improvement societies, self-improvement societies and occupational associations – grouped by Myrdal under one name of "voluntary associations" – are very characteristic of American society in general and of the Negro ethnic group in particular. African American social institutions were often replicas of their white counterparts. These "manifestation of the American norm", represented an "effort to achieve

9 Ibid., p. 92.

10 Ibid., p. 93.

11 Frazier, op. cit., p. 369.

12 *The New York Times*, March 13, 1871.

13 Ibidem.

identification with upper-class whites by imitating as far as possible the behaviour of white society".[14]

In their activities, societies went beyond the sickness and death benefits of the earlier rural institutions – providing a very active social life:

> One of the most popular diversions was the ball or promenade. At these events, the participants socialized and displayed the latest clothing fashions. Social affairs helped to defray the heavy expenses of these organizations [...] Along with balls and promenades, picnics were popular diversions in the Negro community. Churches, fraternal organizations, social clubs, and various ad hoc associations held these events in neighboring parks or distant resort areas. Negroes celebrated the customary holidays and added to the commemoration such events as the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln's Birthday.[15]

2.2. Race Pride and the Hope of Race Redemption: Marcus Garvey and His Movement.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, the Negro society centered in Harlem was developing a sense of racial self-consciousness through the various forms of activity of the above mentioned institutions of the church and voluntary associations, but the social integration of this ethnic group would not be complete without the activity of the Back-to-Africa movement led by Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey. The church and secular organizations brought only partial comfort to African Americans disappointed with what they had encountered in the urban Promised Land. After a few years of residence in northern cities, they began repeating ever more often the words of Jeremiah from the Old Testament: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."[16] Garvey with his ideology responded to these feelings of discontent and "made thousands think, who had never thought before. Thousands who merely dreamed dreams, now saw visions."[17]

As a number of critics (Cronon, Levine) have observed, to understand the extraordinary scope of Garvey's movement we are compelled

[14] Scheiner, op. cit., p. 93. Also see Myrdal, op. cit., pp. 952-53.

[15] Ibid., p. 95.

[16] M.R. Berry, J.W. Blassingame, *Long Memory. The Black Experience in America*, New York, Oxford, 1982, p. 101.

[17] *The Spokesman,* quoted in Edmund David Cronon, *Black Moses. The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*, Madison, 1969, p. 136.

to consider mainly the historical reality on one side, and the charismatic features of its leader on the other. Garvey fully understood the growing dissatisfaction among American Negroes and had the strength to capture their hearts and minds. With his first arrival in the United States in 1916, Marcus Mosiah Garvey, the eleventh child of Marcus and Sarah Garvey, born in St. Ann's Bay, a rural town on the North coast of Jamaica in the British West Indies, met the growing social and economic frustration of American Negroes. As frustration often turned into riots, the climate was favorable to promote ideas of racial pride and redemption.

The group to which Garvey made the strongest appeal were the poorly educated lower class Negroes, who, after the initial experience of relative equality between the races, now disillusioned, were searching for new hopes of survival in the hostile American environment. Their dreams and expectations in the period prior to the First World War transmuted into frustration and disillusionment after it. The war created a hope for the Negroes that the fruits of democracy for which the Americans were fighting in Europe would be granted to them as well. In spite of a limited number of voices, like the one published in *The Messenger* by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, which "cynically questioned the advisability of dying for the country that denied all its citizens equal treatment"[18], the overwhelming majority of the American Negroes responded loyally to the call to arms. In the new circumstances created by the war, many Negro activists, notably W.E.B. Du Bois, shared a deep hope that through bloodshed black men would gain their share of American equal rights. In a famous editorial which appeared in *The Crisis* in July 1918, under the title "Close Ranks", Du Bois urged Negroes to forget their particular grievances and stand shoulder to shoulder with their white fellow citizens in the fight to protect democracy and thus prove to themselves and their white co-citizens, that they were worth of equality. A year later, in the May, 1919 issue, in the article "Returning Soldiers", Du Bois spoke in the name of the returning soldiers when he said:

> We return from the slavery of uniform which the world's madness demanded us to don to the freedom of civil garb. We stand again to look America squarely in the face and call a spade a spade. We sing: This country of ours, despite all its better souls have done and dreamed, is yet a shameful land.

[18] Ibid. p. 27.

> It *lynches* [...] It *disfranchises* its citizens. [...] It encourages *ignorance*. [...] It steals from us. [...] It insults us. [...]
> We *return*. We *return from fighting*. *We return fighting*.
> Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the U.S.A., or know the reason why. [original emphasis – Z.G.]

Reverend Francis J. Grimke welcomed the returning black soldiers in words which echo the sentiments of Du Bois's article:

> Again, most gladly do I welcome you back home; and most earnestly do we express the hope that every man of you will play a man's part in the longer and more arduous struggle that is before us in battling for our rights at home. If it was worth going abroad to make the world safe for democracy, it is equally worth laboring no less earnestly to make it safe at home. We shall be greatly disappointed if you do not do this – if you fail to do your part. [19]

In Europe, and in France in particular, Negro soldiers experienced equal treatment and respect not encountered in "The Land of the Free". The returning African American troops, who had fought so bravely in France where race prejudice was mostly absent, in their homeland encountered strong discrimination. Moreover, racial riots erupted and swept across the United States. Lawrence W. Levine gives an account of the words of one of the veterans who, returning from work during the Chicago race riot of the "Red Summer", was set up by a white mob shouting: "There's a nigger, get him!" The veteran later testified: "The injustice of the whole thing overwhelmed me; had the ten months I spent in France been all in vain? Were those little white crosses over the dead bodies of those dark-skinned boys lying in Flanders field for naught? Was democracy merely a hollow sentiment?"[20] Levine further remarks that "Blacks had played the game by the rules and discovered that the rules simply did not apply to them. 'We have been fighting the wrong fellow', a Negro Masonic leader in California insisted. 'The American,

[19] Francis J. Grimke, *The Works of Francis J. Grimke*, Carter G. Woodson, ed., Vol. I, *Addresses Mainly Personal and Racial*, Washington, pp. 589-591 , quoted in Franklin J. H. and Moss A. A., Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, New York, 1994, p. 349.

[20] L. W. Levine, "Marcus Garvey and the Politics of Revitalization", in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, edited by J.H. Franklin and A. Meier, 1982, p. 113.

and not the German, is the brute who ravished our women, lynched, flayed, burned and massacred our men and women.'"[21]

The natural reaction to the growing discrimination was to search within its own community for protection, understanding and consolation. The external conditions gave impetus to search within African American culture and black people themselves for elements indispensable for survival and the building of a meaningful existence.[22] Anthropologist Anthony F.C. Wallace has observed that when a perceptible gap arises between the images and expectations of the local culture and the dominant culture, the resulting anxiety can often be relieved only through the agency of what he calls a "revitalization moment": "a deliberate, organized conscious effort of a society to construct a more satisfying culture", one that comes closer to their longstanding dreams and expectations.[23]

Marcus Garvey was the one who successfully preached a message of revitalization to the urban Negro masses, welding them into a mass movement never before experienced within this ethnic group. His earlier political activity had shaped his outlook but we can speak of his international career as beginning August 1st, 1914, when UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) was established in Jamaica. From the very beginning the Association's aims were clearly stated: "To establish a Universal Confraternity among the race, [...] to promote the spirit of race pride and love, [...] to establish Commissionaires or Agencies in the provincial countries of the world for the protection of all Negroes irrespective of nationality, [...] to conduct a world-wide commercial and industrial intercourse", and the vaguely worded exhortation "to strengthen the imperialism of independent African States".[24] "One God! One Destiny!" became the bold motto of Garvey's organization.

Garvey's ambitions, however, were far greater; hence, Jamaica soon turned out to be too provincial for them to be set in motion. In March 1916, Garvey arrived in Harlem finding the black masses eager to listen to his message of race redemption. The program of his organization was focused on two elements that were interwoven together: race pride and African nationalism. "Be proud of your race today as our fathers were in

21 Ibidem.

22 Ibidem.

23 Anthony F.C. Wallace in Levine, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

24 Quoted in Levine, op. cit., p. 110.

the days of yore. We have a beautiful history, and we shall create another in the future that will astonish the world."[25]

The most effective instrument for the promotion of his program became *The Negro World*, UNIA's New York weekly, established in 1918 (with an estimated circulation from 60 to 200 thousand in its most prosperous years) and the daily *Negro Times*. The message propagated through these papers was directed not only toward Negroes living in the United States but was meant to communicate with blacks throughout the world.

Journalistic and oratory skills were not the only strengths of the leader of UNIA. Garvey created a number of groups under the patronage of his organization: The Legion, Black Cross Nurses, Negro Factories Corporation, and finally a business venture, The Black Star Line which was to be the manifestation of economic independence of African Americans. Operated by and for black people, giving even the poorest a chance to become stockholders, this steamship company was to link the colored peoples of the world. Speaking during the first annual meeting of stockholders of the Black Star Line on July 20, 1920, Marcus Garvey said, referring to the enterprise: "[...] it has brought recognition to us as race – it has elevated our men."[26]

UNIA, which was modeled after other American fraternal orders, held annual international conventions. During the first one, in August 1920, which in the words of Cranon, turned out to be an "extravaganza not soon to be forgotten"[27], Garvey said: "We are the descendants of a suffering people, we are descendants of a people determined to suffer no longer. We shall now organize the 400 000 000 Negroes of the world into a vast organization to plant the banner of freedom on the great continent of Africa."[28] The unsophisticated and uneducated masses – Garvey's basic supporters – were not only allured by the program of the movement but also by the splendor and pageantry (reminding Cranon of a medieval coronation). Levine reports that during the convention of 1920:

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[25] *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, Amy Jacques Garvey, ed., Paterson, 1923, vol. I, p. 7.

[26] Cronon, op. cit., p. 59.

[27] Ibid., p. 62.

[28] Ibid., p.65.

> Spectators lined the streets of Harlem for miles to watch Garvey in military uniform and plumed hat lead his impressively arrayed followers under such banners as: "We Want a Black Civilization", "God and the Negro Shall Triumph", "Uncle Tom's Dead and Buried", "Africa Must Be Free", and, at the head of the Woman's Auxiliary, "God Give Us Real Men!"[29]

Garvey, who was elected president of UNIA and the provisional president of Africa, and who himself created numerous titles for his association, loved the atmosphere of ceremony. Mrs. Garvey described the court reception held during the convention of 1921:

> The hall was transformed into a magnificent tropical setting, with lighting effect, appropriate music being played. Each Dignitary was timed to arrive according to his rank, and an anthem or appropriate music played until he was seated [...] Young ladies were presented, and honors conferred on persons who had served the race faithfully and well. Titles were: Knight Commander of the Nile, Distinguished Service Order of Ethiopia, and the Star of African Redemption. After the ceremonies, supper was served, guests were seated according to rank. Then followed the Great Ball, with all courtliness of training, natural gift for dancing and love for music.[30]

Increasing criticism of UNIA's leader, combined with complaints by a number of Black Star Line stockholders, resulted in the arrest of Garvey in January, 1922, on the charge of using the mails to defraud. On February 2, 1925, Garvey's appeal of his mail fraud conviction was rejected by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and two years later he entered Atlanta Penitentiary to serve a five-year term. In his cell he continued his activity and in one of the letters to his followers he wrote:

> My months of forcible removal from among you, being imprisoned as a punishment for advocating the cause of our real emancipation, have not left me hopeless or despondent; but on the contrary, I see a great ray of light and the bursting of a mighty political cloud which will bring you complete freedom [...] Hold fast to the Faith. Desert not the ranks, but as brave soldiers march on to victory. I am happy, and shall remain so, as long as you keep the flag flying. [31]

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29 Levine, op. cit., p. 120.

30 Amy Jacques Garvey, in Levine, op. cit., p. 121.

31 Marcus Garvey quoted in Franklin J.H. Moss A.A., op. cit., p. 359.

Garvey remained in prison until President Coolidge pardoned him in 1927 and ordered his deportation as an undesirable alien – thus ending Garvey's short-lived, but nevertheless turbulent presence in the United States. The UNIA continued its activity but the days of power and glory were behind it without the main animator.

During his decade-long activity in the United States, Garvey created an organization which, as he himself estimated, had 11 million members. The figures reflected Garvey's hope and pride more than they corresponded to reality. Still he could be proud if not of the actual membership then at least of the vigorous informal support he had received. In effect, he "[...] made black people proud of their race. In a world where black is despised, he taught them to admire and praise black things and black people [...] They rallied to him because he heard and responded to the heart beat of his race."[32]

Marcus Garvey, through his activity, helped to create race consciousness of African Americans on a scale never before experienced, giving them a sense of pride, strength and historical perspective, and becoming an essential stimulus for the cultural revival manifested by the Harlem Renaissance.

Garvey's movement found strong opposition among the educated African American middle-class, who "regarded the global schemes of its owner with a mixture of chagrin and derision."[33] Especially after it was revealed that the president-general had secretly attended the Ku Klux Klan summit meeting in Atlanta (June 1922), the Afro-American leadership united in a "Garvey Must Go" campaign. The fact that a Negro activist would come into contact with an organization aiming at the extermination of the black race could not be accepted by the majority of Negro intellectuals. The only logical explanation for such a step was that Garvey at that time had a vague idea of obtaining Klan support for his Back-to-Africa venture – the KKK's ideology of race purity being in accordance with Garvey's own ideas.[34] He had a high opinion of the supremacist organizations as having "lynched race pride into the Negroes".[35] In an address entitled "The Ideals of Two Races", delivered on October 28, 1925, Garvey openly stated that:

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[32] *The Amsterdam News*, Nov. 30, 1927.

[33] David L. Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, New York, 1982, p. 37.

[34] Consult Cronon, op. cit., p. 190.

[35] Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey*, Baton Rouge, 1986, p. 338.

> We believe in the doctrine of "Live and let live." They [supremacist organizations] represent the clean-cut and honest section of the white race that uncompromisingly stands for the purity of their race, even as we unhesitatingly and determinedly agitate and fight for the purity of the Negro race.[...] All races should be pure in morals and in outlook, and for that we, as Negroes, admire the leaders and members of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs. They are honest and honorable in their desire to purify and preserve the white race even as we are determined to purify and standardize our race. [36]

Although most of Harlem's intellectuals united in their opposition to the social activity of Marcus Garvey, they cannot be viewed as a unified group. They were as diverse in their outlook on racial problems as the whole of the Harlem community. Black intellectuals could not fail to notice Garvey's movement and very early expressed their criticism of not only the ideological program but also the show he made out of a mass organization. They not only ridiculed his "anachronistic trappings and aristocracy"[37], but also saw the dangers of his UNIA with "[...] its fierce chauvinistic nationalism and strong centralized leadership, which had fascist characteristics"[38].

2.3. Struggle for the Souls of Black Folk: The W.E.B. Du Bois – Marcus Garvey Controversy

The role of W.E.B. Du Bois in shaping the intellectual climate and stimulating the artistic creativity of the Renaissance remains unquestionable. Du Bois in his manifold activities demonstrated a strong belief in progressive social action and envisioned the social, economic and artistic advancement of African Americans that would be possible due to the efforts of the "talented tenth". This group, the top 10 percent of the race in terms of education, would not only set an example for their brothers but would guide and assist them in their struggles to win equal position in American society .

In contrast to Du Bois, a radically different approach was presented by Marcus Garvey who saw a solution to the race problem through the building of racial pride and the idea of a Back-to-Africa movement. However, his equally momentous inspiration and role in the shaping

[36] *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 338.

[37] Ibidem.

[38] Cronon, op. cit., p. 199.

of the Renaissance has been neglected [39] and so in many discussions Garvey is "the great absent"[40] of the movement. As Tony Martin – a long-time propagator of the argument that Garvey did, in fact, exert an important impact on the Harlem Renaissance – shows, Garvey is most often viewed from the perspective of his social[41] and economic activity[42], and less as an inspiration for artistic creativity.

This sub-chapter surveys the contacts between Du Bois and Garvey and the subsequent controversy which developed between them. This controversy reflects at the same time the struggle between the two to win the hearts and souls (not to forget the financial support) of the African-American population of the United States in the 1920s and to convince them to embrace their own respective programs providing an ultimate solution to the racial problem in the United States. Although their views – which covered a whole spectrum of social and political, as well as artistic, spheres – varied considerably, there were issues which brought them more closely together. These issues will be considered at the end of the chapter.

The controversy between the two leaders struggling to win support for their alternative solutions of the race problem was most visible on the pages of *The Crisis* (edited by Du Bois) and *The Negro World* (Garvey's UNIA – Universal Negro Improvement Association weekly newspaper). *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Race,* founded by Du Bois in 1910 with a circulation of 1,000, was soon to become the most influential publication of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Its position was reflected in the circulation which grew from a modest 9,000 in 1911 to reach 30,000 in 1915, then to

[39] Tony Martin, in the Bibliographical Note (p. 355) of his *African Fundamentalism. A Literary and Cultural Anthology of Garvey's Harlem Renaissance*, Dover, Mass., 1991, gives account of his publications aimed at re-evaluating the role of Garvey in the development of the Renaissance. He first introduced the argument in: *Race First: the Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the U.N.I.A*, Dover, 1968, extended it in: *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts and the Harlem Renaissance*, Dover, 1983, and by publishing in *African Fundamentalism* a selection of texts from the *Negro World* from the years 1920-1928 gave further arguments.

[40] In the introduction to Geneviève Fabre and Michel Feith, eds. *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*, Bloomington, 2003, p. 9.

[41] Stein, op. cit.; Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*, Dover, Mass. 1976.

[42] W. Haddad and D. Pugh, *Black Economic Development*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J, 1969; Shawn Carter, "The Economic Philosophy of Marcus Garvey", *Western Journal of Black Studies*, Spring 2002, Vol. 26, Issue 1.

skyrocket to 75,000 in 1918 and 100,000 in 1919.[43] However, consecutive years indicate a considerable drop in circulation caused by numerous reasons, one of them presumably being the publication of Garvey's *The Negro World* which drew away some of Du Bois's readers. *The Negro World* was established by Garvey in Harlem in 1918 and soon achieved a circulation of 200,000 to become, according to Martin, "one of the largest Black newspapers and certainly the most widely distributed".[44] The dynamism by which the circulation of the paper grew reflects the dynamism of the movement led by Garvey. Although the target readership of both papers varied, undoubtedly Garvey's publication attracted some readers of *The Crisis*.

Relations between Du Bois and Garvey were complex. Many years later, in his autobiographical *Dusk of Dawn*, when he describes the problems of the Pan-African movement, Du Bois recalls Marcus Garvey as someone who "walked into the scene" [45] – the American scene of African-American struggle for a respected place in society. In fact, he intruded into the African-American reality of the day where Du Bois had already assumed the mantle of Booker T. Washington as the leading voice of the race. In his most famous essay "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and others", contained in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois openly challenges Washington's leadership when he writes, " [...] the time is come when one may speak in all sincerity and utter courtesy of the mistakes and shortcomings of Mr. Washington's career [...]"[46] As the result of the criticism, he presented his own blueprint for racial uplift where the well educated "talented tenth" – and not the professionally trained blue collar worker – would be the vanguard of social, political and artistic development of the race. Du Bois went a step further than the Washingtonian belief that "[...] culture without a decent home and a bank account means little".[47]

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[43] John Tobbel and Mary, Ellen Zuckermann, *The Magazine in America: 1741-1990*, New York, 1991, pp. 131-139.

[44] Martin, *African Fundamentalism,* op. cit., p. XV.

[45] *W.E.B. Du Bois. Writings*. Literary Classics of the United States, New York, 1986, p. 756.

[46] W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Greenwich, 1961, p. 44.

[47] Booker T. Washington, 1896 address at the Armstrong-Slater Memorial Trade School, in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, ed. Louis R. Harlan, Stuart B. Kaufman, and Raymond W. Smock, Chicago, 1972-1984, vol. 4, p. 373.

Du Bois and Garvey, viewed from a wider social and intellectual perspective, present two different worlds – not only geographically. Du Bois – born in Great Barrington in Massachusetts of a mixed heritage, graduated from Fisk, then Harvard University, to become one of the most prominent voices of the Afro-American minority of the times. Du Bois was a very prolific Afro-American sociologist. His credits include a major monograph on black urban life, numerous other studies on black American life and culture, and an impressive number of fiction writings. "He was a historian, editor, writer, educator, civil rights activist, propagandist and a sociologist. Known primarily for his propagandist activities and leadership on behalf of his race."[48]

On the other hand, Garvey a native of Jamaica, did not receive any formal education; however, he read widely and extended his interest in the written word as a printer's apprentice and then as a printer himself. Furthermore, the elocution lessons he took and public speaking contests he participated in helped to develop the oratory skills fundamental to his later career. He worked as a journalist and traveled extensively (Central and South America 1910-12, Great Britain and Europe 1912-14); consequently, as Tony Martin concludes, "[...]. world travel convinced Garvey of the need for founding a racial uplift organization",[49] which he soon did; the Universal Negro Improvement Association was established in Jamaica in 1914. Booker T. Washington encouraged him to come to the United States and it was on this invitation that he arrived in the United States on 23 March, 1916, only to learn of Washington's death. He came with a vision for extending the activity of UNIA first in the US and then eventually in the whole world. His first attempt to win followers was to organize a meeting at Saint Mark's Hall at West 138th Street in Harlem during which he was to deliver a lecture on Jamaica; musical entertainment was also planned. As the printed announcement advertised, the purpose of the lecture was to help the "Universal Negro Improvement Association of Jamaica to establish industrial farms".[50]

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48 Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver, eds., in the introduction to *W.E.B Du Bois. On Sociology and the Black Community*, Chicago, 1978, p. l.

49 Martin, *Literary Garveyism*, op. cit., p. 3. Also bibliographical data comes from the same source, pp. 1-4.

50 Information on the Saint Mark Hall lecture, printed announcement quote, Garvey's *Crisis* visit – based on *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois*, vol. I, Selections, 1877-1934, ed. Herbert Aptheker, University of Mass. Press, Amherst, 1973, p. 214.

The arrival of Garvey did not go unnoticed by the Afro-American press. The May, 1916 issue of *The Crisis* reported the coming of Garvey to New York City and informed of a series of lectures "in an effort to raise funds for the establishment of an industrial and educational institution for Negroes in Jamaica."[51] A month earlier, in April, Garvey visited the offices of *The Crisis* with the intention of personally inviting Du Bois. The latter, however, was out of town so Garvey only left him a note inviting him to the meeting.

In fact Du Bois had met Garvey a year earlier during Du Bois's vacation in Jamaica in 1915 where he "[...]extended a [...] handshake to a short, very dark-skinned man of remarkable intensity, one Marcus M. Garvey."[52] In a letter to Du Bois, dated April 30, 1915 (Kingston, Jamaica), Garvey gives a "hearty welcome to Jamaica, and trusts that he has enjoyed the stay in the sunny island."[53] Time was to show that the initial courtesy was soon to give way to "deep personal and political hostility",[54] but at this point both showed considerable sympathy to each other, with Du Bois characterizing Garvey as "an extraordinary leader of men"[55] This state of affairs would continue for some time. In the summer of 1920, Du Bois and Garvey exchanged a number of letters.[56] In one of them, dated July, 16, 1920, Garvey came out with a proposal:

> At the International convention of Negroes to be held in New York during the month of August, the Negro people of America will elect a leader by the popular vote of delegates from the forty-eight States of the Union. This leader as elected, will be the accredited spokesman of the American Negro people. You are hereby asked to be good enough to allow us to place your name in the nomination for the post. [57]

Du Bois answered promptly on July, 22, thanking Garvey for "the suggestion" and firmly stating that "under no circumstances can I allow

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[51] *The Crisis*, May, 1916, p. 517.

[52] Reported in David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois. Biography of a Race, 1869-1919.*, New York, 1993, p. 456.

[53] Garvey to Du Bois, *Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 1, ed. Robert A. Hill, University of California, Berkeley, 1986, p.120.

[54] Fabre, Feith, op. cit., p. 29.

[55] *The Correspondence,* op. cit., p. 245.

[56] Ibidem.

[57] Ibid. p. 245-6.

my name to be presented". He went on to inform Garvey about the considerable interest of *The Crisis* readers in his movement, asking for details concerning: "Name, History, Offices, Finances, Members, Property, Activities and Accomplishments, Publications" because, as he formulates it: "It seems, however, increasingly important as your movement grows that we should present to our readers a critical estimate of it."[58] Unfortunately, there is no sign of Garvey's answer. Even if Garvey did not supply the information Du Bois asked for, *The Crisis* was indeed well informed. As the movement grew, Du Bois felt an obligation to share this information with his readers and inform them of the real scope of the movement. What worried Du Bois in particular were Garvey's aspirations to establish a number of UNIA businesses: especially the Black Star Line venture. This proposed international shipping line was to transport goods and passengers between the United States, Africa, and the West Indies. It caught the attention of Du Bois and of the underprivileged African-American community drawn by Garvey's "'get-rich-quick' promises."[59]

Du Bois reacted with a number of *The Crisis* articles. In the first one, in December, 1920, he declares that he has not found "[...] a slightest proof that [Garvey's] objects were not sincere or that he was consciously diverting money to his own use. The great difficulty with him is that he has absolutely no business sense, no *flair* for real organisation and his general objects are so shot through with bombast and exaggeration that it is difficult to pin them down for careful examination". [60] He later characterises him as "an inexperienced businessman [who] cannot escape failure."[61] The September, 1922 *Crisis* Du Bois article "The Black Star Line", is a selection of quotes from the certified copy of the sworn testimony of the Orr trial (Orr being a stockholder who sued Garvey). Du Bois gives an account of the Black Star Line venture quoting Garvey's own words and also cites the final statement of the trial made by Judge Panken:, "It seems to me that you have been praying upon the gullibility of your own people [...] there is a form of paranoia which manifests itself in believing oneself to be a great man"[62], and ends the article with a

[58] *The Correspondence,* p. 246.

[59] Shawn, op. cit., p. 2-3.

[60] *The Crisis*, December, 1920, p. 58-60.

[61] *The Crisis*, January, 1921, p. 112-15.

[62] *The Crisis*, September, 1922, p. 210-214.

quotation from a letter by Ella Ross Hutson: "I am forced to write to you, asking if it is wise for a widow-woman who makes her living by working in service and doing day's work, to continue to make the sacrifice by sending $5.00 per month on payment of shares in the Black Star Line [...] I began to think, maybe I had better keep my earnings at home, for I have an aged mother to support and I haven't one penny to throw away." [63] Readers were allowed to draw their own conclusions which seem to be obvious: open your eyes, cast off the spell, see what is the truth – do not support Garvey.

The controversy intensified to a climax in *The Crisis* article of May, 1924, headlined "A lunatic or a traitor". In the first lines Du Bois reveals that he has tried not to be drawn into a direct confrontation with Garvey, although the latter had made constant accusations violently attacking him and the NAACP. Du Bois seems to lose his temper when he says, "Marcus Garvey is without doubt, the most dangerous enemy of the Negro race in America and in the world. He is either a lunatic or a traitor."[64] What made Du Bois furious were Garvey's contacts and attempts to bargain with the Ku Klux Klan[65] which found expression in a pamphlet that practically advocated the deportation of American Negroes to Liberia. As a result, Du Bois reacts with fury:

> He is not attacking white prejudice, he is grovelling before it and applauding it [...] Friends have even begged me not to publish this editorial lest I be assassinated. To such depths have we dropped in free black America! I have been exposing white traitors for a quarter century. If the day has come when I cannot tell the truth about black traitors it is high time that I died.
>
> The American Negroes have endured this wretch all too long with fine restraint and every effort at co-operation and understanding. But the end has come. Every man who apologizes for or defends Marcus Garvey from this day forth writes himself down as unworthy of the countenance of decent Americans. As for Garvey himself, this open ally of the Ku Klux Klan should be locked up and sent home. [66]

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[63] Ibidem.

[64] *The Crisis,* May, 1924, p. 8-9.

[65] Refer to the discussion of this issue on page 65.

[66] *The Crisis,* May, 1924, p. 8-9.

The foreboding materialized and the "bubble of Garveyism burst"[67] in 1927 when he was deported after conviction on mail fraud. However, before this happened, a fierce "Marcus Garvey Must Go" campaign by much of the African-American establishment, including the socialist-oriented *Messenger,* took place. In December, 1922 it reported on "A Symposium on Garvey by Negro Leaders"[68] which was based on a questionnaire sent to twenty-five prominent Negroes of America to see what they thought of Marcus Garvey. The editorial which accompanied it – part of the anti-Garvey campaign provoked mainly by his contacts with the Ku Klux Klan – described "Back-to-Africa" concepts as "suicidal", adding that "the future of American Negroes is here in America."[69] The questionnaire contained three items:

1. Do you think Garvey's policy is correct for the American Negro?;
2. Do you think Garvey should be deported as an alien creating unnecessary mischief ?;
3. Remarks.[70]

Fourteen of those questioned replied but Du Bois refused, explaining that "I have published from time to time my opinion of Mr. Garvey in *The Crisis* and shall add to that in the future."[71] In spite of his outburst of anti-Garvey sentiment in the "A lunatic or a traitor" article mentioned above, basically Du Bois stayed outside of this fierce campaign.

As Du Bois admits in a February, 1928 article in *The Crisis,* "Marcus Garvey and the N.A.A.C.P." [72], he himself was seen by the African American establishment as Garvey's fierce enemy but, in fact, he had only reacted to the repeated accusations published in *The Negro World* where Garvey called him "a misleader", "a colored man who hates the drop of Negro blood in his veins" an "unfortunate mulatto" and an "arch-enemy".[73] Du Bois's response is calm: "We have today no enmity

[67] Du Bois, "Back to Africa", *Century Magazine*, February, 1923, p. 544.

[68] *The Messenger*, December, 1922, p. 550-552.

[69] Ibid. p. 550.

[70] Ibidem.

[71] Ibid. p. 551.

[72] Du Bois, "Marcus Garvey and the N.A.A.C.P." *The Crisis* February,1928, p. 51. The article reflects the main thesis of a letter of Du Bois to P.B. Young, the editor of an African American newspaper *The Norfolk, Virginia, Journal and Guide,* dated August 8, 1925, quoted in *The Correspondence,* op. cit., p. 317.

[73] Editorial letters of Marcus Garvey, *The Negro World*, 6 and 17 February, 1923 in *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, p. 226, 232-241.

against Marcus Garvey. He has a great and worthy dream. We wish him well [...] We will be the first to applaud any success that he may have."[74] All in all, it appears clear that "[...] on the whole, the quality of Garvey's opposition to Du Bois was more bitter, more deep, and his expression of it more vituperative, than were Du Bois's toward Garvey."[75]

Although both Du Bois and Garvey envisioned the solution of the race problem in the United States through quite different means, there were issues which brought them closer together. The two most characteristic issues, namely their concepts of art as propaganda and their opinions on the Bolshevik Revolution are, in fact, closely connected with each other.

The questions as to the role of art in society, which were raised at the time, developed into a heated debate among African American intellectuals, Alain Locke and Du Bois being the leading adversaries. Locke, in his *The New Negro* and in other writings, maintained that art should be created for its own sake, whereas Du Bois saw it as strictly an instrument of propaganda. In his review of *The New Negro*, Du Bois wrote:

> Mr. Locke has newly been seized with the idea that Beauty, rather than propaganda should be the object of Negro literature and art. His book proves the falseness of this thesis [...]. If Mr. Locke's thesis is insisted upon too much, it is going to turn the Negro Renaissance into decadence.[76]

For Du Bois, art was strictly instrumental. He viewed it as a means of promoting social, economic, and political change in the quest for racial advancement. In fact, there was a great deal to be done in the area of racial problems: the colour line was still visible in many spheres of American life and the "Negro question" had not been solved. Therefore, active participation and struggle seemed to him the only appropriate stand to take – also in art. Du Bois presented his philosophy of art in a famous address delivered at the Chicago Conference of the NAACP, and later reprinted in *The Crisis* under the title "Criteria of Negro Art", where he peremptorily states that "[...] all Art is propaganda and ever must be,

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74 Du Bois, "Marcus Garvey and the N.A.A.C.P." *The Crisis* February,1928, p. 51.

75 E.U. Essien-Udom, in his introduction to the 2nd edition of *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, Amy Jacques Garvey, ed., London, 1967, p. xxvi.

76 Du Bois quoted in Patricia Liggins Hill, et al., *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*, Boston, 1998, p. 791.

despite the wailing of the purists [...] I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda."[77]

These views place him close to Garvey's concepts of the role of art as an important weapon in the struggle for the goal of race independence. According to him, literature and art in general should be subordinated to racial goals and should in its turn do everything to promote them. First of all, Garvey was of the opinion that black artists should reject the integrationist aesthetic which mimics white mainstream culture, where "writers [...] have been prostituting their intelligence under the direction of the white man."[78] Garvey was of the opinion that a new Black aesthetic, independent of the white man, should be created. "Time has come for the Negro to forget and cast behind him his hero worship and adoration of other races, and to start out immediately to create and emulate heroes of his own."[79] *The Negro World*, as the official organ of UNIA, also became a major literary forum where the voice of the new aesthetic was most strongly heard. In the "Poetry for the People" section of *The Negro World* most of the published poems were blatant propaganda – very often strongly militant – with somewhat questionable artistic value. This was due to the fact that most of the published poems were written by amateurs hoping to express themselves artistically. A poem by Carita Owen Collins under the title *This Must Not Be!*, published in 1919, exemplifies the dominance of propaganda over art. The poem ends with:

> Demand, come not mock suppliant!
> Demand, and if not given – take!
> Take what is rightfully yours;
> An eye for an eye;
> A soul for soul
> Strike back, black man strike!
> This shall not be![80]

Numerous published poems also made an attempt to translate Garvey's Back-to-Africa ideology into poetry; Ethel Trew Dunlop's

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77 *The Crisis,* October, 1926, p. 296.

78 Garvey's editorial, *The Negro World,* September, 1928.

79 Garvey in Martin, *African Fundamentalism*, op. cit., p. 4.

80 Carita Owen Collins in Martin, *African Fundamentalism,* op. cit., p. 168. As Tony Martin notices, "This Must Not Be!" was one of the most militant poems appearing in *The Negro World* and as such singled out for condemnation in 1919 by the Lusk Committee of the New York state legislature , p. 346.

(1921) *Good-bye, America!* may serve as a representative example when she writes:

> Good-bye, America, good-bye!
> We're leaving Uncle Sam!
> You stole us, but we're going back
> Into the land of Ham.[81]

The pent-up violence and aggression reach a climax in Robert L. Poston's *When You Meet A Member of the Ku Klux Klan* (1921) which encourages one to:

> Hit him in the mouth and push his face right in,
> Knock him down
> Pour some water on him
> Kick him in the stomach
> Sic your bulldog on him
> Head him off.[82]

For both Garvey and Du Bois all art was propaganda; for each, the Bolshevik Revolution became an inspirational event. They shared an admiration for the Russian Revolution because it became the example of a brave social experiment ultimately materialized, giving American Negroes hope that social equality could be possible. In an unpublished article *Russia and the Race Problem*, Du Bois asks: "How does the Revolutionary government of Russia face the question of race? And the answer is clear and unequivocal. Russia stands for absolute equality of races – political, social and civil."[83] From one of his trips to Russia he reports in *The Crisis*:

> I stand in astonishment and wonder at the revolution of Russia that had come to me. I may be partially deceived and half-informed. But if what I have seen with my eyes and heard with my ears in Russia is Bolshevism, I am a Bolshevik.[84]

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[81] Ethel Trew Dunlop in Martin, *African Fundamentalism,* op. cit., p. 204. I would not agree with the opinion of Claude McKay (*The Negroes in America*, Port Washington, 1979, translated from Russian by Robert J. Winter, p. 73), who argues that *The Negro World* poets attempted to produce "verses [...]. written in the style of Pope, Dryden, Goldsmith and Longfellow".

[82] Robert L. Poston in Martin, *African Fundamentalism,* op. cit., p. 167.

[83] Unpublished, undated article, c. 1928, in *The Papers of W.E.B Du Bois*, reel 83, frame 26 in Special Collections and Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

[84] *The Crisis*, November 1926, p. 8.

Yet, in spite of his fascination with the Revolution and communism (he joined the Communist Party late in his life), Du Bois emphasised evolutionary methods in which progress is achieved through gradual transformation of existing conditions.

Garvey saw the situation quite differently: he envisioned a sudden action that would bring a radical solution to racial problems. To him, the Russian Revolution was a symbol of the energy which liberates the masses from oppression; he believed it could be repeated through freeing the black race from the oppression of the white man. That is probably why the Communist International noticed that the Garvey movement "possessed radical potential"[85] and made attempts to tie it with its plans for international revolution.

In all cases, however, on a deeper level the outlooks and activities of Du Bois and Garvey were rooted in the American reality of the times and were an integral part of the US social, economic and artistic fabric. They also echoed the nineteenth century integration and black nationalism debate. As Judith Stein states in reference to Marcus Garvey, structural forces of the outside world that profoundly affected the black experience both within and outside the UNIA have also coloured the whole of African American reality, and certainly the activity of Du Bois.[86] He fits well into the mainstream, middle-class framework of American reality, addressing those who have attained, or aspire to achieve, the American Dream. His progressive ideas, advocating intellect as a guide for social change, place him close to other intellectuals of the time (John Dewey, Franz Boas, Melville Herskovits). Focusing on the elitist "talented tenth", thus excluding the masses, he struggled "with the tension between the one and the many".[87] Garvey's cry "Up you mighty race!", on the other hand, reflected a mutualistic, inclusive approach. However, his mass oriented philosophy, combined with a nationalistic and militant program, could not take root in an America which excludes, or at least marginalizes, all extreme social or artistic forms. Rejecting the mainstream frame, and operating outside of it, Garvey was predestined to fail but his

[85] Michael W. Fitzgerald, Michael Furmanowski, Robert A. Hill "The Comintern and American Blacks, 1919-1943", (Appendix III), in Hill, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 843.

[86] Stein, op. cit., p. 4.

[87] Mark Helbling, *The Harlem Renaissance: The One and the Many,* Westport: Greenwood, 1999 quoted in the review by Tony Martin, *The Journal of American History*, vol. 89, Issue 2; September, 2002, p. 677.

ideals lingered on and surfaced again in the Black Power movement of the 1960's. This convergence of conditions may one day emerge again.

One thing is certain – the majority of influential African American intellectuals of those years chose Harlem as their home. One of the explanations is that in Harlem they were close to their people and problems. The other reason was strictly economic – here they were close to the press and the publishers, i.e. to the means of gaining a livelihood.

What characterized the intellectuals of the era was the constant attempt to re-evaluate Negro life and his place in American society. As noted earlier, the turn of the century brought a change in thinking about the Negro race; Booker T. Washington's accommodating philosophy was now rejected by a number of young intellectuals. One man leadership was openly questioned, first of all by W.E.B. Du Bois who strongly opposed a philosophy that, he believed, condemned the Negro to segregation and consequent dependence on whites. His new credo had been manifested in the essay *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others* in *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903. "Easily the most striking thing", began Du Bois, "in the history of the American Negro since 1876 is the ascendancy of Mr. Booker T. Washington." He went on to criticize his spiritual father because his policies "[...] practically accepted the alleged inferiority of the Negro [...] allowed economic concerns to dominate over the higher aims of life, and preach submission to prejudice."[88]

Du Bois believed that the Negro could gain his respected place in the American society both through his self-development and through the good will of the whites. The avant-garde features of the Talented Tenth were to lower the color barriers and lead the race to a brighter future. The term itself stands for the minority who had received a liberal arts education and thus was in a position to elevate Negroes both culturally and economically. "I believed", Du Bois years later wrote in his autobiography, "in the higher education of a Talented Tenth who through their knowledge of modern culture could guide the American Negro into a higher civilization."[89] And further on: "Progress in human affairs is more often a pull than a push, a surging forward of the exceptional man, and the lifting of his duller brethren"[90]. Together with other young

[88] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Greenwich, 1961, pp. 42, 48.

[89] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life From the Last Decade of Its First Century*, New York, 1968, p. 236.

[90] Du Bois in A. Meier, E. Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto*, New York, 1970, p. 297.

intellectuals he strongly demanded full social and political equality according to the guarantees granted by the United States Constitution.

Early in his career, Du Bois had become fully aware of the function and power of the press. In one of his letters, he characterized the black press of the time: "Now we have many small weekly papers and one or two monthlies, and none of them fill the great need I have outlined". The need, as he saw it, was: "The Negro race in America today is in a critical condition. Only united, concentrated effort will keep us from being crushed. This union must come as a matter of education and long effort."[91] In contrast to the white press, the Negro magazines and newspapers had rather the function of opinion shaping than of entertainment. To address this need in 1906, Du Bois, together with two Atlanta graduates, started a small publication called *Moon Illustrated Weekly*, which gave the editor the formula for the future *Crisis*. Du Bois in the words of Wolseley, "made the magazine a vigorous critic of any national policy or event which resulted in harm to the black people – whether it was discrimination in the military service or the wartime lynchings of the 1914 – 1919 conflict."[92] The second function, just as important, was that *The Crisis*, together with other African American publications (*The Age, The Messenger, Opportunity, The Negro World*), gave a strong impetus to the African American cultural movement of the time – without *The Crisis* and other periodicals, undoubtedly the Harlem Renaissance would not have come into its full bloom.

[91] Du Bois in Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, USA* , Ames, 1971, p. 41.

[92] Ibid., p. 42.

3. THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE: NEGATION – CONTINUATION – EXTENSION

> Harlem [...] draws immigrants from every country in the world that has a colored population, either large or small [...] Ambitious and talented colored youth on every continent look forward to reach Harlem. It is the Mecca for all those who seek opportunity with a capital O.
>
> Chester T. Crowell [1]

3.1. Home to Harlem: The Rise of a Cultural Center

During the first two decades of the twentieth century Harlem lured not only poor, illiterate southern blacks in search of economic and social improvement, but also the "better elements", the Du Boisian "talented tenth" of the race: social activists who found there the masses to be addressed; intellectuals who found intellectual ferment; and artists, who found the inspiration for creative work, as well as sponsors (patrons) and an admiring public. As a consequence, Harlem became the "hub of African American culture" to use the title of Steven Watson's monograph devoted to the Harlem Renaissance.[2] Thus, David Levering Lewis draws the convincing conclusion in *When Harlem was in Vogue*, that the artistic output of the epoch was a natural consequence of the great migration to the urban centers of the North, especially to New York City, where quantity transformed itself into quality. "Like a foam over robust beer, they were thought to have risen to the top under the pressure from the ten times ten thousand Afro-Americans pouring into [...]

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1 Chester T. Crowell, "The World's Largest Negro City", *Saturday Evening Post*, August 8, 1925.

2 Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African American Culture*, New York, 1995.

Manhattan Island."[3] In fact, for all of them it was a quest for the American Dream of economic prosperity and equality, a dream which, as the future would show – especially during the hardships of the Depression years – was elusive and which never fully materialized.

One should assume that, on the one hand, the gathering of such a vast number of African Americans of diverse cultures (Northern, Southern, Caribbean) would result in an accumulation of creative energy which, in effect, did find outlet in an artistic outburst. On the other hand, however, one should not overlook the fact that African American artists "[...] were caught up [in] the spirit of the artistic yearnings of the time, which is to say that their experience was a part of the common experience."[4] The "common experience" is understood as part of the American reality with all its consequences. Therefore, in order to give a full panorama of the artistic renaissance which bloomed in Harlem in the years 1925-29, a close examination of the duality of forces shaping it seems appropriate: the "awakening", as Arna Bontemps observes, of African American spirit and racial self-consciousness[5], as well as the conditioning and constraints imposed by the dominant mainstream culture.

The artistic movement which sprang up in Harlem was not a "rare flower that suddenly grew upon a desert – rootless, unshaped, uninformed by the past"[6], but a cultural movement strongly conditioned by internal as well as external forces. The growing number of black migrants mostly from the South, with increasing demands for rights and freedom, the integrating activity of Marcus Garvey, and the much greater interest in black life and culture on the part of white American citizens in general – all stimulated the Renaissance.[7] Undeniable also is the fact that the migration of talented blacks who had "made it" was a significant factor in shaping the intellectual, cultural, and political landscape of the district – ultimately attracting young ambitious artists from near and far.

The movement's growth was greatly influenced by the intellectual atmosphere of the time. The predominant Progressive ideals of the early

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3 David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, New York, 1982, p. 119.

4 S.P. Fullinwider, *The Mind and Mood of Black America: 20th Century Thought*, Homewood, Ill.., 1969, pp. 119-22.

5 Arna Bontemps, *Harlem Renaissance Remembered,* New York, 1971.

6 Margaret Perry, *The Harlem Renaissance. An Annoted Bibliography and Commentary*, New York, 1982, p. xvii.

7 Ibidem.

decades of the twentieth century, along with the belief that the destiny of individuals and the whole of society was in each person's hands, gave hope to all minorities, especially African Americans. According to John Dewey, one of the prominent thinkers of the day, human intelligence nurtured during the process of education is the main agent of hope for a new social order, an order in which every individual can fully develop and gain a respected position in society. Dewey's belief in the powers of human intelligence was unprecedented, reaching its height in a lecture given at the University of California, later published in an essay form under the title "Philosophy and Democracy" in *Character and Events* (1929).[8] Here, he formulates his concept of philosophy as a democratic practice for bringing forth a far-reaching reform of society.

Dewey follows William James's vision of the power of the mind and active intellectual inquiry. The "pragmatic method" developed by James in his *Pragmatism*, where each notion is interpreted through tracing its respective practical consequences[9], influenced many educated Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century.[10] African American intellectuals were no exception and many "landed [...] in the arms of William James of Harvard, for which God be praised", as W.E.B. Du Bois recalls in his autobiographical *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940).[11] He further writes:

> It was at Harvard that my education, turning from philosophy, centered in history and then gradually in economics and social problems [...] The turning was due to William James. He said to me, 'If you must study philosophy you will; but if you can turn aside to something else, do so. It is hard to earn a living with philosophy.' So I turned toward history and social science."[12]

Due to such strong intellectual influence, it is not surprising that Du Bois was a frequent guest in the house of William James and that, as Du Bois avowed, William James "was my friend and guide to clear

8 John Dewey, *Character and Events*, New York, 1929, vol. 2, pp. 841-855.

9 William James, *Pragmatism*, New York, 1907, p. 48.

10 For a more in-depth discussion of the influence of William James and John Dewey on the African American intellectuals of the day, consult George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, Cambridge, Mass., 1995.

11 W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* in *W.E.B Du Bois Writings,* New York, 1986, p. 578.

12 Ibid., p. 582.

thinking".[13] Initially aspiring "to get hold of the basis of knowledge," to "explore the foundations and beginnings," he abandoned academic philosophy for "realistic pragmatism", becoming a devout follower of James at the time the latter was developing his pragmatic philosophy.[14] The realistic pragmatism acquired in this way later manifested itself in an "historical interpretation of race relations".[15]

The first work of Du Bois to use this approach was *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America. 1638-1870* (1896) in which he "proposes to set forth the efforts made in the United States of America, from early colonial times until the present, to limit and suppress the trade in slaves between Africa and these shores."[16] This was followed by the renowned *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. As Arnold Rampersad has pointed out, both works reflect Du Bois's implementation of pragmatism as a method of academic inquiry which, however, reached beyond the Ivory Tower of academia and aspired "to serve science, art, and the need for political action."[17]

Besides Du Bois, this path was followed by Alain Locke who, like many other Progressives of the times, was a strong advocate of the intellect as a leading force of social change, and who also showed a pronounced interest in the arts.[18] As Warren I. Susman further notes in his influential work, *Culture as History: the Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (1984):

> [...] in a sense, Progressivism was also an aesthetic movement: it possessed as a social *and* political end the opportunity for each man and woman to know some experience that was creative and satisfying, an aesthetic experience that was the consequence of communal and political life. This kind of vision is strikingly new as a political goal in America. [19] [original emphasis]

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[13] Ibid., p. 581.

[14] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois*, New York, 1968, p. 143.

[15] Ibid., p. 148.

[16] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America. 1638-1870,* in *W.E.B Du Bois Writings,* New York, 1986, p. 9.

[17] Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois*, New York, 1990, p. 65.

[18] Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, New York, 1984, p. xxii.

[19] Ibidem.

The belief in the power of art underlies the New Negro movement in black art-forms of the 1920s.[20] It first appeared to many intellectuals (just to mention Du Bois, Locke, Johnson), and then to numerous artists, that through "aesthetic experience"[21], to use Hutchinson's expression, African Americans would be recognized in mainstream American culture as a constructive element. It was hoped that, eventually, understanding between the races would be reached and a democratic, culturally pluralistic society, much like the one Whitman had sought, could be born. James Weldon Johnson's words in his Preface to the first edition of *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) reflect that longing. At the same time they may be viewed as the artistic and social manifesto of a generation:

> A people may become great through many means, but there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all people is the amount and standard of literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior.
> The status of the Negro in the United States is more a question of national mental attitude toward the race than of actual conditions. And nothing will do more to change that mental attitude and raise his status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through the production of literature and art.[22]

Four years later, in a 1926 address delivered at the Chicago Conference of the NAACP (later printed in the *Crisis* under the title "Criteria of Negro Art"), Du Bois echoes Johnson's manifesto. He begins with a powerful, social statement:

> We want to be Americans, full-fledged Americans, with all the rights of other American citizens.

And ends the address on an aesthetic note:

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[20] Nathan Huggins in *Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, New York, 1976 and David Levering Lewis in *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, op. cit., have referred to the question of the role of art in the Harlem Renaissance works.

[21] George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, Cambridge Mass., 1997, p. 34.

[22] *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, edited by James Weldon Johnson, New York, 1931, p. 9.

> I do not doubt that the ultimate art coming from the black folk is going to be just as beautiful, and beautiful largely in the same way, as the art that comes from the white folk, or yellow, or red; but the point today is that until the art of the black folk compels recognition they will not be rated as human. And when through art they compel recognition then let the world discover if it will that their art is as new as it is old and as old as new.[23]

Langston Hughes, rather ironically, summarizes the state of mind of many African American intellectuals of the time: "[...S]ome Harlemites thought the millenium had come. They thought the race problem had at last been solved through Art [...].They were sure the New Negro would lead a new life from then on in the green pastures of tolerance [...][24] As time would show, these "green pastures" were but a mere illusion which would vanish with the economic crisis of the Depression.

From this perspective, the New Negro Movement intellectuals, and also artists themselves, were caught in the dilemma of "pure art" or "propaganda". On one side, there was great pressure from the African American intelligentsia to harness art into the service of racial dialogue and the struggle for social justice – and many artists did conform to these ideals, generating "racially" coded works (literary, visual arts) which fit well into a set program: "We insist that our Art and Propaganda be one".[25] However, there were also artists who attempted to break free from the limitations imposed by the masterminds of the New Negro movement and follow instead the ideas of "romantic modernism", as John Steadman Rice labels it, transcending social categories – in this case "race"[26].

The August, 1926 issue of *The Crisis* relates of a symposium in which, among others, a noted white author, Carl Van Vechten supported this viewpoint by stating that "[...] there is very little difference if any between the life of a wealthy or cultured Negro and that of a white man of the same class."[27] Countee Cullen, a black poet who also took part in the symposium, when talking about "what material the Negro writer should

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[23] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art", *The Crisis,* October, 1926, pp. 290-297.

[24] Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea. An Autobiography*, New York, 1986, p. 228.

[25] W.E.B. Du Bois, " Negro Art", *The Crisis*, June 1921, pp. 55-56.

[26] John Steadman Rice, "Romantic Modernism and the Self", *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture*, 1, 1999, pp. 9-16.

[27] In the "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed. A Symposium", *The Crisis*, August 1926, Vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 193-194.

draw upon" saw danger in looking for inspiration in the Negro slum; moreover, he dissociated himself from the ideology of social justice and the limitations imposed by the propaganda idiom by strongly declaring: "Let the young Negro writer, like any artist, find his treasure where his heart lies".[28] Therefore, the artistic output of the Harlem Renaissance may be characterized as both "propaganda" and "pure art".

The geographical location where all the above mentioned forces fused to create a new cultural quality was New York City and Harlem in particular. As noted, it became a "city within a city", a "promised land", a home "for the transient outcasts of American society".[29] And as a result, as Sidney Bremer rightly notices, "like the Jewish immigrants crowded into the Lower East Side before them, Harlem's African American newcomers constituted a critical mass large enough to sustain a subculture and to achieve high visibility".[30] Harlem was not just a geographical location but to a great extent a symbolic home, a magical space – the "Negro Capital", the "Mecca" where the flowering of African American intellectual life and art was possible.

There are numerous accounts of intellectuals and artists who had been affected by these forces and fell under the spell of Harlem. The writings of Langston Hughes are one of the many personal chronicles of the experience. In his autobiographical *The Big Sea*, he recalls Harlem as "a magnet for the Negro intellectual, pulling him from everywhere"[31]; it was like an "ebony flute" that lured Negroes.[32] Four decades later, he clearly remembers one special day in 1921, a day which determined his future artistic destination:

> I was nineteen when I first came up out of the Lenox Avenue subway one bright September afternoon and looked around in the happy sunlight to see if I saw Duke Ellington on the corner of 135th Street or Bessie Smith passing by, or Bojangles Bill Robinson in front of the Lincoln Theatre, or maybe Paul Robeson or Bert Williams walking down the avenue. Had I been able to recognize any of them, it would have been only because I had read about them in the Middle West, where I had gone to school,

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28 Ibidem.

29 Sidney H. Bremer, "Home to Harlem, New York: Lessons from the Harlem Renaissance Writers", *PMLA*, Vol. 195, No 1, January, 1990, p. 48.

30 Ibidem.

31 Hughes, *The Big Sea*, op. cit, p. 240.

32 Ibidem.

> and might see in New York some of the famous colored writers and editors whose names were known around the country [...][33]

The attraction of Harlem was felt by Hughes, as it was by Claude McKay, a native of Jamaica who after coming to the district "shortly abandoned all thought of returning" to his home island [34]. Harlem became his home just as it did for many other young African Americans at the beginning of the 20th century. These "urban wanderers" flocked to Harlem: Du Bois from Atlanta University, Zora Neale Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, and Duke Ellington from Washington, D.C., Wallace Thurman from Los Angeles, Hughes from Cleveland, Nella Larson from Chicago, James Weldon Johnson from Jacksonville, Jessie Fauset from Philadelphia, and Claude McKay from Kingston, Jamaica.[35] All of them began to treat Harlem as their home; moreover, they always returned: "[...] it was better to come to New York than to any other city in the world [...] I stood there, dropped my bags, took a deep breath and felt happy again"[36], said Langston Hughes on the occasion of one of his returns to the district. It became home him as to other "modern urban transients" who "collectively [...] developed a vision of an urban home that was at once an organic place, a birthright community, and a cultural aspiration."[37] Fictional heroes too longed for Harlem. Jake Brown, of Claude McKay's novel, *Home to Harlem* (1928), longs for Harlem's sexuality: "Fifth Avenue, Lenox Avenue, and 135th Street, with their chocolate-brown and walnut girls, were calling him".[38] Nella Larson's novel *Quicksand* (1928) similarly describes its heroine's "magic sense of having come home" to Harlem "as if she were tasting some agreeable exotic food".[39]

3.2. The Harlem Renaissance in Quest of Africa/Identity

What made Harlem exceptional during those years was the exuberant flowering of intellectual and cultural life. In it were located the offices of the main African American papers (*The Crisis, Opportunity, The*

[33] Langston Hughes, "The Twenties: Harlem and Its Negritude", *African Forum*, Spring 1966, p. 12.

[34] J. W. Johnson, ed. cit. p. 166.

[35] Bremer , op. cit. p. 49.

[36] Hughes, *The Big Sea*, op. cit., p. 81.

[37] Bremer, op. cit. p. 48.

[38] Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem*, New York, 1928, p. 5.

[39] Nella Larson, *Quicksand*, New York, 1928, p. 65.

Messenger, The Negro World), clubs popular among the white patrons flourished (the Cotton Club being the most famous). Harlem's cultural activity very early centered around the One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street Library, later to be named the Schomburg Collection. George S. Schuyler remembers: "[...] it used to be a great gathering place for all the people of the Renaissance"[40], where W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Melville J. Herskovits, and many other prominent intellectuals lectured. Arthur A. Schomburg, a Puerto Rican of African descent, assembled here a vast collection of black cultural treasures: over 5000 volumes, 3000 manuscripts, 2000 etchings and portraits, and several thousand pamphlets. By doing so, he was attempting to convince the general American public that Negroes had maintained their cultural individuality in the dominant white American culture; he stressed the need for the present generation to further study African American culture and history in order to understand their inherited African roots. Schomburg's words, "The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future",[41] became his life's motto and, in a sense, the motto of many African American artists of the period.

Therefore, it is not surprising that among the numerous works of art, we find many that present self-evaluation of the race and its history as leading themes. African American artists realized the deep need for re-examination of their place in American reality in order to find some inner integrity as artists. The speaker of the "Proem", introductory poem to the volume *The Weary Blues* (1926), by Langston Hughes (his first volume of poetry), pinpoints this basic dilemma in the discussion of the New Negro artist who first must come to terms with black history and then eventually draw energy from the depths of racial experience. Once again the echo of the Whitmanian "everyman" is heard when the speaker asserts without regret or ambivalence:

I am a Negro:
    Black as the night is black,
    Black like the depths of my Africa.
I've been a slave:
    Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.

[40] "The Reminiscences of George Schuyler", Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 1960, p. 208.

[41] Arthur A. Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past"; in *The New Negro. Voices of the Harlem Renaissance.* edited by Alain Locke, New York, originally published in 1925. This work will rely on the 1992 reprint, pp. 231-37.

I brushed the boots of Washington.
I've been a worker:
Under my hands the pyramids arose.
I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.
I've been a singer:
All the way from Africa to Georgia
I carried my sorrow songs.
I made ragtime.
I've been a victim:
The Belgians cut off my hands in Congo.
They lynch me now in Texas.
I am a Negro:
Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

Hughes believes that, in spite of centuries of suffering and cultural loss, black Americans have a rich history which reaches beyond the American slave experience into the distant African past, a history to be learned and to be proud of. In spite of the lowly social roles the Negro had played in history, where he was primarily a slave and/or a laborer, we cannot overlook his importance as an agent in the development of past economies. Equally important, though, throughout history he has been, and still is in many ways, a victim who has suffered and still suffers; he is also an artist – a singer – a poet.

But how is "my Africa" defined? And essentially "What is Africa to me"? – to use the first line of the poem "Heritage" by Countee Cullen contained in *The New Negro* (1925)[42]. Cullen was not the only one to ponder this issue. The question was echoed by intellectuals (W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke), social activists (Marcus Garvey and A. Philip Randolph) and numerous African American artists of the times, becoming a central metaphor shaping their identity and artistic output.

One crucial question, then, is how did African Americans imagine Africa, the continent of their ethnic origin but, nevertheless, so distant? James H. Meriwether in his work *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*, published in 2002, investigates this issue and notes that the popular image of Africa underwent significant changes, being modified both by events taking place on the "dark

[42] Ibid. p. 250.

continent" and in the United States.[43] According to him, one thing is clear: nineteenth century representations of the continent were primarily negative and mirrored both the general opinions and widespread stereotypes of Africa as a backward and even savage continent – a representation reflecting the then-dominant, highly judgmental Euro-centric approach to foreign cultures, which referred to them as either "primitive" or "savage". For all that bias, Africa was still a vital source of symbols and imagery for African Americans.

It seems that Judeo-Christian religion had to some extent nourished and strengthened pro-African sentiments. The psalm of David (68:31): "A Princess shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God" and other frequent Biblical references to Ethiopia (a synonym for Africa) inspired and gave hope and dignity to African Americans during the time of slavery and in the years that followed.[44] The importance of the image is demonstrated by the numerous black religious congregations with Ethiopia in their names, e.g. the Ethiopian Baptist Church, the Ethiopian Zion Church, the Ethiopian Methodist Church, etc. The turn of the century marked a turning point within the African American community with respect to how Africa was imagined and the role it played in elevating race consciousness.

One incentive for these more positive views, and the consequent "romanticization of Africa", was the "[...] collective need for heroes or homelands."[45] This resulted in the growing conviction that Africa was the cradle of a great civilization and rich cultures (ancient Egypt and Ethiopia) which, through the mediation of modern African Americans, could significantly contribute to the development of American culture. Africa had an essential role to play in "rehabilitating the race in world esteem"[46] and "hope rest[ed] in the revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective".[47] Representations, according to Michel Faith, due to scarce factual knowledge about Africa, were bound to be

[43] James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961,* Chapel Hill, 2002.

[44] Edward Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, British Academy and the Museums, 1989. Introduction: "Biblical references to Ethiopia", pp 5-14.

[45] Jonathan Scott Holloway, "What is America To Me? Defining Black Life Through The Motherland", *Reviews in American History,* 31.1, 2002, pp. 96, 97.

[46] Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro,* New York, 1992, p. 14.

[47] Ibid., p. 15.

simplified, symbolic, and "Pan-African", fusing Egyptian with West African images.[48] Therefore, Ethiopian and Egyptian "homelands" reappear in many Harlem Renaissance works (see Annex, items 2, 3, 9 and 10), symbolically representing the dark continent as a whole: Meta Warrick Fuller's sculpture *The Awakening of Ethiopia*[49] (see Annex, item 1); W.E.B. Du Bois's pageant celebrating black history *The Star of Ethiopia* (drafted in 1911 and first staged in New York City in 1913 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of emancipation); Langston Hughes's poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"(1926), where the "I" speaker says: "I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it."[50]

Faith concludes that the Egyptian and Ethiopian heritage was "clearly fabricated", but nevertheless had a role to play in creating a myth which symbolically united "unsolvable oppositions" and "contradictory identifications": 'I Too Sing America' and 'I am a Negro'.[51] "Africa" therefore functions here as a symbol and metaphor for a distant continent, a vague concept, a fantasy rather than a reference to a specific geographical location and cultural heritage. Both the geographical location and cultural heritage are confused; and as Cullen Gruesser notes in *Black on Black: Twentieth-Century African American Writing about Africa* (2000), Ethiopianism "refers to the whole continent of Africa rather than simply the East African nation".[52] Following this obvious truth, one should note that very few, if any, Africans had actually been transported from this region to become slaves in the Americas. In spite of this misinterpretation, Africa and its Ethiopian/Egyptian representation nourished African American sensibility and played a significant role in the burgeoning African American concept of culture. Another, often overlooked aspect of employing Ethiopia as the symbol of the continent is that it in fact it was the only African country never successfully subjugated by Europeans; therefore retaining its archetypal cultural identity.

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48 Michel Faith, "The Syncopated Africa: Constructions of Origins in the Harlem Renaissance (Literature, Music, Visual Arts)", in *Temples for Tomorrow. Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Michel Faith, Bloomington, 2001, p. 54.

49 Ca. 1914, now at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Arts & Artifacts Division of the New York Public Library.

50 Ibid. p. 55, 56. Faith also speculates here on the image of Egypt (Ole Pharaoh) in African American culture.

51 Ibid., p. 57.

52 Cullen Gruesser, *Black on Black: Twentieth-Century African American Writing about Africa*, University Press Kentucky, 2000, p. 1.

In the *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940) Du Bois echoes Countee Cullen's question: "What is Africa to me?" and acknowledges that his affinity with the continent is merely imagined, and thus is to a great extent an intellectual construct: "Living with my mother's people I absorbed their culture patterns and these were not African so much as Dutch and New England [...] My African racial feeling was then purely a matter of my own later learning and reaction [...] But it was none the less real and a large determinant of my life character."[53] In spite of the fact that he is "the sixth generation in descent from forefathers who left this land [Africa]"[54] and that "neither [his] father nor [his] father's father ever saw Africa or knew its meaning or cared much for it"[55], "still [his] tie to Africa is strong"[56] and is regarded as "'fatherland', or perhaps still better, 'motherland'".[57]

For Langston Hughes, Africa and America were "unsolvable oppositions". Is it possible to be at the same time American and African American? Hughes found himself a stranger in both worlds. He realized that Africa was a distant land for him and his race, and at the same time he was aware that full participation in the American dream would be impossible.[58] "Afro-American Fragment", portrays this predicament:

> So long,
> So far away
> Is Africa.
> Not even memories alive
> Save those that history books create,
> Save those that songs
> Beat back into the blood –
> Beat out of blood with words sad-sung
> In strange un-Negro tongue –
> So long,
> So far away
> Is Africa.

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53 Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn,* op. cit. p. 638.

54 Ibid., p. 640.

55 Ibid., p. 639.

56 Ibidem.

57 Ibidem.

58 Raymond Smith, "Langston Hughes: Evolution of the Poetic Persona", *The Harlem Renaissance Re-Examined*, Victor A. Kramer and Robert A. Russ, eds., Troy, 1997, p. 270.

Subdued and time-lost
Are the drums – and yet
Through some vast mist of race
There comes this song
I do not understand
This song of atavistic land,
Of bitter yearnings lost
Without a place –
So long,
So far away
Is Africa's
Dark face.[59]

Here is an expression of longing for a heritage, identity, and community. The speaker is separated from Africa by physical and spatial dimensions – the continent is geographically distant. But what makes Africa even more tragically removed, are its cultural and spiritual elements which may be experienced only "[t]hrough some vast mist", a vague subconscious feeling where even the drums are "[s]ubdued and time-lost". Although through education ("history books") and music ("songs", "words sad-sung"), the past is in a sense recreated, it is a mere substitute that essentially bars any real spiritual tie with the homeland. The speaker experiences the history that is given back to him as something artificial and limited; it turns out that the obtained knowledge is incapable of assisting him in any way in decoding the elements of Africa's culture: "There comes this song / I do not understand". He realizes that there is no simple method for recovering his lost African identity. The American experience, the Middle Passage and the years of slavery, have alienated him from the land and the culture of his ancestors and the "link between Africans and African-Americans [...] has been disrupted or transformed to the point that it can no longer be clearly defined."[60]

Hughes records his personal quest for Africa in the autobiographical *The Big Sea* (1940). He reports of his travel to Africa as a seaman in 1923, where he experienced the continent first-hand (in fact Hughes and Du Bois were among the few significant authors of the era who had the opportunity to travel to Africa), which made him observe: "I was only an American Negro – who had loved the surface of Africa and the

[59] Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, New York, 1994, p. 129.

[60] Edward James Smethurst, *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry, 1930-1946*. New York, 1999, p. 98.

rhythms of Africa – but I was not Africa. I was Chicago and Kansas City and Broadway and Harlem."[61] One might ask why Hughes felt that he lacked an authentic cultural tie with Africa. The answer seems to be in the fact that his Americanness alienated him from his ethnic roots – he was "only an American Negro" [my emphasis – Z.G.]. When he addresses West Coast Africans that "Our problems in America are very much like yours" and that "I am a Negro too", the response is quite sarcastic: "They only laughed at me and shook their heads and said: "You, white man! You, white man!" Hughes's "copper-brown skin and straight black hair" made him in their eyes "a white man".[62] Culturally and even physically he was a stranger, an alien in a foreign land. One of the Africans, a Kru from Liberia, voiced the reasons for such a reaction:

> Here, he said, on the West Coast, there are not many colored people – people of mixed blood – and those foreign colored men who are here come mostly as missionaries, to teach us something, since they think we know nothing. Or they come from the West Indies, as clerks and administrators in the colonial governments, to help carry out the white man's laws. So the Africans call them all *white* men.[63]

In spite of the rejection he experienced, Hughes saw Africa – the land and the people – the Black Diaspora or the Black Atlantic[64] (to use Paul Gilroy's concept) – as "we", "my people", "our land", including himself as its legitimate descendant. Although it is an imagined land and community, it offers a sense of belonging, heritage, and pride. Hughes's previously mentioned early poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1926), demonstrates his indissoluble unity with the conceptualized Africa where he again echoes the Whitmanean "I". As Fahamisha Brown notes:

> Hughes enumerates rivers associated with African American heritage to evoke a mystical sense of the eternal presence of the speaking "I". From the beginnings of recorded history, "the Euphrates"; through

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61 Hughes, *The Big Sea*, op. cit., p. 325.

62 Ibid., pp. 102-103.

63 Ibidem.

64 The conceptual framework of the Black Atlantic first presented by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, Mass., 1993, geographically locates itself in the triangular relationship between North America, Africa, and Europe. His main argument rests on the role Black Atlantic culture played in shaping the understanding of modernity. Gilroy argues strongly for "the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis".

> the greatness of empire and civilization, "the Nile" and its "pyramids"; through slavery and freedom, "the Mississippi" – the voice proclaims its presence and knowledge. [65]

Like other artists of the time, Hughes draws nourishing energy, both as a source of identity and artistic imagery, from the well of Africa – "the American Black man's romantic motherland"[66] – but still America remains his true home, as is the case in Claude McKay's sonnet "America" which expresses this bittersweet, love-hate relationship:

> Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
> And sinks into my throat the tiger's tooth,
> Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
> I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!
> Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
> Giving me strength erect against her hate.
> Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.
> Yet as a rebel fronts a king in state,
> I stand within her walls with not a shred
> Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.
> Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,
> And see her might and granite wonder, there,
> Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,
> Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.[67]

For most, however, interest in Africa was simply a desire to learn about their past, to learn about their roots and cultural heritage. Most African American periodicals, *The Crisis* and *The Opportunity* in particular, published numerous articles reflecting the glorious past in which "the Negroes of Ethiopia were among the great rulers of the World."[68]

For Claude McKay, Africa was an imagined homeland possessing energy able to bring about the rebirth of the spirit of African Americans:

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[65] Fahamisha Brown, *Performing the Word: African American Poetry as Vernacular Culture*, New Brunswick, N.J., 1999, p. 68.

[66] Richard K. Barksdale, *Langston Hughes: The Poet and His Critics,* Chicago, 1977, p. 17.

[67] In Venetria K. Patton and Maureen Honey, eds., *Double-take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology,* New Brunswick, N.J, 2001, p. 275. First published in *Liberator,* December, 1921.

[68] *The Crisis,* May, 1925, p. 38. As Gregory Holmes Singleton notices in his article "Birth, Rebirth, and the 'New Negro'" published in *Phylon*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1982, this is one of the 186 articles on Africa to appear in that periodical between 1925 and 1926, p. 39.

Through the pregnant universe rumbles life's terrific thunder,
And Earth's bowels quake with terror; strange and terrible storms break,
Lightening-torches flame the heavens, kindling souls of men, thereunder;
Africa! Long ages sleeping, O my motherland, awake!
.....
O my brothers and my sisters, wake! arise!
For the new birth rends the old earth and the very dead are waking,
Ghosts are turned flesh, throwing off the grave's disguise,
And the foolish, even children, are made wise;
For the big earth groans in travail for the strong, new world in making -
O my brother, dreaming for long centuries,
Wake from sleeping; to the East turn, turn your eyes.[69]

Implementing Biblical and Doomsday apocalyptic imagery, McKay witnesses the awakening of Africa and also encourages his brothers to awaken and turn their eyes toward the dark continent which is to become the source of salvation as the messianic resurrection of the new world is at hand. This brings to mind another "awakening", namely the above-mentioned *The Awakening of Ethiopia*, Meta Warrick Fuller's bronze sculpture (see Annex, item 1) of a standing woman in an Egyptian headdress, swathed mummy-like from the hips down, which symbolically represents the awakening of African Americans to world culture after centuries of slumber.

Zora Neale Hurston is another vivid example, both her anthropological studies and her fiction being saturated with African elements. Her famous line from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), although written after the Renaissance had already faded, represents this symbolic "homeland" inspiring many artists of the time: "If I never see you no' mo' on earth, Ah'll meet you in Africa".[70] Although "so far away", the meeting place materializes as an imagined dimension, a construct fundamental for the African American artist. Jean Toomer sees the direct African roots of African American culture when he writes in his story "Carma", included in *The New Negro*: "Torches flare [...] juju men, gree-gree, witch-doctors [...] torches go out [...] The Dixie Pike has grown from a goat path in Africa."[71]

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69 Claude McKay, "Exhortation", in *Harlem Shadows*, New York, 1922, pp. 24-7.

70 Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Urbana, 1976, (1937), p.. 231.

71 Jean Toomer, "Carma" in *The New Negro. Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, Alain Locke, ed., New York, 1925, reprinted in 1992, p. 97.

For social activists, Marcus Garvey in particular, Africa was no "fabricated" image, but the basic ideological concept on the foundation upon which he built his Back to Africa philosophy, as well as a rhetorical device to color the discourse of his speeches and writings.

Thus, Hughes, McKay, Hurston, and Garvey, just like many other artists, intellectuals, and social activists of the time, drew inspiration – both as a source of artistic imagery and, perhaps more significantly, identity – from the African motherland. Although in most cases it was an imagined land, symbolically it offered a necessary sense of belonging, heritage, and pride. Paraphrasing Countee Cullen's question "What was Africa to the Harlem Renaissance artists?" it may be repeated that although Africa was but a vague concept, a mythical dimension, it became a central metaphor in the shaping of African American identity and race consciousness, and had a profound influence on the artistic output of the Harlem Renaissance.

3.3. African American Culture Prior to the Harlem Renaissance

To make the presentation more complete, a short survey of African American culture prior to the Harlem Renaissance seems indispensable here. The overview will provide an answer to the basic question as to what degree the achievements of the Renaissance consisted of a mere continuation of previous trends or were an attempt to overcome prevailing stereotypes. Accomplishments in the formal arts (poetry and fiction), as well as in the sphere of folk art (music, dance and folk tales), should be discussed here, to lead to the conclusion that the artistic creations of the "New Negro" grew in large part out of criticism of previous achievements of African American art – but also drew upon the rich resources of Black folk tradition. The main goal and driving force of the new generation of black artists was the continuous struggle to establish and retain African American identity in art.

One basic assumption needs to be maintained: that African Americans have considerably contributed to American civilization not only in a material sense but also on the cultural level. The economic exploitation of the race during slavery would again be strongly voiced during the 1960s, when black activists even demanded compensations. Within recent decades, recognition has grown that the Negro in the United States was and is an active force in shaping the characteristically American cultural features, being "a giver as well as receiver, a creator as well

as creature."[72] There now is little question that the Negro is the creator of products universally acknowledged as distinctively American. As early as 1922, James Weldon Johnson went so far as to argue that the Negro had produced "the only things artistic that have sprung from American soil and been universally acknowledged as distinctive American products."[73] Although the opinion is an apparent overstatement, we must admit that in the case of musical expression it is fully verifiable. Du Bois shares Johnson's opinion when he states that: "To America, the Negro could bring only his music, but it was quite enough. The only real American music is that of the Negro American." [74]

When considering African American culture, one should be aware of the fact that cultural systems are open to influence and therefore it is only logical to investigate them in connection with neighboring systems. "The total isolation of one culture is highly improbable",[75] writes Antonina Kłoskowska [my translation – Z.G.]. Equally unconvincing is the theory of a one-way flow of cultural influences.[76] The Negro, being in effect isolated from the living sources of his African cultural roots, was confronted with a culture alien to him in form as well as in content. In result, as has been noted many times, the fusion of elements of the dominant white culture (mainly the language and religion) with remnants of the African culture created a new cultural value.

Questions concerning the influence and place of African cultural elements in African American culture have been considered many times by numerous scholars. The Melville J. Herskovits / E. Franklin Frazer debate seems to dominate the discussion. Herskovits was not the first to record and document Africanisms in the United States. Newbell Niles Puckett in his *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (1926) examined African carryovers found in Southern society; presented and showed the origin of over ten thousand folk beliefs of Southern blacks; discussed the preservation of African traits in African American burial customs and religious philosophy. However, it is Herskovits's *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941) which holds the most significant position in the discussion.

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72 J.W. Johnson, ed. cit., p. 3.

73 Ibid., p. 10.

74 W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negro in Literature and Art", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, Philadelphia, September, 1913, p. 233.

75 Antonina Kłoskowska, *Socjologia Kultury*, Warszawa, 1983, p. 83.

76 LeRoi Jones, "The Changing Same", in *The Black Aesthetic*, Addison Gayle, Jr. ed., New York, 1971, p. 120.

In this monograph, the author argues that African cultural tradition was transplanted to America and kept alive in slave as well as post-slavery societies. Herskovits illustrates many significant African contributions to American culture and emphasizes the continuity of West African carryovers and retentions. Although Herskovits's model was limited – evidence to support his thesis applied only to the Caribbean and South America – he nevertheless established the theory of African survivals in the New World, which would later be expanded into areas he did not take into account.

For example, Guy Johnson in *Drum and Shadows* (1940) extensively examined African retentions in the Georgia Sea Islands and nearby mainland Gullah communities, recorded the testimony of ex-slaves, and was the first to use oral history as a methodology. His work on the Gullah was taken over by Lorenzo Dow Turner in *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949), where he demonstrated and documented Africanisms in the speech of African Americans. It was the first study to examine seriously and identify possible African elements in Gullah. As Turner noted, most scholars up to that point had viewed Gullah as a more or less aberrant offshoot of various early British dialects spoken by white settlers, with little or no input from the African languages spoken by slaves. Turner's study has made a strong impact over the past half century on both the scholarly and popular imagination, leading to much research on the possible African sources. His analysis of linguistic retentions lists over five thousand words that originated in West and Central Africa and, like Herskovits, he concludes that West African cultures shaped and molded African American culture.

Herkovits's scope was further expanded by the study of Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stano Rebellion* (1974), in which the author documents numerous African contributions to agriculture and animal husbandry, including cattle breeding, open grazing, rice cultivation, medical practices, and basketry. John W. Blassingame's *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1974) is considered by many scholars as one of the most important studies of slave culture in which he looks at it from the slave perspective, describing and analyzing the life of slaves, focusing on their African heritage.

A new dimension in the study of Africanisms was opened by Winfred Vass in *The Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States* (1979),

where she focused on Central Africa rather than on West Africa as the source for African American culture. This basic shift in perspective distinguishes her study from previous ones. The Bantu hypothesis found support in: Robert Ferris Thompson, Joseph Cornet, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (1981), and in Robert Ferris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (1983), where carving and sculpting techniques in the folk art of African Americans are examined to lead to the conclusion that there exists a strong relationship with their Bantu predecessors.

In consequence, this led to the publication of a monograph dedicated to the memory of Melville J. Herskovits, edited by Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* (1990), where Robert Ferris Thompson in "Kongo Influences on African-American Artistic Culture" (pages 148-184), repeats the argument that the impact of the Kongo on African American culture contributed significantly to the foundation of black American aesthetics and music culture in the New World (samba in Brazil and jazz in the United States to name but a few). The argument was extended in, "Africanisms in African-American Music", (pages 185-210), by Portia K. Maultsby who argues that Africanisms survived in American music, however transformed into new forms and adopted to new circumstances. According to her, specific African songs disappeared making way for new forms which used traditional African styles, vocabulary and idioms. Genevieve Fabre in her *Drumbeats Masks and Metaphor* (1983), adds a new dimension to the argument when she states:

> From the time they boarded ships for the passage to the New World, Slaves provided shows for the entertainment of whites [...] From their very first appearance, these shows took on a subversive character. Similar in form to African ceremonies or festivals, they were clearly occasions to perpetuate certain customs and to preserve the cultural heritage [...] Mimed songs that had all the appearance of praising whites actually satirized them. Slaves were thus able to express their dissatisfaction and unhappiness without risking punishment for their insolence. [77]

Therefore, reinterpreted according to the demands of the social setting, Africanisms existed as conceptual constructs, i.e. unique ways of behavior, rather than specific cultural elements. "They [slaves]", Portia

[77] Geneviève Fabre, *Drumbeats Masks and Metaphor: Contemporary Afro-American Theatre,* translation by Melvin Dixon, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, p. 4.

K. Maultsby writes, "survived an oppressive existence by creating new expressive forms out of African traditions, and they brought relevance to European-American customs by reshaping them to conform to African aesthetic ideas."[78]

Returning to Herskovit's adversary, E. Franklin Frazier, in *The Negro in the United States* (1957) and in *The Negro Church in America* (1963), finds some African elements in American slave communities, but then stresses that those African elements were lost in American reality. He stated his opposition to Herskovits, arguing that the hardships of slavery and the years following it practically stripped the social fabric of this group. Slavery in the United States destroyed African elements of culture, including the family institution. In the new cultural environment, African Americans found themselves on one hand isolated from their African roots and on the other in close proximity to the dominant white culture which became the new model. Therefore, it is not surprising that African Americans strove to blend into the mainstream culture. Although Frazier failed to note any considerable traces of the African background in the African American culture, he did recognize the strong role played by black churches in helping blacks to recognize their culture after slavery had ended.

LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka), in the militant diction of his article "The Changing Same", contained in the collection *The Black Aesthetic* (1971), openly declared that "the slave ship destroyed a great many formal art traditions of the Black man. The white man enforced such cultural rape." He continues the argument by stating that: "The breakdown of Black cultural tradition meant finally the destruction of most formal art and social tradition." The initial acculturation, i.e. the "nearly complete loss of [...] original culture and resultant vacuum like emptiness undoubtedly speeded the absorption"[79] and shaped the distinct features of African-American culture. However, it was Kenneth M. Stampp in *The Peculiar Institution* (1956), who represented the most radical approach to the topic when he spoke of the "cultural void" to which the Negro was confined in the New World.

African American art is often viewed as a monolith. The opinion is incorrect, for art has always been a manifestation of the group

[78] Portia K. Maultsby, "Africanisms in African-American Music" in *Africanisms in American Culture,* Joseph E. Holloway eds., Bloomington, 1990, p. 185.

[79] Margaret Just Butcher, *The Negro in American Culture*, New York, 1956, p. 23.

experience, where wide diversity is a common feature. When examining pre-Civil War African American art, one can distinguish several distinct groups whose experience and dependence upon white culture reflected itself in their artistic output. The creations of the considerable number of free Negroes (mainly concentrated in the North) had a different set of qualities from the output of the relatively small group of "house Negroes" shaped by upper-class manners and values, which, again, differed from that developed by the lower servants and artisans; finally, came the sharecroppers – the least influenced by the dominant white culture. Therefore, Arnold Hauser's statement that: "Works of art are not born in the outer space of the spiritual world; artistic creation is something dynamic: a dialectical act connected with the whole life, an activity deeply rooted in practice"[80] applies as well to African American art.

In 1922, James Weldon Johnson, in the preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, first noticed the fact that the most characteristic features of American culture derive from the deep stratum of folk life and spirit of Negro peasant culture.

> The inventory of his humble but influential contribution is impressive: the spirituals, Uncle Remus, a whole strain of distinctive humor, some of the most typical varieties of Southern folk balladry, a major form and tradition of the American theater (the minstrel and vaudeville), and practically all of the most characteristic idioms of modern American popular music and dance."[81]

Hence, not the creations of "house Negroes", nor of lower servants and artisans, but those of Negro sharecroppers and their output represent a "[...] deeply original and creative character. American culture is most indebted, above all other folk sources, to this lowly but distinct level of Negro peasant experience."[82] Under the term "folk art", we shall describe the artistic creation of those strata of population who were neither educated, urbanized, nor industrialized.[83]

In music culture, the Negro demonstrated that he possessed features of artistic creativity by which American music in general would become known around the world, having universal appeal and influence.

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[80] Arnold Hauser, *Philosophie der Kunstgeschichte*, München, 1958, *Filozofia Historii Sztuki*, Warszawa, 1970, p. 272, translated by Danuta Danek and Janina Kamionowska.

[81] Butcher, op. cit., p. 36.

[82] Ibid., p. 19.

[83] Hauser, op. cit., p. 269.

According to Eileen Southern, it was through music, "[...] perhaps more than any other field, [that] the preeminence of the African American was acknowledged by the nation."[84] However, the process was slow, with full acknowledgement only coming years later. In 1894, Antonin Dvořák, the renowned Czech composer, assumed the directorship of the newly opened New York National Conservatory of Music in September 1892 and was soon drawn into the discussion of American cultural identity, especially in music. In a "Letter to the Editor" of the *New York Herald* he voiced his conviction: "It is my opinion that I find a sure foundation in the Negro melodies for a new national school of music [...] in America."[85] As a consequence, he chose spirituals to represent the American atmosphere in his *Symphony no. 9 in E Minor (From the New World)*, at the same time showing a respect for and recognition of African American folk music as a rich inspiration to philharmonic musical expression. (I will elaborate more extensively on this topic in the next chapter, where I consider George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and the musical activity of Duke Ellington). Although some critics question the direct inspiration of spirituals on Dvořák's symphony[86], he himself makes it clear when he declares that "My new symphony is [...] an endeavor to portray characteristics, such as are distinctly American."[87] In fact, Dvořák asked Henry Burleigh, an African American student at the National Conservatory, to sing for him spirituals of slave origin.

> "It was my privilege," Burleigh later recalled, "to sing repeatedly some of the old plantation songs for him at his house, and one in particular, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot", greatly pleased him, and part of this old spiritual will be found in the second theme of the first movement of the [symphony *From the New World*], first given out by flute."[88]

"In the spirituals, or slave songs", states James Weldon Johnson, "the Negro has given America not only its only folk song, but a mass of noble

[84] Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, New York, 1997, p. 265.

[85] Antonin Dvořák, "For National Music", *The Chicago Tribune*, 13 August, 1893; reprinted in *Dvořák in America: 1882-1895*, ed. John C. Tibbetts, Portland, Oregon, 1993, p. 362.

[86] Note here for example the opinion expressed in *Jazz. A History of America's Music*, Geoffrey C. War and Ken Burns, New York, 2000, p. 10.

[87] Antonin Dvořák, "Letter to the Editor", *New York Herald,* 28 May, 1893; reprinted in *Dvořák in America: 1882-1895*, ed. cit.

[88] Henry Burleigh, quoted in Thomas L. Riis, " Dvořák and his Black Students", *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries*, New York, 1996, p. 266.

music. I never think of this music but I am struck by the wonder, the miracle of its production."[89] Three decades later, Gilbert Chase was equally enchanted by the originality and depth of black musical expression when he wrote:

> And interwound with the frolic and fun, the sorrow and mourning, the work and prayer, there was always music, not music of one kind, but of many kinds, changing and taking to itself melodies and harmonies and rhythms from here and there, but always based on the bedrock of black man's intense love and great gift for the solace and beauty and excitement of music.[90]

African-American music, similarly to all art created by African Americans prior to the Harlem Renaissance, was not a homogeneous product, but full of complexity and diversity, reflecting social and cultural conditions as well as various levels of cultural experience. For example, the music of the comparatively sophisticated Negroes inhabiting urban centers could not equal in form and content that produced by, for example, the Sea Islands Gullah, a unique group which retained many more African-based cultural elements than groups inhabiting other geographical locations of the South.[91]

To understand the complexity of Negro music, we should be aware of the "internal", as well as "external" forces shaping it. The basic "internal" force was mainly psychological: "[...] a matter of sheer survival, both physical and spiritual, it was fundamental that the Negro slave developed some sources of release from the resentment and frustration that human bondage created."[92] As to "external" influences, Gilbert Chase notices three main popular traditions of vocal music that developed in the United States during the first half of the 20th century: the revival hymns of the whites, Negro spirituals and work songs, and the "plantation" or "Ethiopian" melodies of the minstrel show.[93] Musical syncretism

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89 J.W. Johnson, ed. cit., p. 17.

90 Gilbert Chase, *America's Music From the Pilgrims to the Present*, New York, 1955, p. 83.

91 For more information on the retention of African culture among the Gullah, see: Mary Twining and Keith Baird, *Sea Island Roots*, Trenton, N.J., 1991 and William S. Pollitzer, *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage*, Athens, Georgia, 1999.

92 Butcher, op. cit., p. 40.

93 Chase, op. cit., p. 248.

or blending was unavoidable and in effect productive. The mechanism was noticed by Chase:

> What gave to each current or branch its particular character was the "working over" of the material, the transformation of basic elements through the shaping spirit and the prevailing trend to each tradition, each with its concomitant cultural factors, ranging from ancestral African patterns to vulgarized commercial entertainment.[94]

Saying "vulgarized commercial entertainment", Chase has in mind the so-called "Ethiopian business", or in other words blackface minstrelsy, which stands out as a caricature of Negro music and the Negro himself. The roots of nineteenth century minstrelsy go back to the slave era, when the Negro often played the role of the plantation musician and comedian – the plantation entertainer. He performed not only to a black audience but in many cases to whites as well, exploiting the strong stereotype of the plantation "darkie", an image which in future was to become the essence of minstrelsy. James Weldon Johnson tells us that every plantation had a band that could "crack jokes", sing, and dance to the accompaniment of the banjo and the "bones" (the bones being the actual ribs of sheep or some other small animal cut the proper length, scraped clean, and bleached in the sun). When the planter wished to entertain his guests he needed only to call the troupe of black minstrels.[95] The stereotype of the "happy-go-lucky" Negro captured the imagination of 19th century America so well that white performers blackened their faces with burnt cork to become blackface entertainers of the popular theater. They, not the Negroes, found the commercial value of the minstrel. Although the Negro is credited with creating this genre, many years passed until he entered the commercial minstrel as a participant. This is, however, not the only paradox to be found in the cultural history of the American Negro.

The 1840s brought a novelty into the business – the solo performer was pushed aside by a coordinated team in which each member had a precise role to play, in a complete, self-contained show. This was a combination of singing, dancing, Negro dialect, joke telling – all to the sound of traditional plantation instruments: banjo, violin, bone castanets, and tambourine. In February, 1843, in the Bowery Amphitheater

94 Ibid., p. 248.

95 Butcher, op. cit., pp. 48-9.

in New York City, a group of "four grotesque figures in blackface, wearing white trousers, striped calico shirts, and blue calico coats with long swallowtails", put on a show which, according to Chase, set up a convention to be copied by other teams.[96]

The minstrel as a genre in its classical form did not flourish long, giving way to a more lavish and spectacular presentation of as many as 100 performers in a troupe. Authenticity and originality were features which the minstrel lacked until the Negroes themselves began to take part in them. Appearing at first in the traditional blackface, these performers over time acquired popularity as entertainers in three basic domains: dancing, singing, and instrumentals. The 1890s marked a decreasing popularity of traditional minstrelsy but a successful attempt to revive it was made with the presentation of *The Creole Show* in 1891. The "coon songs"[97], one element of the degenerating minstrel genre, ignored by Negro songwriters, were quickly picked up by more industrious white composers sensing the great commercial power of ragtime:

> What passed to be ragtime was not the full rhythmic and harmonic idiom of the real "rag" as used, for example by Will Marion Cook and the Negro musical-comedy arrangers, with chorus and orchestra at their disposal, but the thin, superficial, eccentric rhythm as could be imitated on the piano or in the necessarily simplified "accompaniments" of popular sheet music of the day.[98]

The systematic syncopation of the piano playing and composition[99], in further development, produced a basis for jazz.

Musical expression found its manifestation in the above mentioned spirituals. But along with the choral music, solo expression developed – the blues. These songs, mostly conveying a "blue" feeling, possessed in some instances undertones of humor and sentimentality, and developed into a classical verse form of three line stanzas (statement, repetition and response), all in a twelve-bar pattern with instrumental accompaniment. Originally, the blues developed as a form of Afro-American folk song prior to the Civil War in the rural South and reached the northern urban centers with the migrating Negroes. In effect, a newly urbanized

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96 Chase, op. cit., p. 259.

97 "Coon' being a contemptuous word for African Americans.

98 Butcher op. cit., p. 66.

99 Chase, op. cit., p. 438.

blues branched off from the archaic form, which continued its own path of development and is present in almost unaltered form even today.

The musical form which focused in itself all of the existing forms of the Afro-American musical experience and expression was jazz. Isaac Goldberg suggests that spirituals, ragtime, and jazz form one continuous sequence of Negro musical expression.[100] We should look for the roots of jazz in New Orleans, where " [...] French, Spanish, African, Caribbean, and American influences created a cultural climate uniquely propitious for the emergence of an urban folk music such as jazz."[101] Chase goes on to enumerate the particular ingredients of jazz: "traditional patterns and impulses of native African music [...], the whole body of Afro-American folk song, the spirituals, the work songs, the ballads, the blues [...] the blackface minstrel tunes, which in turn had drawn upon the storehouse of Irish, Scottish, and British folk melody", and finally "the heritage of creole folk songs and dance tunes, which gave such a gay and brittle character to the popular music of New Orleans."[102]

In contrast to the blues, jazz was a uniquely urban music, born and bred in the ghettoes of the northern cities, into which flocked musicians in search of better wages and better life. Blues, which was rediscovered by the artists of the Harlem Renaissance, and jazz, which had its dynamic development during those years, convinced all the skeptics that African American music had contributed greatly to the rise of American music as such.

The participation of African Americans in shaping American musical expression was so spectacular that in many cases it overshadowed other achievements of artistic significance. The accomplishments in pure literature, for example, "would be surprising both by its length and excellence of achievements."[103] Johnson's opinion, however, is not shared by other critics, who in their considerations tend rather to share the view expressed, for example, by Margaret Butcher: "[O]n the whole, Negroes' conquest of the more formal and sophisticated arts – fiction, playwriting, literary and art criticism, and the like – has been slow and hazardous, in part because of his limited cultural opportunities and contacts.[104]

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[100] Butcher, op. cit., p. 69.

[101] Chase, op. cit., p. 469.

[102] Ibidem.

[103] J. W. Johnson, ed. cit., p. 22.

[104] Butcher, op. cit., p. 28.

Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley best represent the formal poetry prior to the Civil War. Although slaves, both were educated thanks to generous patrons. Their poetry, modeled on the poetic tendencies of the day, revealed few signs of racial consciousness or originality. "Their constructive contribution was to give evidence of the intellectual and artistic capacities of the Negro in the time and environment of doubt [...]" says Margaret Butcher.[105] In spite of the attempts of the anti-slavery poets, and the dialect school of Paul Dunbar (depicting folk life), or the romantic poets who "insisted on the privilege to write as poets freed from racial or regional consciousness"[106], their achievements were rather marginal. The same fate was also shared by black fiction.

Although slave narratives, anti-slavery propaganda, and the autobiographies of African American activists (Frederic Douglass and Booker T. Washington) had their share in the portrayal of the "peculiar institution", they cannot be accepted as outstanding achievements of artistry and craftsmanship influencing American literature.

To underline the specific features of Afro-American culture prior to the Harlem Renaissance, we may declare after Margaret Butcher that in spite of the brutalities of the slave system which reduced the artistic expression of African Americans to a minimum

> [...] there was some memory of beauty; by way of compensation some obviously artistic urges flowed with the peasant Negro toward the only channels of expression left open – song, graceful movement, and poetic speech. Stripped of all else, the Negro's own body became his prime and only artistic instrument; dance, pantomime, and song were the compensation for his pent-up emotions.[107]

[105] Ibid., p. 118.

[106] Ibid., p. 123.

[107] Ibid., p. 209.

4. ENTER THE NEW NEGRO: THE BLOOMING OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

4.1. The Harlem Issue of *The Survey Graphic*

The thesis that the culture of the Harlem Renaissance grew out of criticism of the previous achievements of African American art while drawing upon the rich resources of Black folk tradition seems credible. Artists of the Renaissance to some extent continued the African American cultural tradition, but also made attempts to overcome the limitations stifling their artistic creativity. "Our poets", Alain Locke wrote in "Negro Youth Speaks" from *The New Negro*, "have now stopped speaking for the Negro – they speak as Negroes. [...] They have shaken themselves free from the minstrel tradition and the fowling-nets of dialect, and through acquiring ease and simplicity in serious expression, have carried the folk-gift to the altitudes of art."[1]

The book which explicitly separates the two periods of African American culture, the "old" and the "new", was *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois, published in 1903. In many ways the work stands out as a turning point in African American thought and culture. As James Weldon Johnson stated, it had "a greater effect upon and within the Negro race in America than any other single book published in this century since *Uncle Tom's Cabin*".[2] Along with the racial polemic with the ideas presented by Booker T. Washington, the book deals with the cultural aspects of African American experience. The "sorrow songs", as Du Bois calls spirituals, according to him contained the mystical force which bound the black race together and ministered to its universal emotional needs. "[T]he Negro folk-song – the rhythmic cry of the slave – stands

[1] Locke, "Negro Youth Speaks", *The New Negro.*, ed. cit., p. 48.

[2] Sounders Redding, in the introduction to W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Greenwich, 1961, p. IX.

to-day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas."[3]

The book contributed to a greater interest in black folk culture being also a significant step in beginning the collection of African American artifacts and the study of black life. Many followed the idea: Arthur Schomburg gathered African-American materials; Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and *The Journal of Negro History*;[4] Zora Neale Hurston and Arthur H. Fauset collected and studied folklore; James Weldon Johnson not only compiled spirituals but also used their form and expression in his own poetry (as in *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, 1925). This growing interest resulted in a significant number of publications and "... provided the grounds for a more realistic treatment of the traditional folk culture and its metamorphoses on the urban scene" [5] while intensifying the feeling of racial consciousness and confidence of American blacks. According to the intellectuals, folk materials were to be the first step in further elevation, a base and inspiration for future manifestations of black higher culture.

> With its publication Negroes [...] who had hitherto pretended to regard the race problem as of a strictly personal concern and who sought individual salvation in a creed of detachment and silence, found a bond in their common grievances and a language through which to express them.[6]

Furthermore, the essay "Of Our Spiritual Strivings", charted new directions and specified new goals to reach: "to be a coworker in the kingdom of culture; to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius."[7]

Although the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* was a significant step on the path toward establishing a new image of the Negro, the young emerging black writers (who began to be recognized around 1924, the majority being in their twenties), demonstrated even greater radicalism and stronger features of nationalism, openly opposing the

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3 W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Greenwich, 1961, p. 182.

4 Geneviève Fabre, Michel Faith, *Temples of Tomorrow*, ed. cit., introductory essay, p. 15.

5 Ibidem.

6 Sounders, op. cit., p. IX.

7 Du Bois, op. cit., p. 17.

passing generation of Black literati most distinctly represented by Du Bois and James W. Johnson. These young artists were not organized into a consolidated group, as was practiced by their white colleagues; instead what united them was the color of their skins and "[...] a strong spirit of cohesion, a bond group consciousness toward some goal of achievement which would make the Negro artist proud of his work."[8] Significant attention was focused on the group of new writers – at first, by black critics and, with time, by white ones as well. Arna Bontemps remembers:

> Within a year or two we began to recognize ourselves as a "group" and to become a little self-conscious about our "significance". When we were not too busy having fun we were shown off and exhibited and presented in scores of places, to all kinds of people. And we heard their sighs of amazement, sometimes admiration when it was whispered or announced that here was one of the "New Negroes" [...] In Harlem we were seen in a beautiful light. We were the heralds of a dawning day. We were the first-born of the dark renaissance.[9]

Self-confidence, self-assurance and a simple pride in their race was a new feature never before so openly manifested by this ethnic group.

The official introduction of the new generation of African American writers to white editors and critics, as well as to a number of older black writers, was made possible during a dinner of the New York Writers Guild held at the Civic Center on March 21, 1924, which was characterized as a "[...] dress rehearsal of what was soon to be known as the 'Harlem Renaissance'".[10] The dinner was attended by influential figures of the New York cultural community, both black and white. The guest speaker was Du Bois, who explained that, although his generation had been denied its true voice, the time had come for the end of the "literature of apology". In particular, did he praise James Weldon Johnson for providing an inspiration to young black artists. Paul Kellogg, the editor of *The Survey Graphic*, moved by the speech, and addressing Charles Johnson, offered to devote an entire issue of his magazine to the new black artists. The offer was accepted and Alain Locke was suggested as

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8 Eugene C. Holmes, "The Legacy of Alain Locke", in *Harlem, USA*, edited by John Henrik Clerke, Berlin, 1964, p. 51.

9 Arna Bontemps, "The Two Harlems", *American Scholar*, Spring 1945.

10 Lewis, op. cit., p. 90.

the editor of the Harlem issue.[11] The *Opportunity* reported on the dinner where black writers and white editors declared the "debut" of young Negro writers.[12] On May 7, 1925, *The New York Herald Tribune* reported another significant event: a banquet at the elegant Fifth Avenue Restaurant in New York City during which Langston Hughes was awarded the highest prize for poetry in the first literary competition promoted by the *Opportunity*, (Langston Hughes's "The Weary Blues" was the winning poem). The article, "A Negro Renaissance", reported that during the banquet "White critics whom everybody knows (and) Negro writers whom nobody knew met on common ground."[13] Apparently, *The New York Herald Tribune* coined the term "Harlem Renaissance" which was to be used from then on to denote the movement.[14]

During these two events there presumably sprang the idea of publishing the issue of *The Survey Graphic*, (Volume VI, no. 6), dated March 1925, subtitled "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro", the first comprehensive study devoted entirely to African Americans and Harlem in particular. In fact, the editors of *The Survey Graphic* were open to the forces of change and the Pragmatic ideals of the times. *Charities, The Commons* and *Jewish Charity* became the backbone of the Publications Committee that issued the so-called "surveys" which became a success; consequently, the Committee decided to focus more on social matters and in April 1909 began publishing *The Survey Graphic*. It appeared twice a month: a "graphic" issue with a decorated cover on the first of each month, and a "midmonthly" issue on the fifteenth, printed on lighter stock and unbound.[15]

In 1915, Paul Kellogg described the main aims of his magazine: to become "an investigator and interpreter of the objective conditions of life and labour and as a chronicler of undertakings to improve them."[16]

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[11] Information on the Civic Club dinner on the basis of Mary Schmidt Campbell, *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America*, New York, 1987, pp. 62-63 , Lewis, op. cit. pp. 93-95.

[12] "The Debut of the Younger School of Writers", *Opportunity*, 2, 1924, pp. 143-144.

[13] "A Negro Renaissance", *The New York Herald Tribune*, May 7, 1927, p. 16.

[14] There is a controversy in this matter. As Tony Martin relates in the preface to his *African Fundamentalism. A Literary and Cultural Anthology of Garvey's Harlem Renaissance*, Dover, 1991, the term was coined by Garvey's literary editor William H. Ferris in 1922 in an article "The Negro Renaissance", published *in The Negro World.*

[15] Information on the history of *The Survey Graphic* is based on Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1930*, Ann Arbor, 1968, pp. 744-748.

[16] Paul U. Kellogg cited in Clarke Chambers, *Paul U. Kellogg and ' The Survey': Voices from Social Welfare and Social Justice*, Minneapolis, 1971, p. 8.

The mission was to "provoke citizens everywhere into the awareness of new programs for social reform"[17] and to "engage the attention of a wide audience by the use of graphic and literary arts in partnership with the social sciences, to catch the eye and heart as well as the intellect."[18] The magazine's graphic depiction of social facts, "catching the eye" of readers and communicating the information visually, was to reach a wider readership. Kellogg declared that, "we are going to employ photographs, etchings, drawings and text of a sort which we hope will get a new hearing for the big human concerns which lie underneath all this technical discussion of social problems."[19] The stress on the graphic side of the presented information locates Kellogg and his *Survey Graphic* at the beginning of a trend in the development of magazines communicating information through images.

Living up to its name, *The Survey Graphic* published comprehensive social studies and often focused on the growing metropolitan centers (e.g. Pittsburgh and Birmingham, Alabama). The editors and reporters of the magazine were interested in social issues ranging from jail conditions (1910), labour and welfare (1910-1912), eventually to expand its content base into matters devoted to politics, socialism, social insurance, industrial reform, labour strikes, child welfare, sex and prostitution (1913).

Now, with larger page size, better typography and improved illustrations, *The Survey Graphic* became a high quality magazine. The quality of the magazine was reinforced by the well-established names published there, just to name John Dewey among others. During World War I, *The Survey Graphic* took a strong pacifist stand and numerous antiwar articles appeared in the magazine. But with the United States entering the war, the magazine became loyal to the foreign policy of the government and after the war supported aid campaigns to re-establish the destroyed European economies. "Shall We Turn Our Backs on Europe?" asked Henry P. Davidson in the April 24, 1920 issue. The author of the *History of the American Magazine* enumerates issues of *The Survey Graphic* which attracted much attention among its readers: the April, 1921 issue devoted to coal mines and miners; the November, 1922 issue focusing on the Elk River Basin oil fields; the March, 1925 number about the

[17] Ibid, p. 84.

[18] Ibid. p. 105.

[19] Ibid. p. 85.

Russian experiment; and the December, 1925 issue for which Mahatma Gandhi wrote an article entitled "Untouchable". The list also includes the March, 1925, Harlem issue and calls it "a fine Negro number containing contributions dealing with Negro culture by leaders of the race."[20] The high quality of this particular issue of *The Survey Graphic* made it the largest in circulation of any in its history, reaching 42,000.[21] Several reprints had to be made before the demand was satisfied.

For the editors of *The Survey Graphic*, interested in social issues, the Harlem number seemed to be a logical step in presenting to American society an area which until then had been, from the white perspective, practically non-existent or, to use Ralph Ellison's later expression, "invisible" in social consciousness. In just two decades, Harlem as a district had absorbed a multitude of African Americans from the South as well as from the Caribbean. It had become synonymous with a better life, a sign of hope, the Promised Land for numerous migrants. As it has been shown in the social analysis section of this work, the Harlem the recent migrants encountered turned out to be less hope-inspiring: housing problems, unemployment and crime was the reality. *The Survey Graphic*, involved in social work, philanthropy, and charity work, could not ignore such a Harlem and its burning social issues.

The Harlem number of *The Survey Graphic*, however, not only explored the social realm but also covered many other aspects of Negro life and gave voice to the viewpoints of African Americans and whites, men and women, scholars, sociologists, civil leaders, and men of letters. The articles focused on four distinctive areas: discussion of the concepts of the New Negro, the problems and opportunities in Harlem, the importance of Africa for African American artists, and highlighting the work of Winold Reiss. In an introduction under the title "The Gist of It", Alain Locke as the editor, wrote that: "If the Survey reads the signs aright, such a dramatic flowering of a new race-spirit is taking place at home – among American Negroes, and the stage of that new episode is Harlem."[22] The issue in its first part, titled "The Greatest Negro Community in the World", contained essays by Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson and others; part two – "The Negro Expresses Himself", brought essays by W.E.B. Du Bois and Arthur A. Schomburg, poems by Countee

[20] Mott, op. cit., p. 748.

[21] *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology,* ed. cit., p. xxxiv.

[22] Alain Locke, "The Gist of It", *Survey Graphic*, Vol. VI, No. 6, March 1925, p. XI.

Cullen, Anne Spencer, Angelina Grimke, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer and Langston Hughes under one name: "Youth Speaks", all illustrated by Winold Reiss; the third part "Black and White – Studies in Race Contacts", introduced essays on black and white contacts with essays by such eminent authors as, for example, Melville J. Herskovits and Walter F. White. Editorials and book reviews closed the issue.

The first section of *The Survey Graphic* under the title "The Greatest Negro Community in the World", includes James Weldon Johnson's text focusing on social issues implementing sociological discourse. Johnson considers "The Race Capital" to "be a large scale laboratory in the race problem". In explaining his point of view, Johnson quotes sociologists who note that if African Americans came to the North in large numbers, they would also bring the race tensions characteristic for the South. For now: "175,000 Negroes live closely together in Harlem, in the heart of New York. 75,000 more than live in any southern city, and do so without any race friction."[23] New York did guarantee its Negro citizens the fundamental rights of American citizenship and it protected them in the exercise of those rights. In return for their dignity and personal protection, Johnson said, "the Negro loves New York and is proud of it, and contributes in his way to its greatness."[24] He also admitted that there was discrimination for the African American citizen to contend with, but he felt that ever since the basic rights had been granted, the people believed that discrimination would eventually be abolished.

Although this issue of *The Survey Graphic* is devoted to a whole spectrum of matters connected with the district of Harlem in Manhattan, social dimensions are not its main emphasis. In fact, the presentation of the social and economic radicalism of Harlem, i.e. leftist politics as well as the nationalistic Back-to-Africa movement of Marcus Garvey, was considerably limited. Apart from the first section, mentioned above, only Winthrop D. Lane's essay "Ambushed in the City: The Grim Side of Harlem" from the third section of the issue, contains strong social criticism. Here the author draws the reader's attention to the dysfunctional aspects of social life in the district, which included gambling, poverty, racism, the medical neglect of doctors, and discriminatory rent practices. Due to its strong social criticism, the article was not included in the

[23] James Weldon Johnson, "The Making of Harlem", *Survey Graphic,* ed. cit. p. 639.

[24] Ibidem.

New Negro which as a result provided a more optimistic view of African American urban life.

An overview of the whole issue of *The Survey Graphic* reveals the real interest of the editors: to present the cultural aspirations of African Americans in the American context. Kellogg himself saw this particular issue as:

> [...] offering a new approach – different from the economic-educational approach of Hampton and Tuskegee on the one hand; and on the other hand, different from the political approach of Negro rights, lynching, discrimination, and so forth. We are interpreting a racial and cultural revival in the new environment of the northern city: interpreting the affirmative genius of writers, thinkers, poets, artists, singers and musicians, which make for a new rapprochement between the races at the same time that they contribute to the common pot of civilization.[25]

In its previous editions, *The Survey Graphic* had been interested in cultural nationalist movements and had featured issues on topics devoted, in particular, to "New Ireland", "New Russia" and "New Mexico"; now the time had come to present the "New Negro" and the achievements and aspirations of African Americans.

In the opening essay, "Harlem", Alain Locke compares Harlem's role for African Americans in building a cultural and national identity to other cultural centers of the day and predicts that "without pretence to their political significance, Harlem had the same role to play for the New Negro as Dublin has had for the New Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia."[26] It is here, he claimed, that African Americans will develop their group expression and self-determination. In the second essay, "Enter the New Negro", Locke sees the new generation of artists as inspirators who have a significant role to play in the revival of the consciousness of the race. It would be this group of young artists who through their works would disseminate the new ideas to members of their race. Albert C. Barnes supports Locke's thesis in his essay "Negro Art and America" published in *The New Negro* (1925), when he states that young African American artists are the ones who "know the Negro soul and lead it to richer fields by their own ideals of culture, art

[25] Kellogg to Locke, 5 February, 1925, *Survey Graphic* correspondence files, Alain Locke Papers, quoted in George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, p. 393.

[26] Ibid, p. 630.

and citizenship."[27] Barnes extends the argument to even more universal dimensions when he says that: "Through the compelling powers of his poetry and music the American Negro is revealing to the rest of the world the essential oneness of all human beings."[28] Locke's chosen few, the avant-garde, the Talented Tenth, could be the solution to race problems and lead African Americans to a brighter future both in the American as well as a universal context.

In his considerations Locke does not fall into the trap of overlooking the social dimensions of the Negro problem but expresses his belief that the most immediate hope for the future of race relations in the United States rests in the reevaluation of the Negro by both whites and African Americans. This reevaluation, accordingly, should have its foundations in artistic creativity and cultural contributions to the richness of the general American culture. "It must be increasingly recognized that the Negro has already made very substantial contributions not only in his folk-art, music especially, which has always found appreciation, but in larger, though humbler and less acknowledged ways."[29] Locke formulates the brave statement that African Americans had been in the past, and would continue to be, conscious collaborators and artistically gifted participants in the larger American culture – which is why they deserve attention and why their contributions should be fully respected and included in the culture they too are a part of. It is in fact their duty to stress that, through culture, this group might win its "just reward and recognition".[30] Locke, through his ideas, draws attention to concepts of cultural pluralism previously unnoted by cultural critics, not to mention the general public.

Locke continues this theme in his essay "Youth Speaks" where he elaborates his discussion on the role of young African American artists. According to Locke, they have a unique power to shape the future of American art, and are ones who, from the depths of their experience, possess all the necessary skills and abilities to produce works of art significant not only to their race but also to the general American culture. "Negro genius today relies upon the race-gift as a vast spiritual endowment from which our best developments have come and must

[27] Albert C. Barnes, "Negro Art in America", *The New Negro*, ed. cit. p. 23.

[28] Ibidem.

[29] Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro", *Survey Graphic,* ed. cit., p. 633.

[30] Alain Locke, "The Ethics of Culture" in *Critical Temper of Alain Locke*, Jeffrey C. Stewart, ed., New York, 1983 , p. 416.

come."[31] To Locke, race *should* be a source of inspiration for the African American artist. As a consequence of this outlook, he regards the youngest generation of writers (Jessie Faucet, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen) as the avant-garde of the race and as keepers of a tradition which had now acquired new creative energy to produce significant works of art. Locke closes the essay with the following words: "Indeed, by the evidence and promise of the cultured few, we are at last spiritually free, and offer through art an emancipating vision of America."[32] Therefore, there is a significant place for African Americans in a pluralistic America as an important element of "multiplicity in a unity" and not merely an ingredient of the "melting pot".[33]

The initial, dominant "melting pot" hypothesis underwent growing criticism to be fully challenged by H.M. Kallen, who first presented his innovative concept of so-called "cultural pluralism" in the article "Democracy versus the Melting Pot" in *The Nation* in 1915.[34] In Kallen's musical metaphor of a pluralistic America, African Americans, as seen by Locke, constitute an important instrument:

> As in an orchestra, every type of instrument has its specific timbre and tonality [...], so in society each ethnic group is the natural instrument, its spirit and culture are its theme and melody, and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all make the symphony of civilization.[35]

These pluralistic ideas challenged the traditional romantic attitudes of "Americanization", presenting a "new and more liberal vision of democracy".[36] A more vital and beautiful democracy would arise, they argued, by permitting ethnic groups to maintain their individuality, rather than conceiving them as swallowed up, or melted down into one

[31] Alain Locke, "Youth Speaks", *Survey Graphic,* ed. cit., p. 659.

[32] Ibid., p. 660.

[33] Consult Frederick J. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", in *The Frontier in American History*, New York, 1920; Robert E. Park and H.A. Miller, *Old World Traits Transplanted*, New York, 1921; Maria Curti, *The Making of an American Community*, Stanford, 1959; Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, Boston, 1951. J. Chałasiński in *Kultura Amerykańska*, Warszawa, 1973, p. 100, maintains that the concept was first presented in a paper "The significance of the Frontier in American History", at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.

[34] See also Horace M. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, New York, 1924.

[35] Horace M. Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot", *The Nation*, February 25, 1915, p. 220.

[36] Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, New York, 1971, p. 182.

dominant American culture. Each group, given freedom of expression and development, would then make valuable contributions to American society. Diversity and cultural pluralism should be fostered and encouraged; maintained, not stifled.[37]

Unlike James Weldon Johnson, who saw Harlem from the sociological perspective of a "large scale laboratory in the race problem"[38], Locke's Harlem was the cultural capital and center for the New Negro, where the "pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat."[39] He compares Harlem's meaning for African Americans to that of the Statue of Liberty for European immigrants, and sees the district not as a slum or a ghetto but rather a location emerging into a significant "race capital". It was here that artists had come together in an urban center, a modern environment, no longer isolated in their rural communities but open to new ideas and trends. Consequently, this opened new perspectives and possibilities for artistic development, for the stimulation and enrichment of American art, and, especially for the benefit of the race, could be understood within American culture in a wide sense.[40]

The theme of search for identity and heritage is echoed continuously throughout *The Survey Graphic*. In the quest to establish a new tradition in the visual arts (an area of artistic creativity then almost completely non-existent among African Americans because "the Negro in his American environment had turned to the art of music, the dance, and poetry, an emphasis quite different from that of African culture"[41]), Locke turned to Africa as a possible source of inspiration. In his short article "The Art of the Ancestors", which he would eventually extend and publish in *The New Negro* under the title "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts", he not only discusses the importance of African art to the development of European modernism of the day ("attested influences are to be found in the work of Matisse, Picasso, Modigliani, [...] and others"[42]), but also expresses the hope that African art would become a stimulant to the "plastic arts" of African Americans. Just as European modernists based in Paris were

37 Ibid., p. 182.

38 James Weldon Johnson, "The Making of Harlem", *Survey Graphic,* ed. cit., p. 639.

39 Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro", *Survey Graphic,* ed. cit., p. 633.

40 Ibid. p. 634.

41 Alain Locke ,"The Art of the Ancestors", *Survey Graphic,* ed. cit. p. 673.

42 Ibidem.

"profoundly influenced by the aesthetics of this [African] art"[43], Locke expresses his hope that African aesthetics will eventually "exert upon the artistic development of the American Negro the influence that it has already had upon modern European artists."[44] Locke saw the extent to which African art had revitalised European art by freeing it from the stifling influence of academia and expressed the hope that it would now similarly stimulate African American artists.

> It [African art] may well be taken as the basis for a characteristic school of expression in the plastic and pictorial art, and give to us again a renewed mastery [...] and a lesson in simplicity and originality of expression. Surely this art, once known and appreciated, can scarcely have less influence upon the blood descendants than upon those who inherit by tradition only. And at the very least, for those not especially interested in art, it should definitely establish the enlightening fact that the Negro is not a cultural foundling without inheritance.[45]

Let us underline Locke's words: "the Negro is not a cultural foundling without inheritance", through which he confirms the importance of not only the artistic achievements of the American experience of the Negro race but also its African inheritance. This page, and the pages that follow, are the most "African" of the whole issue of *The Survey Graphic*. Locke's article is illustrated by photographs of four African sculptures: a bronze sculpture of a slim, full-body figure from Dahomey and three head sculptures from Soudan-Niger, Baoule and Yabonba. The next two pages (674 and 675), feature Countee Cullen's poem "Heritage" ("What is Africa to me?") accompanied by Bushango and Ivory Coast ceremonial masks, two seated figure sculptures and a Zouenoula sculpture. All the photographs are of artifacts ("exemplars of the art of the ancestors"[46], as Locke calls them) from the Barnes Foundation (see Annex, item 8).

Locke's "discovery" of African art was significantly indebted to Albert C. Barnes, the owner of the Barnes Foundation (opened in Merion, Pennsylvania in 1924) who was also the author of an essay "Negro Art and America" in the Harlem issue of *The Survey Graphic*. This multimillionaire, influenced by pragmatic ideals, under the spell of William James and closely connected with John Dewey, became so interested in

[43] Ibidem.

[44] Ibidem.

[45] Ibidem.

[46] Ibidem.

African American art as to become its main sponsor and a major collector of African tribal art.[47] It is thanks to his passionate interest in African art and through his agency that many African Americans realized the need to search for their roots in quest of their ancestry, at least in the visual arts, to name only Alain Locke and Aaron Douglas (the leading artist of the Harlem Renaissance) among many others.

The visual dimensions of *The Survey Graphic* were essential since "graphic" features were the magazine's main objectives. Winold Reiss, a German-born artist, was commissioned to provide the artwork for the issue which, as it turned out, became an important inspiration for African American visual artists. The graphic works of this artist demonstrated a strong interest in the graphic documentation of various social groups – his previous projects including, among others, portfolios of Blackfoot Indians, the Pueblo people, and Mexicans.[48] Alain Locke praised Winold Reiss:

> His art owes its particular success as much to the philosophy of his approach as to his technical skills. He is a folklorist of the brush and palette, seeking always the folk character back of the individual, the psychology behind physiognomy. In design also he looks not merely for decorative elements, but for the pattern of culture from which it sprang. Without loss of naturalistic accuracy and individuality, he somehow subtly expresses the type, and without being any the less human, captures the racial and local. [49]

He goes on to compare Reiss, in promoting the Negro and Africa, to the role Paul Gauguin played in popularizing the culture of Tahiti and the Far East. *The Survey Graphic* commission was a natural step in Winold Reiss's artistic career.

The front cover of *The Survey Graphic* presents his drawing of Roland Hayes, the Fisk-trained tenor, who had won recognition in the United States only after scoring European success. It is a straightforward, realistic drawing presenting (with no hesitation) Hayes's African physiognomical features, including a full nose and lips (see Annex, item 5).

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[47] William Schack, *Art and Argyrol: The Life and Career Dr. Albert C. Barnes*, New York, 1960.

[48] Information supplied in the Bibliography section under the title "Who's Who of the Contributors, *The New Negro*, ed. cit. p. 419.

[49] Alain Locke, "Harlem Types. Portraits of Winold Reiss", *Survey Graphic,* ed. cit., p. 651 also quoted in *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 419-420.

It is worth noting that until the publication of the drawings of Winold Reiss in *The Survey Graphic* African American characters were mostly presented in caricature form. As Locke states: "Caricature has put upon the countenance of the Negro the mask of the comic and the grotesque [...]"[50] Here, though, the artist makes no attempt to hide or exaggerate African physiognomical features but rather gives them a realistic, photographic rendition in order to "portray the soul and spirit of a people".[51]

The back cover of *The Survey Graphic* features a drawing by Herald Jackman, entitled *A College Lad*, which is executed in the same style as the remaining portraits of Winold Reiss drawn for *The Survey Graphic*. The series *Four Portraits of Negro Women includes: A Woman from the Virgin Islands* (page 685) – her dark face drawn in a very detailed manner to contrast with the sketch of her white dress; *The Librarian* (page 686) – a drawing of an elegantly dressed woman with a hat and a fur coat, holding a book and looking straight at the viewer: a woman whose strongly African features are noticeable, especially in reference to her lips and nose; in *Two Public School Teachers* (page 687), (see Annex, item 7) – again the women possess strong African features – this time the hairstyle which later gained fame as an "Afro" is noticeable; and *Elise Johnson McDougald* (page 688) – a drawing which resembles Picasso's early drawings and focuses on the head and hands drawn in a detailed manner.

Winold Reiss's artwork for *The Survey Graphic* included not only drawings but also graphic works. The graphic design of the issue is unified and consistent: beginning with the stylized "African" lettering on the front cover and Africa-inspired patterns through the design elements presenting African American silhouettes and landscape elements. The article "Jazz at Home" in which J.A. Rogers reviews the history of jazz, calling it one part American and three parts Negro[52], is accompanied by two graphic works titled *Interpretations of Jazz*. Both show cabaret scenes in which African American dancing couples are the dominant theme. Bodies are stylized, resembling flat silhouettes with thick lips (a slight note of caricature is noticeable here). Moreover, the presence of the African mask in the background is a significant element of African visual inspiration (see Annex, item 6). Page 663 of *The Survey Graphic*

[50] Ibidem.

[51] Ibidem.

[52] J.A. Rogers, "Jazz at Home", *Survey Graphic,* ed. cit., p. 666.

presents a full-page graphic work under the title: *Dawn in Harlem. A Fantasy by Winold Reiss.* This time it is a cubist rendition of a city (New York – Harlem?) with a landscape dominated by high-rise buildings, factories and smoking chimney-stacks. What is characteristic in all the works are flat patterns, cutout black and white silhouettes – there is neither depth nor perspective. The stylized qualities of these works echo features of Art Deco, Art Nouveau, cubism, and even elements of ancient Egyptian art.

Aaron Douglas, the artist most often associated with the New Negro and the Harlem Renaissance, was strongly inspired by Reiss. *The Survey Graphic* turned out to be an important element in the artistic development of Douglas. As he recalls in a speech delivered late in his life (1973): "The most cogent single factor that eventually turned my face to New York was the spectacular issue of "*Survey Graphic*" magazine (1924) with the splendid portrait of a black man on the cover drawn by Fritz Winold Reiss."[53] At the time when Reiss was working on *The Survey Graphic* he complained that: "I should not be doing this [...] these African [...] decorations and pictures should be done by a Negro."[54] Aaron Douglas would make Reiss's wish come true.

Critical analysts of *The Survey Graphic* tend to concentrate mainly on the presented articles and their content, while often overlooking other components, like the above-considered visual dimensions of the issue. Other items – such as editorials, lists of books by and about African Americans, and especially the numerous advertisements – are just as informative and revealing. The message they convey is that African Americans are a highly cultured race, possessing a vibrant culture which has significantly contributed to general American culture. This had been, in fact, Locke's main objective. Especially informative are the full-page advertisements of African American magazines, organizations and announcements of artistic events. On page 624, the reader finds an impressive, full-page advertisement of *The Crisis* addressed to white readers. A photograph of an African American girl is accompanied by a text which begins with a series of rhetorical questions:

[53] Aaron Douglas, "The Harlem Renaissance", address of 18 March, 1973 quoted in *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, ed. cit. p. 398.

[54] Ethel Ray Nance, interview, quoted in *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, ed. cit. p. 398.

> Would you like to know how it feels to be an American Negro?
> Would you like to know what Negroes are thinking and doing?
> Would you like to see their daily life pictured?
> Would you like to know "facts" as Negroes see them?
> Read : *The Crisis*

At the bottom, the caption reads: "*The Crisis* is the most hated, most popular and most widely discussed magazine dealing with questions of race."

The National Urban League, "an organization which seeks to improve the relations between races in America",[55] also posted a full page advertisement presenting its program (page 622) and likewise included an advertisement of its official publication *Opportunity* where one may read that the paper is:

> [...] interested in stimulating and encouraging artistic expression among the younger generation of Negroes [...] who are endeavoring to live the creative life – who through poems or story or play or musical composition are passionately striving to bring to the surface of our materially stimulated consciousness something of the pathos and romance and unflagging spirit of the black man. [56]

Although its circulation never could compete with Du Bois's *The Crisis,* it is thanks to *Opportunity's* literary contests, and particularly to the activity of Charles S. Johnson, that many talents which would make significant contributions to the literary dimensions of *The Survey Graphic,* and in the long run to the Harlem Renaissance, were discovered. Some of them – Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, E. Franklin Frazier, Zora Neale Hurston, Arna Bontemps, to name just a few – made their debuts in these contests.

Many critics (Lewis, Hutchinson, Fabre) treat *Opportunity*'s "coming-out" party (March 21, 1924) for the awarded African American writers at the Civic Club as the formal launching of the New Negro movement, and in effect of the Harlem Renaissance. As David Levering Lewis notices, Charles S. Johnson, just like Locke, through the agency of his paper attempted to "redeem, through art, the standing of his people."[57] Both of them shared similar views on aesthetics and the role of art in the social

[55] Advertisement in *The Survey Graphic,* ed. cit., p. 622.

[56] Ibid., p. 703.

[57] Lewis, op. cit., 90.

advancement of the race, and worked together on *The Survey Graphic* making "a perfect team because at bottom, both wanted the same art for the same purposes – highly polished stuff, preferably about polished people, but certainly untainted by racial stereotypes or embarrassing vulgarity. Too much blackness, too much streetgeist and folklore – nitty-gritty music, prose, and verse – were not welcome."[58]

Opportunity's advertisement page (703) of *The Survey Graphic* is shared by "The Negro in Print. A Selected List of Magazines and Book by and about Negroes." As the title suggests, it gives a comprehensive list of publications of African Americans of the day. What is, however, interesting is the comment (page 706) on the state-of-the-art of contemporary African American literary production. Due to the relevancy of the quote it is supplied in full:

> In general literature, the treatment of Negro life has taken a turn that can only be called revolutionary, so definitely and suddenly has literature broken with the traditional attitudes of previous decades. In drama and fiction the younger realists have gone in for detailed and serious studies of Negro life that have scrapped the old stereotypes and penetrated the true environment and psychology of the Negro life: this new school with increasing penetration goes to the heart of the life it attempts to portray. Another school takes the aesthetic approach and just as startlingly reveals, both in the African Negro and the American scene, elements of strange exotic charm, individuality and beauty.

The quote expresses an enthusiastic belief in the "new" and exultation at the breaking away from the "old" literary tradition. According to this opinion, African American literature had at last freed itself from stereotypical representations and was on the road to self-fulfillment for the benefit of the race.

Along with the above advertisements for African American magazines and literary publications, *The Survey Graphic* also included a series of smaller ads from other areas (1/2 and 1/4 page): G. Schirmer, Inc. promotes "Music of Interest to the Negro Race" which includes Negro folk-songs, Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent and Afro-American Folk Songs; the managers of Roland Hayes, internationally famous Negro tenor (portrayed on the cover of *The Survey Graphic*; see Annex, item 5), advertise his 1924-25 tour which, in fact, by that time had been already fully booked; Boni and Liveright publishing house advertises

[58] Ibid., p. 95.

books by African American writers: Jessie R. Fauset's *There is Confusion*, Waldo Frank's *Holiday* and Jean Toomer's *Cane*. The ad is accompanied by photographs of the authors.

The general impression the reader of *The Survey Graphic* gets is that African Americans had at last achieved the acceptance of Americans through the manifestation of their artistic achievements. James Weldon Johnson's great wish, expressed a few years earlier in the preface to the first edition of his *Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) that:

> A people may become great through many means, but there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior[59]

...had finally come true.

Publication of *The Survey Graphic* met with a wide response from African Americans as well as from white circles. The May 1925 (Volume 7, no. 2) issue of *The Survey Graphic* quotes reviews sent by readers of the Harlem issue (March, 1925). For the most part, opinions were favorable, some even enthusiastic. For example, Florina Lasker from the Department of Immigrant Aid of the Council of Jewish Women wrote that the publication had been "A real service to both peoples"; J.E. Springern exclaimed: "The Harlem issue is superb; I congratulate you sincerely on this picture of the almost unparalleled achievement of a race"; Carl Van Doren, literary editor of *The Century*, stated that: "The Harlem issue of *Survey Graphic* seems to me an amazing performance. I have read it with delight and am carefully preserving it among my most valued American documents"; the editors of *The Nation* for their part wrote:

> The current issue of *Survey Graphic* is a notable contribution to the fact and philosophy of a democratic America. For the first time it brings together an interpretation of this new Negro from the standpoint of his poetry, his music, his gifts of temperament and philosophy and character toward the making of an American democracy. The march of his

[59] J. W. Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, ed. cit., p. 9.

> race has hurdled ages of the world's progress in half a century; he stands even with the present. [60]

Even Marcus Garvey – who was completely ignored by the editors of *The Survey Graphic* (in the entire issue he is mentioned only once by W.A. Domingo in the article "The Tropics in New York" as "the most-advertised of all West Indians [...] absentee "president" of the continent of Africa, [who] represents the attempt of West Indian peasants to solve the American race problem."[61]) wrote: "The effort you have made to present partially the life of the race as it strikes you in Harlem is commendable. Your motive is of the nature that will bring about the better understanding that the world needs."[62]

But not all responses to *The Survey Graphic* were favorable. A group of African Americans felt offended by Reiss's portraits presented in the issue, mainly because of the emphasis on the African features of the people presented, especially their "nappy" hair. Jeffrey C. Stewart, in his monograph *To Color America: Portraits by Winold Reiss*, gives a comprehensive account of the controversy surrounding *The Survey Graphic*'s portraits and the protests of the Harlem elite who "wondered if the whole art side of the issue were a piece of subtle propaganda to prejudice the white reader."[63] Paul U. Kellogg in his essay "The Negro Pioneers", included in the *New Negro,* sees the process of racial self discovery of African Americans as "finding [themselves] anew in [their] own eyes" gaining "a new sense of [...] integrity and distinction [64] and adds:

> [...] they [African Americans] clung to the prevailing [i.e. white man's] ideals of beauty and these [portraits] were not beautiful to them [...] Their imagery had been so long thwarted and warped that they could not grasp the rare service rendered by [Reiss], who came with fresh eyes, who is the first in America to break with sentimentality and caricature and delineate racial types with fidelity, and who is encouraging a

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60 This and above quotes of reviews in "What they say of the Harlem Number", *Survey Graphic*, Volume 7, no. 2 , (May 1925), http:// etext.lib.virginia.edu/harlem/reviewsF.html (accessed 28.08.2006).

61 W.A. Domingo, "The Tropics in New York", *Survey Graphic,* ed. cit., p. 650.

62 Marcus Garvey, quoted in "What they say of the Harlem Number", *Survey Graphic*, ed. cit.

63 Jeffrey C. Stewart, *To Color America: Portraits by Winold Reiss,* Washington, D.C, 1989, p. 54.

64 Paul U. Kellogg , "The Negro Pioneers", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 276.

> group of young Negroes to follow through the mastery the path he had broken.[65]

The protest shows to what extent Locke's vision of African American racial identity was ahead of his time. It took decades for African Americans to fully acknowledge their identity, embracing also their physiognomic features, and become proud of both.

4.2. *The New Negro*: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance.

Plans to re-publish and expand the content of *The Survey Graphic* in book form were made even before the issue came out.[66] Albert Boni of Albert & Boni, Inc. sensed not only the commercial success of *The Survey Graphic* but also of its future publication as a book. Again, Locke was asked to mastermind editorial matters, and Winold Reiss was made responsible for the artwork. As a result, not only were *The Survey Graphic* materials (the "nucleus" of future publication, as Locke admits) significantly extended and supplemented by a number of new essays and literary items but the artwork too gained new dimensions thanks to the *Ten Decorative Designs* of Aaron Douglas. In the fall of 1925 *The New Negro. Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* was published.

It is a carefully planned anthology of texts (expository prose, poetry, fiction, drama) and illustrations. In his project, Locke implemented a new, multigenre approach to the creativity of the Harlem Renaissance, which includes literary forms but also genres hitherto neglected: music and visual arts. *The New Negro* is divided into three sections. The first part called "The Negro Renaissance", contains Locke's most important essays – "The New Negro", "Negro Youth Speaks", "Negro Spirituals" and "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" and essays by other authors, as well as a collection of short stories, poetry and drama. The second part, "The New Negro in a New World", focusing more on the social and sociological aspects, presents essays by Paul U. Kellogg, James Weldon Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier, Melville J. Herskovits and others. This is followed by an extended bibliography divided into sections: "Who's Who of the Contributors", "Notes to the Illustrations", "A Select List of Negro-Americana and Africana", "The Negro in Literature", "Negro

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[65] Ibid., p. 277.

[66] Richard A. Long, "The Genesis of Locke's *The New Negro*", *Black World,* 25, no. 4 (1976), pp. 14 -20.

Drama", "Negro Music", "A Selected List of Modern Music, Influenced by American Negro Themes and Idioms", "Negro Folk Lore", and "Negro Race Problems".[67]

Locke's "Foreword" to *The New Negro* categorically states the purpose of the publication which is "to document the New Negro culturally and socially, – to register the transformations of the inner and outer life of the Negro in America that have so significantly taken place in the last few years."[68] According to Locke, African Americans have reached an important moment in their cultural history ("Spiritual Coming of Age") and are ready to present their achievements to American society; moreover, they are ready to contribute to the wealth of the general American culture. These achievements, he stresses, "must be seen in the perspective of a New World, and especially of a New America."[69] Therefore, the manifestation of the creative potential of the race is not to be nationalistic in tone but should respond to the forces of the general American culture and contribute to its development:

> America seeking a new spiritual expansion and artistic maturity, trying to found an American literature, a national art, and national music implies a Negro-American culture seeking the same satisfactions and objectives. Separate as it may be in color and substance, the culture of the Negro is of a pattern integral with the times and with its cultural setting.[70]

"Race-spirit", "group expression" and "self-determination" are to be imbedded in the "cultural setting", i.e. general American culture and the demands of the day.

In the most significant of his essays, "The New Negro", Locke further develops his argument. The artistic achievements of the New Negro are to be an "offering", a "gift", to American culture. This is not a new concept. W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in its final essay "Of the Sorrow Songs", wrote of three gifts which African Americans had

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67 As Alain Locke (the editor of the *The New Negro*) writes in the "Notes to the Bibliography" (page 420): "The bibliographical section of *Negro-Americana* has been compiled by Arthur A. Schomburg; the section *Negro Folk Lore* by Arthur H. Fauset, with the acknowledgment for the assistance to Professor Monroe Work of Tuskegee Institute; other sections, *The Negro in Literature, Negro Music, Negro Drama, African Culture,* and *The Negro Question*, have been presumably compiled by the editor."

68 Alain Locke in "Foreword" to *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. xxv.

69 Ibidem.

70 Ibid., p. xxvi.

contributed to American culture: "a gift of story [...] song [...] and Spirit" and asked the famous, rhetorical questions: "Would America have been America without her Negro people?"[71] The New Negro, a mature artist, has the potential and the will to contribute to American culture by sharing qualities which it is deprived of. He seems to be saying: "Here is what I have to offer, here are my gifts!" "He now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization."[72]

Locke, like many other intellectuals, shared the opinion that American culture was deprived of spirituality. To them, America was a spiritual wasteland shaped by industrialism and materialism. Waldo Frank's thesis, presented in *Our America* (1919), traces the roots of such a state back to Puritan ethics and the Pioneer practical bent of mind. Puritanism pushed spirituality into the private domain, while the Pioneer, involved in matters of survival and subordination of the wilderness[73], suppressed any signs or manifestations of spirituality in his daily life. In 1928, Locke wrote: "The Negro's predisposition toward the artistic, promising to culminate in a control and mastery of the spiritual and mystic as contrasted with the mechanical and practical aspects of life, makes him a spiritually needed and culturally desirable factor in American life."[74]

Albert C. Barnes in his essay in *The New Negro,* under the title "Negro Art and America", relates the intellectual landscape of the time to the role of African Americans in American culture. In his argument, he makes a diagnosis of what he calls "the arid, practical American art": "Modern life forced art into being a mere adherent upon the practical affairs of life which offer it no substance. The result has been that hopeless confusion of values which mistakes sentimentalism and irrational day-dreaming for art."[75] What American culture and art in general had lost, he continues, African Americans were able to retain in their culture, mainly due to the "harmony with nature". Neither the oppression of slavery, the discrimination following Emancipation, nor "adverse material conditions", were able to obliterate the artistic sensibility – the "art

[71] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, pp. 189-190.

[72] Alain Locke, "The New Negro", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 15.

[73] Waldo Frank, *Our America*, New York, 1919, pp. 63-67.

[74] Alain Locke, "The Negro's Contribution to American Art and Literature", in *Critical Temper*, 1928, p. 448.

[75] Albert C. Barnes, "Negro Art and America", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 20.

and soul" – of the race; on the contrary, they even strengthened it. In fact, in those hard times, the spiritual life was the only area left where African Americans could really feel some control. All the adversities they had gone through became thus "nutriment for [their] soul[s] and it made a new world in which [their] souls [have] been free."[76] Now, if Americans were willing to accept a pluralistic approach with its principle of "the right to be different", and treat all ethnic groups as legitimate citizens, African Americans would have a chance to participate in the general culture. Moreover, under such conditions, African American culture would flourish by building upon the preserved, unique values of the past that would contribute to the general society – values which "our prosaic civilization needs most." Many intellectuals and artists felt that the value most lacking in the materialized American reality was spirituality – the value which African Americans had been able to retain and were now offering this "rare gift", this "emotional quality", this "soul", "for the development of a richer American civilization."[77]

It has been noted that such ideology can, in consequence, shape the image of the African American as 'primitives' who, as Hutchinson interestingly formulates, may become "exotic 'pagans' in the urban jungles of America, fundamentally different in nature and nurture from white Americans."[78] Locke was aware of the danger of the exploitation and abuse of "primitive" images, including folk forms, of the African Americans; consequently, even the blues as an artistic form was completely ignored by him in the editorial work on *The New Negro*, as being allegedly a manifestation of "low culture". He was suspicious of the "primitive and pagan and emotional aspects of Negro life and character,"[79] adherence to "high culture" seeming a much safer domain. However, commercial exploitation of the stereotypes associated with African American "primitivism" – which in fact echoed the blackface minstrel/coon song idioms, especially in the manifestations of the developing mass culture (cabarets and revues) – as well as the fascination with "negro" themes being exploited in contemporary drama (Eugene O'Neill, *Emperor Jones,* 1920), classical music (George Gershwin and his jazz inspired symphonic

[76] Ibidem.

[77] Ibid., p. 25.

[78] Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 286.

[79] Ibidem.

composition *Rhapsody in Blue*, 1925) and film (especially *The Jazz Singer*, 1927) are not to be ignored.

4.2.1. Urbanity: Literary Echoes of the Great Migration

Besides *The New Negro's* prevalent theme of New Negro aesthetics, and the issues of Africanism strictly connected with it which have been discussed above, one more topic seems to stand out, namely the concept of urbanity and matters connected with social aspects associated with the migration from the rural South to the urban centers of the North with all the cultural consequences of this relocation. Looking at the migrational statistics of New York City in the 1920s, Charles S. Johnson comes to the conclusion that the African American population of this metropolis was "composed of one part native, one part West Indian and about three parts Southern."[80] Migration undoubtedly brought about changes in many aspects of life and was not always "the end of the rainbow"[81]. In a symbolic way, the "little dusty road" of Helen Johnson's poem "The Road"[82] had transformed into a crowded, impersonal, often hostile Harlem street. With migration, a new Negro had been born – the city Negro. However, the transformation for some was often traumatic, bringing about a nostalgia for the world left behind. Thus, alongside works expressing a "longing for the past", reports of the hardships connected with migration – especially those associated with the inability to adjust to the new reality – find their numerous manifestations in *The New Negro.*

The second essay of Part II of *The New Negro* ("The New Negro in a New World" which concentrates more on the social and sociological aspects of African American life) is Charles S. Johnson's sociological work under the title "The New Frontage on American Life". In the past, Johnson had worked on research connected with the Chicago branch of the Urban League and in 1921 became the director of Research and Publicity of the National Urban League and the editor of *Opportunity; A Journal of Negro Life.*[83] His social activity and influence on the Har-

[80] Charles. S. Johnson, "The New Frontage on American Life", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 284.

[81] Ibid., p. 279.

[82] Helen Johnson, "The Road", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 300.

[83] Information supplied in the Bibliography section under the title "Who's Who of the Contributors", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., pp. 417-418.

lem Renaissance is widely discussed by David Levering Lewis in *When Harlem was in Vogue* (1979). The essay included in *The New Negro* is interesting in the sense that it traces the migration patterns of African Americans and problems of recent migrants in adjusting to the new environment. In particular, Johnson looks at the Harlem African American community, a vibrant mixture of recent migrants from the South and the West Indies, as well as native New Yorkers.

Rudolph Fisher's short story "The City of Refuge" presents a literary rendition of the migration: the flight of a native of North Carolina – King Salomon Gillis – to Harlem, with all the tensions this involves. Gillis, escaping the law for accidentally killing a white man, arrives in Harlem, "the land of plenty", after leaving his peaceful, country environment, and is thrown into the chaos of a great city. At first, he encounters the New York subway system which for him turns out to be a traumatic experience in itself. As a passenger, he feels like a "lump of dirt" "caught up in the jaws of a steam-shovel" "swept blindly for a time, and at last abruptly dumped", and like "Jonah emerging from the whale."[84] The surrounding is completely new and turns out to be an overwhelming experience for him. Especially pervasive are the sounds – sounds so intense and so alien and different from those he is used to:

> There had been strange and terrible sounds: "New York! Penn Terminal – all change!" "Pohter, hyer, pohter, suh?" Shuffle of a thousand soles, clatter of a thousand heels, innumerable echoes. Cracking rifle-shots— no, snapping turnstiles. "Put a nickel in!" "Harlem? Sure. This side – next train." Distant thunder nearing. The screeching onslaught of the fiery hosts of hell, headlong, breath-taking.[85]

The sound imagery and blues-like construction of the story are for Hutchinson "African American folk tradition transplanted to modern New York City."[86] What Gillis first encounters, and is shocked by, is the diversity of the ethnic mixture of Harlem and the magnitude of African American population: "Then slowly, spreadingly, he grinned at what he saw: Negroes at every turn; up and down Lenox Avenue, up and down One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street; big, lanky Negroes, short, squat Negroes; black ones, brown ones, yellow ones [...] Negroes predominantly,

[84] Rudolph Fisher, "The City of Refuge". *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 57.

[85] Ibidem.

[86] Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 404.

overwhelmingly everywhere [...] This was Negro Harlem."[87] The airshaft in the main hero's tenement lodging epitomizes the multiple dimensions of life in Harlem of recent Southern migrants emphasizing the degrading quality of existence:

> King Salomon Gillis sat meditating in a room half the size of his hen-coop back home, with a single window opening into the airshaft.
> An airshaft: cabbage and chitterlings cooking; liver and onions sizzling, sputtering; three player-pianos out-plunking each other; a man and woman calling each other vile things; a sick, neglected baby wailing; a phonograph broadcasting blues; dishes clacking; a girl crying heart-brokenly; waste noises, waste odors of a score of families, seeking issue through a common channel; pollution from bottom to top – a sewer of sounds and smells.[88]

Duke Ellington would later offer his own musical rendition of the idea in his composition "Harlem Air Shaft".

Rudolf Fisher's other observations, sociological in tone, included in *The New Negro* of the forming African American Harlem community are "Vestiges – Harlem Sketches", four prose miniatures (whose style resembles the *Spoon River Anthology*): "Shepherd! Lead Us", "Majutah", "Learnin'", and "Revival". Here Fisher presents a gallery of Harlem characters: Ezekiel Taylor, an old preacher who sees Harlem as the "city of the devil – outpost of hell;"[89] a young woman Majutah who, according to her grandmother, is a "lost soul", lost in the "great, noisy, heartless, crowded place where you lived under the same roof with a hundred people you never knew; where night was alive and morning dead"[90]; Anna, rejoicing after receiving a scholarship at Teachers College at Columbia University; and finally Pete and Lucky, two friends witnessing a tent revival meeting. All of the characters, in one way or another, strive to adjust and find their place in the new urban environment.

Claude McKay, like Marcus Garvey a native of Jamaica and a newcomer to Harlem, shared many of the sentiments of his fellow West Indians relocated into an urban surrounding. Although in essence McKay

87 Fisher, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

88 Ibid., p. 61.

89 Rudolf Fisher, "Vestiges – Harlem Sketches", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 75.

90 Ibid., p. 80.

is considered to be a militant and a leftist poet,[91] some of his poems echo nostalgia over "old familiar ways". Particularly his poem "The Tropics in New York" included in *The New Negro* (p. 135), previously published in the *Survey Graphic* (p. 648) and in his collection of poems *Harlem Shadows* (1922), expresses this longing:

> Bananas ripe and green, and ginger root,
> Coca in pods and alligator pears,
> And tangerines and mangoes and grape fruit,
> Fit for the highest prize at parish fairs.
>
> Set in the window, bringing memories
> Of fruit-trees laden by low-singing rills,
> And dewy dawns, and mystical blue skies
> In benediction over nun-like hills.
>
> My eyes grew dim, and I could no more gaze;
> A wave of longing through my body swept,
> And, hungry for the old familiar ways,
> I turned aside and bowed my head and wept.[92]

Images of tropical fruit and the lush nature of the West Indian countryside, a rural/pastoral vision of the motherland, are a vivid memory of the "paradise" left behind. The intense images of the apparition do, however, slowly fade and the images blur. The emotions of the "I" speaker are very intense, even physical, resembling a hunger which cannot be appeased. He does not want to manifest his feelings, nor does he want others to see his pain. He therefore "turns aside" and with a "bowed [...] head" weeps – though showing one's feelings is inappropriate. In another poem titled "Subway Wind", which was not included in The New Negro but published in the Survey Graphic (p. 649) as well as in the collection *Harlem Shadows*, McKay contrasts the beauty, calmness, and tranquility of the tropics with the ugliness and noise ("deafening roar") of a big city. Again the image of the train/subway as the embodiment of the strength and energy as well as of the negative forces of the urban environment is applied:

[91] McKay radically changed his views towards the end of his life: from the militant to accomodationist (very close to the ideology presented by B.T. Washington whom he strongly rejected during his studies at the Tuskeegee Institute). After years of voicing cultural separatism of African Americans he came to the conclusion that as a minority they would have to adjust to the dominant white culture.

[92] Claude McKay, "The Tropics in New York", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., pp. 135-136.

"Subway Wind"

Far down, down through the city's great, gaunt gut,
The grey train rushing bears the weary wind;
In the packed cars the fans the crowd's breath cut,
Leaving the sick and heavy air behind.
And pale-cheeked children seek the upper door
To give their summer jackets to the breeze;
Their laugh is swallowed in the deafening roar
Of captive wind that moans for fields and seas;
Seas cooling warm where native schooners drift
Through sleepy waters, while gulls wheel and sweep,
Waiting for windy waves the keels to lift
Lightly among the islands of the deep;
Islands of lofty palm trees blooming white
That lend their perfume to the tropic sea,
Where fields lie idle in the dew drenched night,
And the Trades float above them fresh and free.[93]

African American relocation from the rural South and the West Indies to the urban centers of the North is also the theme of Paul U. Kellogg's essay, "The Negro Pioneers", included in *The New Negro*. The author makes a sweeping comparison of American Pioneers to African Americans who "are getting into the stride with that of the old. By way of the typical American experience, they become for the first time a part of the living tradition."[94] By moving North they are becoming a part of the great American experience – the tradition of immigration and "pioneering" to the "city wilderness" – and through it they are being transformed into real Americans. The transition from the "old world" of the South to the "new world" of the North has features of "a baptism of the American spirit that slavery cheated him out of, a maturing experience that Reconstruction delayed."[95] Therefore, migration was a racial "rebirth" of sorts – and at the same time an experience in Americanization. Kellogg shares the opinion of other intellectuals (e.g. Du Bois) that the culture of Southern African Americans is truly American in spirit and waiting to be included in the mainstream culture.

The Harlem presented in *The New Negro* is not only a district but also the "cultural capital" of the "New Negro" – and in fact very

[93] Claude McKay, "Subway Wind", *Survey Graphic,* ed. cit., p. 649.

[94] Paul U. Kellogg, "The Negro Pioneers", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 273.

[95] Ibid., p. 277.

much American – culture: it "talks American, reads American, thinks American".[96] Harlem's African American community does not differ from any other American community ("the same pattern, only a different shade" [97]) and may even serve as a model. Both James Weldon Johnson in his essay "Harlem: The Cultural Capital" and Melville J. Herskovits in "The Negro's Americanism" present similar opinions. Herskovits's title points to his main thesis of the Americanism of Harlemites who "have absorbed the culture of America".[98] The examples of sex relations used by Herskovits support his argument of "complete acceptance of the general pattern"[99], minus any ancestral African elements, i.e. "complete acculturation"[100]: "Of the African culture, not a trace. Even the spirituals are an expression of the emotion of the Negro playing through the typical religious patterns of white America."[101] These opinions place him in opposition to the main concepts presented by Locke, Du Bois and other intellectuals supporting the ideals of the New Negro. Herskovits himself altered his initial African retentions concept to become a firm believer in the significant African influence on African American culture.[102]

4.2.2. Visual Arts: Establishing a New Tradition

In a letter to Langston Hughes (ca. 1925), Aaron Douglas writes:

> ...Our problem is to conceive, develop, establish an art era. Not white art painting black ... let's bare our arms and plunge them deep through laughter, through pain, through sorrow, through hope, through disappointment, into the very depths of the souls of our people and drag forth material crude, rough, neglected. Then let's sing it, dance it, write it,

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96 James Weldon Johnson, "Harlem: The Cultural Capital", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 309.

97 Melville J. Herskovits, "The Negro's Americanism", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 360.

98 Ibid., p. 359.

99 Ibid., p. 355.

100 Ibidem.

101 Ibid., p. 359.

102 Herskovits's change of attitude was first expressed in his article "The Negro in the New World", published in *American Anthropologist*, XXXII, 1, 1930, which began his search for African retention in African American culture. His most significant work, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, (New York, 1941) refuted the notion that the Negro in America had no distinctive cultural heritage.

> paint it. Let's do the impossible. Let's create something transcendentally material, mystically objective. Earthy. Spiritually earthy. Dynamic.[103]

The New Negro demonstrated the growing importance of the visual arts in African American culture, which up to that moment had lacked any real distinction. In this work, Alain Locke saw the need to establish an African American tradition in visual arts not only through the imagery here presented but also through a theoretical background. In both cases Africanism as a concept was at the core of his thinking. The Africanism of *The New Negro* does not solely rely on "Ethiopian" or "Egyptian" fantasies dominant in previous manifestations of African American visual art, such as the previously mentioned bronze sculpture of Meta Warrick Fuller *The Awakening of Ethiopia* (see Annex, item 1) which presents a standing woman in an Egyptian queen's headdress, wrapped in mummy bonds from the hips down to symbolically represent the awakening of African Americans to world culture after centuries of slumber. Now, the imagery would be based more on an ethnographic approach and representing particular West African cultural traditions. Photographic illustrations depicting West African sculptures and masks from the Barnes Foundation Collection, Tervuren Museum, Berlin Ethnological Museum and Frankfurt Museum, are present throughout the volume but mainly in the section "The Negro Digs up his Past". They particularly illustrate Locke's article "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts". These are mainly photographs which previously appeared in *The Survey Graphic* but there are a number of new images, for example a photograph of an impressive Congo portrait statue (page 263) or the Benin bronze sculpture (page 265) depicting a Negroid head in a decorative headgear with neck and collar beads. For Hutchinson, this also demonstrates a departure from "the sort of exotic primitivism that dominated the Parisian scene and the Stieglitz circle in New York".[104]

The African influence on the artistic creativity of African Americans was not to be merely a superficial ornament similar to placing an image of an African mask in a traditional still-life, but rather an in-depth stimulus that would shape the aesthetic qualities of future works of art. It is possible "that the sensitive artistic mind of the American Negro, stimulated by a cultural pride and interest, will receive from African

[103] Amy H. Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance*, University of Mississippi, 1995, pp. 78-9.

[104] Hutchinson, op cit., p. 399.

art a profound and galvanizing influence."[105] Locke propounded no less than an African American school of art with its own aesthetics: "We ought and must have a school of Negro art, a local and a racially representative tradition."[106] If the African American artist follows Locke's guidelines he/she will have the power to create an art that could add a new dimension to Black America's cultural identity and in effect become an "artist of American life".[107] The African American artist, however, has to be aware of the danger of "Americanization": "the mountain in the way of any true Negro art in America – this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible."[108] The front cover of the *Crisis* (vol. 12, no. 4) dated August 1916, presenting a photograph of a small black child sitting in front of a mirror wrapped in American flag, proves how difficult, or in many cases even impossible it was and is, for African American artists to put into action the theoretical guidelines drafted by Locke. The cover, symbolically, also demonstrates the extent to which African American culture was engulfed in the dominant mainstream American culture manifested, in this case, by its prime national symbol – the American flag.

Therefore, Black expression in art should combine a modernist aesthetic (distant from the post-Victorian qualities of American art of the day) with African ancestral imagery, which for inspiration relies on the ancestral arts of Africa.

In the visual arts, as has been mentioned earlier, African American had completely no tradition to follow. The slave era had shattered the remnants of sculpture and other forms of visual expression brought from the African continent. The activity of Locke and the publication of *The New Negro*, along with the earlier *Survey Graphic*, significantly brought the African American artist closer to the re-discovery of African art tradition, which, as it turned out, proved to have a strong and lasting inspiration during the Harlem Renaissance and the years to follow.

The re-discovery was also possible thanks to the growing general interest in "tribal" art in Europe, and then eventually in the United States. Art critics were starting to notice that so-called "primitive" art had, as

[105] Alain Locke, "The Legacy of Ancestral Arts", *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. 256.

[106] Ibid., p. 266.

[107] Ibid., p. 258.

[108] Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", *The Nation*, 122, no. 3181, June 28, 1926, p. 663.

Locke noted above, a significant impact on the development of modern art at the beginning of the twentieth century. The discovery of "primitive" art dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century when art historians and anthropologists focused on "decorative" elements and patterns, which resulted in instituting ethnographic collections (at the British Museum as early as 1753, then in St. Petersburg – 1836, Paris – 1855, Berlin – 1873, and Warsaw – 1875).[109] Needless to say, all these artifacts had been plundered by the "civilized societies" from the so-called "primitive societies". These "savage" artifacts completely gainsaid the prevalent canon of the academia founded on "classicism inherited from the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome"[110] and appealed strongly to a generation looking to the future. As Locke writes in "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts":

> [The] artistic discovery of African art came at a time when there was a marked decadence and sterility in [...] European plastic expression, due to generations of the inbreeding of style and idiom. Out of the exhaustion of imitating Greek classicism and the desperate exploitation in graphic art of all the technical possibilities of color by the Impressionists and Post Impressionists, the problem of form and decorative design became emphasized in one of those reactions which in art occur so repeatedly. [111]

These "primitive" works "possessed precisely what European art seemed to have lost in the long pursuit – intense expressiveness, clarity of structure and a forthright simplicity of technique."[112] Avant-garde artists Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, to name the most prominent, collected "tribal" art and were inspired by the "barbarian" which was referred to as *l'art nègre, Negerkunst*, or "*black art*". Speculations were made as to whether one or another of Picasso's masks or fetishes had found their way onto his canvases, in particular onto *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* in which one of the figures appears to be wearing an African mask. In spite of the opinion of Daniel Henry Kahnwiller, who dismissed any "Negro influence" on the rise of cubism, and of Pierre Daix, who

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[109] Dennis Duerden, "The "Discovery" of the African Mask", *Research in African Literatures*, 31.4, 2000, p. 32.

[110] Douglas Newton in the introduction to Berenice Geoffrey-Schneiter, *Tribal Arts*, New York, 2000, pp. 8, 23.

[111] Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts", *The New Negro*, ed. cit. pp. 258-9.

[112] Ernst Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, London, 1995, p. 563.

claimed that "there is no 'Negro' in the *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*"[113], the influence of African tribal art on this painting and others seems self-evident.

In the catalogue to the exhibition *African Negro Art*, James Johnson Sweeney writes:

> In the end, it is not the tribal characteristics of Negro art nor its strangeness that are interesting. It is its plastic qualities. Picturesque or exotic features as well as historical and ethnographic considerations have a tendency to blind us to its true worth [...] It is the vitality of forms of Negro art that should speak to us, the simplification without impoverishment, the unnerving emphasis on the essential, the consistent, three-dimensional organization of structural planes [...] the uncompromising truth to the material with a seemingly intuitive adaptation of it, and the tension achieved between the idea or emotion to be expressed through representation and the abstract principle of sculpture.[114]

All these features, and especially the "abstract" quality of "tribal" art, have significantly induced a revolutionary turn in the development of visual arts, first in Europe and then eventually on the other side of the Atlantic. The first large-scale event, which later came to be viewed as a turning point in American visual arts, was the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art, better known as the Armory Show at the Seventh Regiment Armory at Park Avenue at 67th Street on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. It was organized by the American Association of Painters who shared the opinion that there were too few opportunities to view and exhibit the works of contemporary artists. As a result, 1300 works were displayed, more than a third European, in order to present to the American public – to artists themselves European experimental tendencies were not unknown – what was innovative in the sphere of modernistic art. The exhibition turned out to be a great success with large sales of works (Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin) and approximately 275,000

[113] Both are quoted in Yve-Alain Bois *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, Mass., 1990, p. 69. For a more in-depth discussion of the issue consult: Christopher Green, *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, Cambridge, 2001; Stephanie Peeples Johnson, "Reconstructing the Influence of African Art on Cubism" in *Rutgers Art Review*, 1994, vol. 14, pp. 29-42; William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, distributed by New York Graphic Society Books, Boston.

[114] James Johnson Sweeney, catalogue to the 1935 Museum Of Modern Art (New York) exhibition *African Negro Art*, 1935, p. 11.

viewers – many of them drawn by the sensation it stirred.[115] Even before the exhibition opened, journalists created a ferment foretelling the invasion of modern art to America, which would eventually lead to a major intellectual confrontation between Europe and America. "[...] [I]t should be borne in mind that this movement is surely a part of the general movement, discernible all over the world, to disrupt and degrade, if not to destroy, not only art, but literature and society, too."[116]

Aaron Douglas, the most acclaimed Afro-American artist of the time, "[...] wanted through his art to interpret what he understood to be the spiritual identity of the Negro people. It was a kind of self that united all that the black man was, in Africa and in the New World."[117] Like his colleagues in Europe, Aaron Douglas began to experiment with African motifs, basing his work on the graphic and sculptural expression of the black continent. He realized that only by following Locke's aesthetic guidelines could he reach artistic integrity as an African American artist. Although his artistic career reached its height in the years when the Harlem Renaissance was fading, it was during the 1920s that he made his first artistic steps in the area of book illustrations (*The New Negro, God's Trombones, Black Magic*) and drawings for magazines: *Opportunity, The Crisis, Fire!!!* (see Annex, item 4). In most cases, Douglas's illustrations and drawings were interpretations of Africanism in its pure form, frequently utilizing "Ethiopian" or "Egyptian" fantasies (see Annex, item 3). For example, the May, 1926 issue of *The Crisis* features Douglas's poster of the Krigwa Players Little Negro Theater of Harlem – an initiative by Du Bois to establish "a real Negro theatre" whose main aim was to write and produce original plays to be performed for African American audiences[118] – is packed with African imagery (see Annex, item 2). The poster is a black and white illustration which presents a sitting figure in a cross-legged position, face turned in profile. The African hair style and exaggerated thick lips leave no doubt as to the ethnic origin of the figure. The large hoop earring, stylized plants and flowers, the African mask, the pyramids and the sphinx, the wavy patterns – all demonstrate African visual inspiration. Besides the African imagery,

[115] For more information on the Armory Show, consult: Milton Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, Greenwich, 1963, Martin Green, *New York 1913: The Armory Show and the Peterson Strike Pageant*, New York, 1988.

[116] "Cubists of All Sorts", *The New York Time*s, March, 16, 1913, p. C6.

[117] Ibid., pp. 169-171.

[118] Huggins, op. cit., pp. 292-3.

the illustration also echoes Art Deco and Art Nouveau influences, especially in design motifs. We may state that it was an attempt to fuse modernist aesthetics with African ancestral iconography.

4.2.3. Harlem Renaissance Poetry: Multiple Dimensions

As with visual artists, the discovery of rich black folklore and African heritage was essential for the Harlem Renaissance poet as well. For him, both of these roots contained a set of values and norms, an inspiration giving a sense of continuity to black culture. Both sources provided a living spring for many; among others, for Langston Hughes. Let us quote his famous poem which has been referred to above:

"The Negro Speaks 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.[119]

One is tempted to ask what are the characteristics of the "soul" in the poem and what is the significance of the term to the race? In 1966, Hughes himself described the meaning of the "soul" in his poem, and more broadly, the meaning of the concept to African Americans :

> *Soul* is a synthesis of the essence of Negro folk art redistilled [...] particularly the old music and its flavor, the ancient basic beat out of Africa, the folk rhymes and Ashanti stories – expressed in contemporary ways so definitely and emotionally colored with the old, that it gives a distinctly Negro flavor to today's music, painting or writing – or even to

[119] Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, New York, 1994, p. 23.

> merely personal attitudes and daily conversations. *Soul* is the contemporary Harlem's *nègritude*, revealing to the Negro people and to the world the beauty within themselves.[120]

African heritage, folk materials, Uncle Remus stories, and spirituals with their language and imagery contained the essential qualities of African American sensibility, which applies especially to the "spiritual" elements, the "soul" – and were promoted by intellectuals of the times as convincing examples of the depth of a long-standing experience and artistic sensitivity. According to their message, African Americans had participated actively in the remotest history of our civilization and gained experience which had the power to complement significantly mainstream American culture. The New Negro ideals not only encouraged and inspired the African American creative artist but also, as never before, served to focus the attention of America and the world upon the Negro problem. Step by step, African Americans were gaining an ethnic identity they had never before experienced on the American continent.

During a relatively short period of time (from the end of the First World War to the year of the onset of the Great Depression), twenty-six novels, ten volumes of poetry and innumerable essays were written and published; five Broadway plays were staged; two or three ballets and concerti performed and a large output on canvas and sculptures displayed. In an artistic sense, as Margaret Perry noticed, "the black world came of age".[121]

In examining the poetry of this period one observes – as did Eugenia Collier in an article "I Do Not Marvel Countee Cullen" – poems which express the new spirit of the Harlem Renaissance; poems which demonstrate an interest in Africa; find inspiration in the blues, spirituals and ballads; use black speech idioms without resorting to dialect, and portray black life realistically.[122]

One poet whose art expresses fully all the above features is the previously mentioned Langston Hughes. When Hughes, (born on February 1, 1902 in Joplin, Missouri), published his first collection of poems in 1926 (*The Weary Blues*), the New Negro movement was in full swing.

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[120] Quoted in Arnold Rampersad, ed., *The Life of Langston Hughes, Vol 1: 1902-1941. I Too, Sing America*, New York, 1986, p. 403.

[121] Perry, op. cit., p. xvi.

[122] Eugenia Collier, "I Do Not Marvel Countee Cullen", *CLA Journal*, 11, no. 1 (Sept. 1967), pp.73-87.

Even when still in high school the signs of a poetic gift were noticed in the young Langston which got him elected class poet.[123] In 1925 Hughes received his first broader acclaim by winning first prize for his poetry in the annual literary contest sponsored by the magazine *Opportunity*. Through his poems he became the poet of Harlem: the poet of the artistic circles as well as the poet of common people. "He had no equal in the accuracy with which he recorded in poetry the spontaneities of language, thought, and feeling and the everyday sights and sounds of the black metropolis."[124] Huggins sees in him features of a folk artist [125], for he exploited extensively materials which he encountered on the streets of the district. The problems and language of ordinary people were reformulated into an artistic dimension. The blues, as the title of the collection of poems (*The Weary Blues*, 1926) suggests, became a recurring theme. Blues patterns and refrains and falsetto breaks are among the blues characteristics of Hughes' poems. "Po' Boy Blues" is an excellent example:

When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
Since I come up North de
Whole damn world's turned cold,

I was a good boy
Never done no wrong.
Yes, I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong,
But this world is weary
An' de road is hard an' long.

I fell in love with
A gal I thought was kind.
Fell in love with
A gal I thought was kind.
She made me lose ma money
An' almost lose my mind.[126]

[123] J.W. Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, ed. cit., p. 232.

[124] Anderson, op. cit., p. 204.

[125] Nathan Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, New York, 1971, p. 227.

[126] Langston Hughes, "Po' Boy Blues", in J.W. Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, ed. cit., p. 237.

The idioms and frequent slang expressions which reverberate in this poem could well be heard on the streets of Harlem but the fact that they are included in the poem elevates them into a higher, more refined artistic dimension.

Another poet of the Harlem Renaissance Countee Cullen, born in New York in 1903, was not so strongly drawn to the details of black experience as Hughes was. He became more of an aesthete, "a fine and sensitive lyric poet, belonging to the classic line [...] All of his work is laid within the lines of long-approved English patterns."[127] On December 8, 1923, *The Age* reported that "Cullen says he is interested in poetry for poet's sake, and not for propaganda purposes", but further on quoted his words that "In spite of myself however, I find that I am actuated by a strong sense of racial consciousness [...] although I struggle against it, it colors my writing." Although he revolts against the racial limitations, "the best of his poetry is motivated by race".[128] His poem "Heritage" which was previously cited, giving a poetical answer to the essential question: "What is Africa to me?", articulates the quintessence of the search for race consciousness.

One more poet of the Harlem Renaissance, whose poetry possesses features of standard form of literary English style, is Arna Bontemps. Born in Louisiana in 1902, he arrived in Harlem in 1924. In *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, James Weldon Johnson characterized his poetry: "He is calm and contemplative, and writes in a quiet, even tone. His fire does not flash or flame but burns with a steady glow. His work shows skill and constant care; and while it never rises to heights of passion and ecstasy, neither does it ever fall to bathos or slipshod workmanship."[129]

On the other hand, Claude McKay (born on Jamaica), was the group's most powerful and militant voice. "He was preeminently the poet of rebellion. More effectively than any other poet of the period he voiced the feelings and reactions the Negro in America was then experiencing."[130] In the best known of his sonnets "If We Must Die", McKay shouts with anger:

> If we must die – let it not be like hogs
> Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
> While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,

[127] J.W. Johnson, *The Book of American Poetry*, ed. cit. , pp. 219-20.

[128] Ibid., p. 220.

[129] Ibid., p. 262.

[130] Ibid., p. 166.

Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die – oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
Oh, 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?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack;
Pressed to the wall, dying; but fighting back![131]

In "Harlem Shadows", McKay recalls "The sacred glory of my fallen race," a race which is represented here by " [...] girls who pass / To bend and barter at desire's call."[132]

The black intellectuals of the 1920s promoted not only prose and poetry but strove to encourage the development of an authentic black drama, relevant to the aesthetic and ideological concepts of the New Negro. W.E.B. Du Bois, who strongly promoted the ethnic theatre in the district through the agency of *The Crisis*, described the four fundamental principles which the new theatre should follow:

> "Negro theater", must be: I. About us . That is they must have plots which reveal Negro life as it is. II. By us. That is, they must be written by Negro authors who understand from birth and continual association just what it means to be Negro today. III. For us. That is, the theater must cater to Negro audience and be supported and sustained by their entertainment and approval. IV. Near us. The theater must be in a Negro neighborhood near the mass of ordinary Negro people.[original emphases – Z.G.] [133]

However, although the pressure and motivation was strong, the productions in their majority were a mere continuation and exploitation of the "corrupt tradition of the blackface minstrel"[134] performances.

Summing up, we may say that the two publications discussed extensively above – the Harlem issue of *The Survey Graphic* and *The New*

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[131] Claude McKay, "If We Must Die", in J.W. Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, ed. cit., p. 168.

[132] Claude McKay, "Harlem Shadows" in J. W. Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, p. 170.

[133] *The Crisis*, XXXII, July 1926, p. 134.

[134] Huggins, op. cit., p. 156.

Negro – turned out to be historic in the cultural achievements of African Americans as they launched the Harlem Renaissance and made Americans aware of the Negro artist and his work.[135] They gathered together the young active black artists whose creed was similar to what Langston Hughes declared in *The Nation* (June 1926) in an article "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain":

> We young Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either [...] We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.[136]

Both *The Survey Graphic* and *The New Negro* defined the concept of the New Negro and together formulated an artistic manifesto for the Harlem Renaissance. Some critics rank *The New Negro* among the most important books on the Negro ever published (J.W. Johnson). Alain Locke, the editor, ended the foreword to *The New Negro* with these powerful words:

> Negro life is not only establishing new contacts and founding new centers, it is finding a new soul. There is a fresh spiritual and cultural focusing. We have, as the heralding sign, an unusual outburst of creative expression. There is renewed race spirit that consciously and proudly sets itself apart. Justifiably then, we speak of the offerings of this book embodying these ripening forces as culled from the spirit of the Negro Renaissance.[137]

The activity of Alain Locke, who spoke of himself as "midwife to a generation of younger Negro poets, writers and artists", was essential to the developing movement. According to Eugene Holmes in "The Legacy of Alain Locke", this active black intellectual, many years prior to the New Negro, encouraged artists and musicians to search for their African roots – a topic which interested him immensely. Although he did not make any significant research concerning Afro-American history and culture, he was deeply convinced of its inherent ability to grow

[135] Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem*, New York, 1982, p. 197.

[136] Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", ed. cit., p. 662.

[137] Alain Locke, *The New Negro*, ed. cit., p. xxvii.

and develop. Locke insisted that the Negro should be aware of his place within American reality and should strive to become a legitimate member of that society. He realized, however, that historical circumstances did not favor the Negro: "The peculiar conditions of American slavery so scrambled Africans from the diverse regions and culture of our entire continent that [...] neither a minority language nor an ancestral tradition remains."[138] In spite of the fact that the Negro had never established separate cultural values but shared the language and traditions of the majority culture[139] – where Negro values were always deeply set in the American reality – the time had come to reach beyond centuries old limitations. The recognition of the Negro as an "artist class" would also result in the breaking of racial barriers.

James Weldon Johnson shared Locke's views on this matter, firmly believing that an outburst of literary and artistic expression was a significant step toward a more general acceptance of Negroes by American society. Booker T. Washington's proposal of economic power was to be replaced – or at least supplemented – by artistic talent. In his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, Johnson anticipated Locke's preface to *The New Negro*:

> The status of the Negro in the United States is more a question of national mental attitude toward the race than of actual conditions. And nothing will do more to change that mental attitude and raise his status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through the production of literature and art.[140]

Johnson's writings in the 1920's were dominated by the belief that the New Negro as a "creator" can break the racism of American society, convincing it of its artistic talents. "I am coming to believe", Johnson wrote to Carl Van Vechten, "that nothing can go farther to destroy race prejudice than the recognition of the Negro as a creator and contributor to American civilization."[141] The formula supplied by Johnson can be viewed today as purely unreal: "The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that

[138] *Harlem USA*, ed. cit., p. 48.

[139] Ibidem..

[140] J.W. Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, ed. cit., p. 9.

[141] J.W. Johnson to Van Vechten, envelope dated March 6, 1927. Johnson Collection, quoted in Osofsky, op. cit., p. 182.

people produces great literature and art."[142] Racial progress through the arts was another noble objective which ultimately did not materialize, but at least the New Negro convinced himself that his (or hers) was a rich culture and could contribute by "[...] generating unexpected creative ferment in the literary and artistic culture of America."[143]

This chapter has discussed the artistic developments of Harlem as a cultural center in the 1920s and only partly investigated the external conditions in which it flowered. Besides the stimulation of African American heritage on Harlem's artistic output (flowing from both the American as well African experience), one should not neglect the fact that the full panorama would be incomplete without examining the American cultural and commercial context in which black culture was engulfed. Evaluation of the Harlem Renaissance is possible only after an in-depth study of the American reality of the jazz era, as only through this perspective may a relatively objective view of the movement be obtained. Therefore, Gunnar Myrdal's opinion from *The American Dilemma* might well serve as a starting point for the next chapter:

> [...] there has developed recently a glorification of things African, especially in music and art, [...] But this is a reaction to discrimination from white people, on the one hand, and a result of encouragement from white people, on the other. Thus, even the positive movement away from American culture has its source in that culture [...] American Negro culture is not something independent of general American culture. It is a distorted development, or a pathological condition, of the general American culture.[144]

[142] J.W. Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, ed. cit p. 9.

[143] *Harlem USA*, ed. cit., p. 47.

[144] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, New York, 1962, p. 928.

5. WITHIN THE AMERICAN CULTURE AND ECONOMY

5.1. Commercial Dimensions of the Harlem Renaissance

The Pragmatic ideas which lay at the foundation of the concept of the New Negro, as well as the whole of the artistic movement of the Harlem Renaissance, developed in the historical context of modernization and urbanization. It was a moment in the evolution of American civilization when the first signs of the emerging mass society were becoming noticeable. The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a steady increase of commercialism, a consequence of the economic growth which nearly tripled while the average salary almost doubled, creating a market for products and services. The booming American economy, strengthened by involvement in the First World War and the mass production closely connected with it, the pressures of the market economy, and the first manifestations of mass consumption – all played a vital role in creating the environment in which the Harlem Renaissance was born and flourished.

Those "mass society" critics who have studied the novel trends that appeared in the American reality, mark the decline of the "organic community", the rise of mass culture, and the social atomization of "mass man" as central themes. Tony Bennett argues that these themes have manifested themselves in a variety of pessimistic reactions to the processes of industrialization and urbanization and resulted in the "development of political democracy, and the emergence of contemporary forms of 'mass communication'".[1] For Warren I. Susman, the basic conflict of the time was between two distinct cultural entities – "an older culture, often loosely labeled Puritan-republican, producer-capitalist

[1] Tony Bennett, "Theories of the Media, Theories of Society" in *Culture, Society, and the Media,* Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woollacott, eds., London, 1988, pp. 31-32.

culture, and a newly emerging culture of abundance"[2], which, along with economic growth and technological advancement, created a favorable background for the expansion or relocation of goods, services, ideas, and people. This inevitably led to a "communications revolution", which in consequence molded the previously dominant oral forms of communication into the new domain of print – in particular, newspapers, magazines and journals – and, with time, also into the technologically novel realms of phonograph records, radio and film.

5.1.1. The Press, Advertising and the American Dream

The African American newspapers, magazines, and journals published by "uplift" organizations played a significant role in popularizing the artistic concepts of the New Negro. According to Hutchinson, "the Harlem Renaissance followed not only (as is often stressed) the black migration and the First World War but also [responded to] a whole new matrix of magazines centered in New York City." Here, the new African American press "found and created the audience."[3] Journals such as *The Crisis, Opportunity, Messenger, Negro World* (to name but a few) "were absolutely integral to the dissemination and institutionalization of New Negro art."[4] Also the "white press" – mainly newspapers such as *The Inter-State Tattler, The New York News, The Amsterdam News,* and *The New York Age* – all stimulated the artistic endeavors of the Harlem Renaissance. Just like the African American journals, those dailies and weeklies – through their editorials, gossip columns, ads for books, poems, society reviews, and city briefs – often commented on Harlem's cultural elite and raised in their readers interest in the movement.

The turn-of-the-century witnessed the rise of a consumer culture, when, aside from "the sensationalism of the modern tabloid, the frenzy of the best-seller system of publishing, the proliferation of commercial images and slogans, the rise of mass entertainment" inexpensive magazines began to appear.[5] In comparison to the limited circulation of the

[2] Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, New York, 1984, p. xx.

[3] Hutchinson, ed. cit., p., 126.

[4] Terrell Scott Herring, " The Negro Artist and the Racial Manor: Infants of the Spring and the Conundrum of Publicity ", *African American Review*, Winter 2001, v. 35, p. 582.

[5] Christopher P. Wilson, "The Rhetoric of Consumption. Mass Market Magazines and the Demise of the Gentle Reader, 1880 – 1920.", in Richard W. Fox and T.J.Jackson

pre-mass magazines based on subscription by well-to-do families (and thus reflecting their expectations), the new, cheap mass magazine influenced a much greater number of readers by providing editorials and articles of common interest. The mass-magazine was directed to the mass audience. D.L. Lewis informs us that even such magazines as, for example *The Crisis*, with its "[...] Harvard-accented editorials", were not only read by the "Talented Tenth" but "[...] found their way into kerosene-lit, sharecroppers' cabins and cramped factory worker's tenements"[6], where they were read and often placed next to the Bible as an important reference and guide.

Among the above mentioned journals, undoubtedly the monthly magazine *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* played the most significant role. The first issue appeared in November, 1910 with a circulation of 1,000 and was available in all of the United States, its possessions and many foreign countries, including several African nations. In the next few years, it became the strongest African American journal of its time, thanks to news cited in the column "Along the Color Line", its editorials, and the drawings and photographs of African Americans. In retrospect, its editor Du Bois felt that the drawings and photographs presented in *The Crisis* were as important in generating the journal's popularity as his editorials and the news. He remembers that:

> Pictures of the colored people were an innovation, and at that time it was the rule of most white papers never to publish a picture of a colored person except as a criminal and the colored papers published mostly pictures of celebrities who sometimes paid for the honor. In general, the Negro race was just a little afraid to see itself in plain ink.[7]

Du Bois not only edited the journal but also wrote several articles and editorials for every issue. As he recalled in the autobiographical *Dusk Of Dawn*, the journal was to be a highbrow and intellectually focused general-interest magazine circulating among the middle and upper class, respectable, well-mannered African American professionals. Consequently, *The Crisis*, "the organ of propaganda" of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), became the tribune for racial progress and "was able to organize one of the most

Lears, editors of *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880 – 1980*, New York, 1983, p. 42.

6 David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem was in Vogue*, New York, 1982, p. 7.

7 W.E.B. Du Bois, "Editing *The Crisis*", *Black Titan,* Boston, 1970, p. 53.

effective assaults of liberalism upon prejudice and reaction that the modern world has seen."[8] Years later, Du Bois enumerated the accomplishments of both the NAACP, and, in particular, *The Crisis*:

> [...] through the *Crisis* [...] We began to organize [African Americans'] political power and make it influential and we started a campaign against lynching and mob law which was the most effective ever organized and eventually brought the end of the evil in sight. Especially we gained a series of court victories before the highest courts of the land which perhaps never have been equaled; beginning with the overthrow of the vicious "Grandfather Clauses" in 1916 and the breaking of the backbone of residential segregation in 1917.[9]

Besides the political focus, with time the journal began to play an important role in propagating African American arts, becoming a significant forum devoted to the discussion of literature and art criticism topics. Once again, Du Bois recalls his role and the seminal function of *The Crisis* in sponsoring the African American arts:

> More especially I tried to encourage other Negro writers through the columns of the *Crisis*. By 1920, we could point out that most of the young writers among American Negroes had made first publication in the columns of the *Crisis*. In the next few years we published work from Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Anne Spencer, Abram Harris and Jessie Faucet. In 1924, through the generosity of Amy Springer, wife of Joel, we were enabled to offer a series of prizes for young Negro writers [...] For several years this competition went on until it grew into what has been called the renaissance of Negro literature, late in the twenties.[10]

The interest in, and the sponsorship of, young African American writers transformed them overnight into American mainstream-style celebrities. As David Levering Lewis observes, "the skies over Harlem simmered with stars, candidates for Charles Johnson's ambitious program to promote racial advancement through artistic creativity."[11]

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8 W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, New York, 1940 in *Du Bois W.E.B., Writings*, Literary Classics of the United States, New York, 1986, p. 720.

9 Ibid., p. 721.

10 Ibid., p. 751.

11 Lewis, op. cit., p. 50.

Along with political propaganda and sponsorship of the arts, in order to survive on the competitive market, *The Crisis* was also interested in profits. In addition to the money obtained from sales and subscription, advertising seemed to be the key to economic survival.

Starting in the 1910s, as the Great Migration of African Americans from the South began to reach the northern urban centers, many money-oriented entrepreneurs were starting to see the economic potential of the profits to come from the African American consumer. Money could be made on the African American market, which until then had been considerably neglected.[12] It soon became obvious that what was needed to sell products and make profits was advertising. Roland Marchant in his *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*, rightly characterizes advertisers as "high priests" of the developing mass market.[13]

Du Bois realized the potential of advertising and therefore strove to obtain needed funds from companies advertising their products on the pages of *The Crisis*. It was obvious that the influx of advertising revenues had significant economic importance for the existence of the journal. This is how Du Bois recalls his advertising policy:

> We got some adverting [...] from Negro businesses; some advertisers were refused – we did not like the wares they offered or suspected fraud. The "Big" advertisers remained aloof; some looked us over, but nearly all fell back on the rule not to patronize "propaganda" periodicals. Besides, they did not believe the Negro market worth entering. [14]

Paraphrasing Du Bois's words we may restate that the larger "white" businesses did not regard the African American market as a profitable venture. Consequently, the majority of advertisements were for the products and services of newly established and constantly growing African American-based enterprises. A whole spectrum of advertisements appeared: ads for housing, business opportunities, social and fraternal organizations, restaurants, hotels, books dealing with African American issues, educational institutions, personal services and various commodities (clothes, toys, records, toilet products, etc.). An overview of

[12] Juliet E.K. Walker, *History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship,* New York, 1998, p. 213.

[13] Roland Marchant, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940,* Berkeley, 1985, p. xvi.

[14] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Editing *The Crisis*", op cit., p. 271.

the advertising presented in *The Crisis* reveals a considerable number of those (often full page ads) devoted to the products of Madam C.J. Walker Mfg. Company Inc..

Madam C.J. Walker was one the greatest success stories of the time. Taking over her mother's toilet products business which was based on allegedly secret formulas making the texture of hair of African Americans look like that of whites and making their black skin lighter – A'Leila (now known as Madame Walker) developed the enterprise to become one of the richest persons in Harlem. As she became a symbol of "racial uplift", she helped many African Americans by employing them in her factories, and donated large sums of money to charity. Advertisements of her products were omnipresent in the pages of *The Crisis* (see examples of advertisements of Mrs. C. J. Walker's products published on the pages of *The Crisis* – Annex, items 12 and 13).

Let us consider a few examples. The December 1930 issue of *The Crisis* presents an ad for "Mrs. C. J. Walker's Tan-off" which "will bleach" face, hands, neck and "make them a clear, light part of your body you'll be proud to show". The June 1925 issue brings a full-page advertisement with the heading "Glorifying Our Womanhood" which reads: "No greater force is working to glorify the womanhood of our Race than *Madame C. J. Walker's* Wonderful Hair and Skin Preparations." [original emphasis – Z.G.] [15] In the 1926 issues of *The Crisis* appeared a series of full-page ads (with photographs) of Madame C. J. Walker Mfg. Company Inc.. The advertisements promoted a travel contest sponsored by the company: "30,000 miles of it, into fifty cities in fifteen different countries. The beauty of Japan, the charm of China, the babble of India, the mystery of Egypt, the languorous moodiness of Italy, and all in kaleidoscopic sequence – free, absolutely, to the four winners in Madame C. J. Walker's Trip Around the World Contest." Winners were announced in the November 1926 issue of *The Crisis*.[16] From today's perspective, this advertising series resembles a full-fledged advertising campaign.

The August 1921 issue of *The Crisis* brings another interesting advertisement for the Arenson Realty Development Corporation lots for sale which starts with the slogan: "Orchardville – where all good people are welcomed regardless of race, creed, color or nationality" and continues:

[15] *The Crisis,* June 1925, p. 103.

[16] These advertisements appeared in February – September 1926 issues.

"The lots [...] have plenty of room for house, garden, chicken yard, shed, etc., besides a few fruit trees which can be planted later on."[17]

This advertisement, as with the whole of *The Crisis,* did not address average working class African Americans, but rather better-off members of the middle-class; to use Roland Marchant's title referred to above, it successfully "advertised the American Dream". All the more so that the services, commodities, and opportunities were presented under the banner of "progress" and, according to David Blanke, advertising at the time "revolved around three key themes":

> [it] assist[ed] the individual [in] find[ing] meaning in the increasingly complex and bureaucratized world; [...] provided a form of therapy in offering "solutions" to many of modern life's newest problems. Frustration with modernity and the faster pace of living were common, and advertisers sought to ease these psychological pressures by assuring their clients that their goods were the latest, the most progressive products available. [And finally] ads helped to create a new standard of conduct – new moral codes for the uninitiated. [18]

African Americans experienced all of these forces; still, the race discrimination which they experienced in a segregated America visibly reflected itself in advertising, too. "Let us train ourselves to see beauty in black" wrote W.E.B. Du Bois in 1920, stressing at the same time the growing sentiment of racial pride. In the same mode, the editor of one of the African American journals attempted to convince its readers that there was "no better way to start [the process of racial awareness] than by purchasing the child a black doll".[19] But here the problems started: how was "black" to be defined?; how "black" did one have to be to be considered "black"? Marcus Garvey had no doubts about his pigmentation, to the effect that his strong belief in the "pure black race" put him in strong opposition to those middle class African Americans who often were of a lighter shade. According to Lewis, Garvey consistently "exploited race color taboos, greatly exaggerating the correspondence between position and pigment in Afro-Americans"[20] Calling Du Bois

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17 *The Crisis,* August, 1921, p. 189.

18 David Blanke, *The 1910s,* Westport, 2002, p. 48.

19 Benjamin Quarles, *Black Mosaic. Essays in Afro-American History and Historiography*, Amherst, 1988, p. 149.

20 Lewis, op. cit., p. 41.

"an unfortunate mulatto"[21] who "hates the drop of Negro blood in his veins",[22] and Cyril Briggs a "white man"[23], Garvey put himself in strong opposition to the "dyed" African Americans of "cross-breed" like the "Dutch-French-Negro editor"[24], (meaning Du Bois).

Garvey in a sense had a point. On the one hand, there was a considerable note of contradiction between the declarations made by middle class African Americans concerning racial awareness and the reality on the other, which was especially visible in advertising. In consequence, *The Crisis* published advertisements such as one from December 1923, presenting the O.K. Colored Doll Co. and its "Negro Crying and Walking Doll" which "has beautiful brown skin". And again, in October 1924 "Light-Brown Dolls" are advertised, dolls which are "beautiful, unbreakable [...] with curls and pretty dresses, shoes, stockings and beautiful bonnet. They Walk, Talk and Cry."[25] Middle class African Americans wanted to have lighter pigmentation and straight hair. The Chemical Wonder Company's ad may serve as a concluding quotation to the above discussion : "If colored people groom themselves daintily [sic], destroy perspiration odors, remove grease shine from the face, and use our new discoveries for improving the skin and dressing their hair they will be better received in the business world, make more money, and advance faster."[26] As the above discussion indicates, this was "a new standard of conduct – new moral code", especially for the majority of aspiring middle-class African Americans pursuing the American Dream.

5.1.2 Race Records: Blues for Sale

The advertising aimed at African Americans, as mentioned above, indicated that this segment of the market, which up to now had been unexplored, was gaining the significant interest of entrepreneurs as a potential business target. In spite of the fact that it was a niche market in the booming American economy, money could also be made here. So

[21] Marcus Garvey in the editorial to *Negro World,* 17 February, 1923.

[22] *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Robert A. Hill, ed., Berkeley, California, (1984-1991), vol. 5, p. 226.

[23] Lewis, op. cit., p. 41.

[24] Ibid., p. 42.

[25] *The Crisis,* December 1923; October 1924, page 283.

[26] Florette Henri, *Black Migration: Movement North 1900-1920*, Garden City, 1975, p. 163.

called "race records" provide a perfect example – the record, with the development of the phonograph, soon becoming a significant market commodity. At first, record companies underestimated and neglected the African American record market thinking that the phonograph was too expensive for this group of customers. Time would show how wrong these estimates were.

The phonograph, a technological novelty, instantly became an essential component of the developing popular culture. The history of the recording industry dates back to 1877 when Thomas Edison first attempted "to store up and reproduce automatically at any future time the human voice perfectly."[27]The experiments with the diaphragm and tinfoil cylinder phonograph which followed led Emile Berliner to invent the flat disk gramophone in 1887.[28] By 1901, Berliner, accompanied by Eldridge Johnson, had perfected the Victor Talking Machine and made it ready for marketing. The Victor logo, the "Little Nipper", a small dog looking into the gramophone with a cocked head, became a symbol of America's fascination with recorded sound (see the advertisement for Victor Records – Annex, item 11). By 1909, more than 27 million records and cylinders had been sold; by 1919, 2 million players and 100 million recordings had found customers.[29]

Mark Katz notes three distinct qualities of recorded music: portability, affordability, and repeatability.[30] The phonograph (the "talking machine", as it was initially called), truly became a democratic device, transcending class and race divisions. Now music could be heard practically everywhere (crossing geographical boundaries) and by everyone (crossing class/race boundaries). "Today we common people make up the audience. And for all this the talking machine largely has been responsible." The phonograph opened doors of musical reception by "unfold[ing] all the beauties of the compositions of great masters, who through their superb art touch [the] heart strings [and become] a

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27 Quoted in Roland Gelett, *The Fabulous Phonograph:1877-1977,* New York, 1977, p. 19.

28 Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans. A History*. New York, 1983, p. 304.

29 Blanke, op. cit., p. 186.

30 Mark Katz, "Making America More Musical Through the Phonograph", *American Music*, winter, 1998, p. 450.

wellspring of inspiration."[31] Victor's advertising slogan echoes the enthusiasm: "The music you want, whenever you want it."[32]

The "affordability" factor in particular was crucial in the development of this medium. Katz argues that the phonograph, as well as records themselves, were affordable to most Americans. Edison's "Home" phonograph in 1896 sold for the relatively high price of $40. Four years later, the Sears and Roebuck catalogue announced "The Wonderful Home Gramophone" for just $5. The record industry boomed. Gross receipts from sales of phonographs rose from $27.1 million in 1914 to $158.7 million in 1919. The Victor Company, the leading producer of phonographs and records, saw its assets rise from $2.7 million in 1902 to $51 million in 1921. In that same year 100 million records sold, each at the price of about $1, four times more than in 1914.[33] Records had become an important component of cultural life in all segments of population – among African Americans as well. Kevern Verney maintains that up to 6 million records were purchased by African Americans in the form of "race records" – those specifically targeted at this market.[34] The long lines of customers in front of stores selling race records on Friday, the day workers received their pay and were eager to spend it on commodities which they felt were indispensable for them, demonstrate how dynamic this segment of the market turned out to be.[35]

On February 14, 1920, the General Phonograph Corporation and its Okeh label recorded Mamie Smith, performing two Perry Bradford songs: "That Thing Called Love" and "You Can't Keep a Good Man Down", which sold well. However, it was the next recording session, held on August 10, 1920, during which Mamie Smith recorded "Crazy Blues" (Perry Bradford, composer) and "It's Right Here For You" (also Perry Bradford's compositions), that turned out to be a spectacular success, selling 100,000 copies in the first month and establishing a rising

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31 Advertisement of Victor-Victrola published in *Women's Home Companion*, 40, September, 1913, back cover.

32 Advertisement in the *American Magazine*, 103, April, 1927, p. 1.

33 Burton W. Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz. Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America*, Urbana, 1992, p. 152.

34 Kevern Verney, *African Americans and the US Popular Culture*, London, NY., 2003, p. 29.

35 Le Roy Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, New York, 1988, p. 95; Giles Oakley, *The Devil's Music: A History of the Blues*, New York, 1976, p. 81.

interest in the, till-then neglected, African American market.[36] Mamie Smith was the first female African American to record a secular song for commercial consumption and instantly became the first blues star to be created by the medium.[37] *The Chicago Defender* reviewed a concert promoting the record: "Mamie Smith is a sensation in records and came back and made good on the stage [...] Her last number, the "Crazy Blues," justly called the "King of All Blues," hit the audience in Babe Ruth order and took a real curtain call and would have done honor to any artist in the business. Miss Smith is one of the overnight successes, and made good and will enjoy packed houses wherever she appears."[38]

"Crazy Blues" as performed by Mamie Smith:

I can't sleep at night
I can't eat a bite
'Cause the man I love
He don't treat me right

He makes me feel so blue
I don't know what to do
Sometimes I'm sad inside
And then begin to cry

'Cause my best friend ... said his last goodbye
There's a change in the ocean
Change in the deep blue sea ... my baby
I tell you folks there ... ain't no change in me
My love for that man
Will always be

Now I've got the crazy blues
Since my baby went away
I ain't got no time to lose
I must find him today
Now the doctor's gonna do all ... that he can
But what you gonna need is a undertaker man
I ain't had nothin' but bad news
Now I've got the crazy blues

[36] http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?section=jazz.371600.2.2, accessed 20 January, 2006.

[37] Adam Gussow, " 'Shot Myself a Cop', Mamie Smith's 'Crazy Blues' as Social Text", *Callaloo,* 25.1, 2002, p. 9.

[38] Ibidem.

Now I can read his letter
I sure can't read his mind
I thought he's lovin' me ...
He's leavin' all the time
Now I see ...
My poor love was lyin'

I went to the railroad
Hang my head on the track
Thought about my daddy
I gladly snatched it back
Now my babe's gone

And gave me the sack
Now I've got the crazy blues
Since my baby went away
I ain't had no time to lose
I must find him today
I'm gonna do like a Chinaman ... go and get some hop
Get myself a gun ... and shoot myself a cop
I ain't had nothin' but bad news
Now I've got the crazy blues

Those blues

"Crazy Blues" is a characteristic blues narrative of romantic abandonment. It is an account of the mental process surrounding a painfully failed love. The woman (Mamie) is experiencing emotional turmoil when her lover leaves her. The "crazy blues" takes full possession of her. In the face of romantic despair she loses appetite, suffers from insomnia, and even contemplates suicide but, remembering her father, gives up the idea. The lines of the final verse give the lyrics an unexpected twist. In her despair, she is planning to intoxicate herself with opium, buy a weapon and shoot a policeman. Why this extreme outburst of violence? Why shoot a policeman? What does Mamie mean precisely when she sings:

I'm gonna do like a Chinaman ... go and get some hop
Get myself a gun ... and shoot myself a cop

Adam Gussow in his article "Shot Myself a Cop, Mamie Smith's 'Crazy Blues' as Social Text", published in *Callaloo* (2002) was the first to discuss these words. Gussow draws far-reaching conclusions from the final verse of "Crazy Blues" and places it in the perspective of social

unrest of the time. According to him, it is the Red Summer of 1919 with its lynchings and racial riots which is reflected here, and the fantasies of shooting a cop, a white cop, is the projection of social tensions. For Gussow, "Crazy Blues" is a "quiet riot". This is an interesting thesis, however, I am inclined to place the words in a strictly psychological perspective. Here, the intensity of the romantic abandonment reaches its climax, and turns into a paranoia which sparks off irrational behaviour.

Gussow, in his analysis of the song sees it in a wide social perspective:

> The explosive success of "Crazy Blues" [...] was both unprecedented and overdetermined: a singular yet seemingly inevitable confluence of emergent technology, modern advertising, a gifted performer's virtuosity, and a song that answered the long-deferred dreams of a race. The *Chicago Defender* had been demanding since 1916 that black female singers (classical rather than blues) be recorded; recent massive black outmigration from the South had swelled northern cities with an audience hungry for folk orality made modern. Now the first blues recording, and first blues recording star, had arrived to fill the void. [39]

The blues caught the imaginations of African American listeners by appeasing a "hunger for folk orality". Desire for the music at the same time revealed the existence of a large and unexploited market. As Duke Ellington's saxophonist, Otto Hardwick observed, "The field for recording was quite limited [...] if you didn't play the blues, there was no room for you."[40]

The success of Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" encouraged the formation of the Black Swan company, the first record label owned and run by African American businessmen to record and exclusively release works by African American musicians. It was established in 1921 by Harry H. Pace who chose the name after the opera singer Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, nicknamed "the Black Swan" (see Black Swan Records advertisements – Annex, items 14, 15 and 17). Black Swan records, "the only records using exclusively Negro voices and musicians", as *The Crisis* advertisement informed, were presented in the first catalogue of the company which listed its selection. The ambition of the owners was to record respectable black artists and, as Harry Pace announced during the National Negro Business League meeting in 1921, to "undertake the job of

[39] Ibid., p. 10.

[40] http:// www. grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?section=jazz.371600.2.2, accessed 20 January, 2006.

elevating the musical taste of the race."[41] Pace continued his speech by stating that his company "issued 12 records, six of them standard high-class numbers, three of the popular type and three blues. We have had to give the people what they wanted in order to get them to buy what we wanted them to want [...] our sales have naturally been larger for the last two types of records."[42] The company made constant attempts to shape the tastes of its customers and convince them to buy classical productions. Black Swan advertisements read:

> "Colored people don't want classic music!" So our dealers write us. "Give em blues and jazz. That's all we can sell." We believe the dealer is wrong. But unless we furnish him with what he has demanded for, he will not handle our goods. If you – the person reading this advertisement – earnestly want to do something for Negro music, go to your record dealer and ask for the better class of records by colored artists. If there is a demand he will keep them.[43]

The repertory of Black Swan Records consisted of "the better class of records by colored artists" and contained light classical pieces, spirituals, ballads, and blues. Ethel Waters made Black Swan's big successful record *Down Home Blues/Oh, Daddy* in 1921 (see Annex, item 17). Just like Mamie Smith, Bessie Smith, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and many other female blues singers, Ethel Waters, "Sweet Mama Stringbean" as she was nicknamed, started her career singing mainly minstrel, popular and vaudeville songs in black music theaters and tent shows. A "hybrid style" (Ann Douglas calls it a "mongrel style") – closer to vaudeville tradition than to original, grassroots Southern blues – was forming, blending the white and African American musical traditions.[44] Recordings heightened the popularity of blues singers, their performances gathering crowds both black and white. Rudolph Fisher remembers one performance of Ethel Waters: "She would stride with great leisure and self-assurance to the center of the floor, stand there with a half-contemptuous nonchalance, and wait. All would become silent at once. Then

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41 Harry Pace, *Minutes of the National Negro Business League*, XXII, 1921, p. 66.

42 Ibidem.

43 *The Messenger*, February 1923, p. 606.

44 Randall Cherry, "Ethel Waters: The Voice of an Era" in Fabre G. and M. Feith, eds. *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*, Bloomington, 2003, pp. 99-100.

she'd begin her song, genuine blues, which, for all their humorous lines, emanated tragedy and heartbreak [...]"[45]

Competition from the "white" record companies was so great that in 1923, Black Swan Company's financial situation began to falter and in 1924 it declared bankruptcy and sold the label to Paramount Records. In spite of its financial failure, *The Chicago Defender* noted the unquestionable accomplishments of the company from the African American perspective. Black Swan: "[...] forced white record companies to recognize the large market for recordings by black performers, forced companies to publish race-music catalogues, and forced them to advertise in black newspapers."[46]

In spite of the relative success of Black Swan, the majority of "race records" were produced by white-owned companies and distributed by white retailers who cashed in on the sales, for example, the short-lived Ajax Record Company which issued its first record in October 1923 and the last in the summer of 1925 (see an advertisement of their blues records published in *The Chicago Defender* in 1924: Annex, item 16). As Verney notes, between 1923-1933, Bessie Smith, the most prominent blues singer of the era, was paid less than $28,600 by the Columbia label – which made over $1 million in profits selling 8-10 million of her records.[47] John Hammond recalls:

> [...] you couldn't get [Bessie Smith's records] in downtown New York. You had to go up to Harlem or the various Black ghettos in other boroughs of New York before you could even listen to such a record. Hers [Bessie Smith's] were sold in White stores [he means stores owned by whites – mainly of Jewish origin] [...] . The first Bessie Smith records came off for 85 cents, and then subsequent ones were 75 cents, and that was a lot of money for the Black community then. But Bessie reached them completely. She was a complete artist. [She] had a powerful voice, with no need for microphones when they were available. She captured an audience both with her soul and her volume.[48]

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[45] Rudolph Fisher's interview in Nathan I. Huggins, ed., *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, New York, 1995, pp. 76-77.

[46] Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History,* New York, 1997, p. 367.

[47] Verney, op.cit., p. 29.

[48] John Hammond, "An Exercise in Jazz", in *Black Music in Our Culture. Curricular Ideas on the Subjects, Materials and Problems,* Dominique-Rene de Lerma, Kent State University Press, 1970, pp. 44, 45.

Through her recordings and live performances, she became the master storyteller of the African American urban experience – as well as symbolizing the exploitation that never seemed to disappear. "They understood all the symbolism, the frustration, and the seesaw of joy and sorrow", pertinently notes George Hoefer in an essay dedicated to Bessie Smith.[49] Her performances also moved a number of white listeners. Carl Van Vechten on seeing one of her performances, observed that Bessie's singing was "so devoid of pretense that it was like watching a woman cutting her heart open with a knife until it was exposed for all to see."[50]

Radio, which began to develop dynamically in the mid 1920s, significantly threatened the record industry and eventually brought about its doom. The first commercially sponsored broadcast in New York City took place in 1922 and three years later, Americans spent $430 millions on the purchase of radios.[51] After that, record sales fell dramatically.

5.1.3. Whose Jazz, Whose Cinema? The Great Music Robbery[52]

The great potential of African American music was instantly acknowledged by mainstream commercial record companies which significantly profited from its market exploitation (note the previously mentioned race records) and artists who incorporated it extensively in their own productions. Imamu Amiri Baraka/LeRoy Jones in *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963), names this process of claiming and co-opting by whites of black music "a rip-off" and "Great Music Robbery".[53] African American music began to be seen by many whites as synonymous with American music. Paul Whiteman and Mary Margaret McBride, in their book *Jazz* (1926), see jazz as a thoroughly American genre, music which can be played exclusively by Americans. The authors do not discredit its African background when they state that "Jazz came

[49] George Hoffer, "Bessie Smith", in *The Jazz Makers*, Nat Shapiro, Nat Hentoff, eds., Westport, 1956, p. 136.

[50] Observed in J. Berendt, *The Jazz Book: From New Orleans to Rock and Free Jazz,* New York, 1975, p. 62.

[51] Burton W. Peretti, op. cit., p. 154.

[52] The title of this subchapter is a combination of: the title of introduction to Krin Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins. Jazz and the American Cinema*, Chicago, 1996 and the title of the final chapter of Imamu Amir Baraka's, *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues*, New York, NY, 1987.

[53] Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America.* New York, 1963, p. 332.

to America in chains".[54] However, this was not a dominant opinion. Many critics completely ignored the African American roots of jazz, as for example Henry O. Osgood who in his book *So This is Jazz* (1926) does not mention a single African American artist![55]

African American intellectuals themselves were partly responsible. It was not jazz and blues but spirituals, a musical form combining dignity and religious yearnings, that had been celebrated by Locke and Du Bois as an honorable element of the African American heritage. The "Spiritual", the critic of *The New York Age* wrote, "is the product of a primitive soul untouched by civilization and its demoralizing influences, while the Blues is its antithesis in every aspect."[56] It was the hope of intellectuals that spirituals would open doors for African Americans in the domain of music. On the other hand, black secular music – blues and jazz in particular, associated with the lower classes, and therefore unfit to aspire to the "high culture" of concert halls – had, according to the elite, little to offer in the advancement of African Americans. How could jazz become "high art" when scores of critics were expressing their hostility toward this new musical form? E. Elliot Rowlins in *The New York Times* for example, maintained that it had the properties of a drug:

> Jazz is killing some people; some are going insane; others are losing their religion. The young girls and boys, who constantly take jazz every day and night, are becoming absolutely bad, and some criminals. Jazz [...] should not be used by the very young, or in copious amounts by the old. Jazz, like any other drug, should be used only when needed, in a specific dose, and by those who know how it should be used. A little jazz is all right and proper; an overdose is harmful.[57]

In spite of these prevalent opinions, Huggins claims that: "It is very ironic that a generation that was searching for a new Negro and his distinctive cultural expression would have passed up on the only really creative thing [i.e. jazz] that was going on."[58] I am convinced that the "only really creative thing" (Huggins means African American secular

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[54] Paul Whiteman and Mary Margaret McBride, *Jazz,* New York, 1926, quoted in a review "If Jazz isn't music, why isn't it", *The New York Times,* June, 13, 1926.

[55] Henry O. Osgood, *So This is Jazz*, 1926, reprinted, New York, 1978.

[56] Lucien White, "Decrying the Use of Spirituals as Companion Pieces to Blues and Jazz", *The New York Age*, 29 November, 1924, p. 6.

[57] E. Elliot Rawlins, *The New York Times,*12 February, 1922, p. 1.

[58] Nathan Huggins, *The Harlem Renaissance,* New York, 1971, p. 11.

music), was in fact noticed by the elite[59], which unfortunately was not able to recognize its full potential and find ways of implementing it in the New Negro program.

Alwyn Williams presents another dimension of the issue:

> [The elite...] recognized that jazz was hot, and they knew it was a black creation with potential. In its raw, bluesy form, with those coarse tones, loose morals and vibrant rhythms, jazz didn't seem compatible with the "new Negro" image of a dignified, sophisticated artist, proud of black ancestry and accepted by white America. But this was not an entirely negative view – jazz simply needed polish and a smart suit to make it an accepted part of the movement.[60]

In spite of numerous declarations on the unity and continuity of African American heritage, the Harlem Renaissance intellectuals failed to reach the black masses – the base of African American identity in America. Alain Locke stipulated this limitation in his address to students of Howard University, i.e. the children of the African American elite: "In the pursuit of culture one must detach himself from the crowd."[61] The "detachment" manifested itself in the elite's neglect of the masses and a rejection of the lowbrow qualities of African American folk roots.

Two notable examples present the process of cultural and artistic co-optation and appropriation of African American music by the American cultural mainstream: the spectacular career of Paul Whiteman, nicknamed the "King of Jazz", and the film production *The Jazz Singer*.

Paul Whiteman began his musical career as a viola player for the San Francisco Symphony. He enlisted in the Navy during World War I, and his musical abilities resulted in the Navy putting him in charge of his own band. After the war he kept up his musical career, moving to New York City in 1920, where he recorded his first hit record, *Whispering/ The Japanese Sandman*. It sold more than two million copies and Whiteman instantly became a celebrity. On February 12, 1924, at the respectable Aeolian Hall, he presented a show of "symphonic jazz", featuring George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, which became the band's signature

[59] For example, Alain Locke included the essay "Jazz at Home" by J.A. Rogers (pages 216-224) and "jazz" poems by Gwendolyn B. Bennet (page 225) and Langston Hughes (page 226) in *The New Negro*, New York, 1925.

[60] Alwyn Williams, "Jazz and the New Negro: Harlem's intellectuals wrestle with the art of the age", *Australasian Journal of American Studies,* 2002, 21(1) p. 16.

[61] Alain Locke quoted in Charles Scruggs, *H.L. Mencken and the Black Writers of the 1920s*, Baltimore, 1984, p. 98.

song. The concert – sponsored by Victor Records, Chickering Pianos and Buescher Instruments – was announced by a poster which read:

Paul Whiteman
And His
Palais Royal Orchestra
Will Offer
An Experiment in Modern Music
Zez Confrey
And George Gershwin
New Typically American Compositions
by Victor Herbert, George Gershwin and Zez
Confrey will be played for the first time.
Aeolian Concert Hall
Tuesday, Feb 12th (Lincoln's Birthday) at 3 P.M.
Tickets on Sale, 55c. to $2.20[62]

Whiteman's "experiment in modern music" of introducing "new, typically American compositions" had the aim, as he called it, of "remov[ing] the stigma of barbaric strains and jungle cacophony", and "mak[ing] a lady of jazz".[63] "Domesticating the primitive" through "racial cleansing" of African American music, if we may thus call the process, was in accord with Gershwin's concept that "jazz is the plantation song improved and transferred into finer, bigger harmonies". Gershwin maintained that the American soul was not "Negroid" but that "it [was] black and white [...] all colors and all souls unified".[64] As a result, not a single African American composition was presented during the Aeolian concert and all performers were white. Also the December, 1925 Carnegie Hall "concert of glorified jazz", reported in *The New York Times*, leaves no doubt that "symphony jazz" was making a spectacular career.[65] "[J]azz had rushed into the mainstream without so much as one black face".[66] Ironically, the dream expressed so strongly by Locke and Du Bois of introducing the African American musical idiom into concert halls,

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62 Poster for Paul Whiteman's concert reproduced in Geoffrey C. Ward, K. Burns, *Jazz. A History of America's Music*, New York, 2000, p. 100.

63 Ibid., p. 99.

64 Claudia Roth Pierpont, "Jazzbo. Why we still listen to Gershwin", *The New Yorker,* October, 2005.

65 "Paul Whiteman gives 'Vivid' Grand Opera", *The New York Times,* Dec. 30, 1925.

66 Baraka, op. cit. p. 100.

and by doing so elevating it to high culture, was made possible through the agency of Whiteman and Gershwin.

Michael Rogin stresses that Whiteman did not give full credit to his African American musical source; he "emancipated" it from its roots, and in effect made it invisible.[67] In another article published in the *Critical Inquiry*, Rogin describes this very process: "[...] almost without exception [white musicians] treated Negro primitivism as the raw material out of which [they] fashioned jazz [...] Jazz was identified with freedom and emotional release rather than technical prowess."[68]

The dynamically developing film industry very quickly responded to the commercial possibilities jazz opened. In 1930, Universal Pictures produced *The King of Jazz,* featuring Paul Whiteman as the main star. The production represented a complete denial of African American sources of jazz. The final number of the film, the "The Melting Pot of Music", is introduced by an announcer who reads the following statement: "America is a melting pot of music wherein the melodies of all nations are fused into one great new rhythm, JAZZ".[69]

A few years earlier, *The Jazz Singer*, a comedy-drama by Samson Raphaelson, was staged at the Fulton Theatre and performed 303 times to become one of the major hits of its season. It was characterized by one paper as "a shrewd and well-planned excursion into the theatre". However, it was the motion picture based on the play that made a truly spectacular career.[70] The film featured Al Jolson, a very popular performer of the time. Jolson was born in Srednike in what is now Lithuania, came to America when still a young boy and settled in Washington, D.C., where his father was a Cantor. In 1897 he ran away from home to join a travelling theater. As one critic was later to write, "He sang with his old-time knee-slapping, breast-beating, eye-rolling ardor, sang with a faith that

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[67] Michael Rogin, "Making America Home: Racial Masquerade and Ethnic Assimilation in the Transition to Talking Pictures", *Journal of American History,* 79, no. 3, p. 1065.

[68] Michael Rogin, "Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds his Voice", *Critical Inquiry*, 18, p. 448.

[69] Krin Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins. Jazz and the American Cinema,* Chicago, 1966, p. 13.

[70] *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre*, 3rd edn., Gerald Bordman and Thomas S. Hischak, eds., Oxford University Press 2004. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press, http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t149.e1603, accessed 9.05.2006.

moved mountains and audiences."[71] Critics rightly felt that the story of the *Jazz Singer* was based on Jolson's career, but Raphaelson is said always to have denied this.[72]

The film, a Warner Brothers production, premiered on the 6th of October, 1927 and is considered to be the first sound motion picture in the history of American cinema (see two posters for *The Jazz Singer* – Annex, items 18 and 19). Actually it was a silent film in which viewers could hear Al Jolson saying a few words and singing several songs thanks to the introduction of the Vitaphone technique of sound reproduction. Jolson plays the main hero of the film: Jakie Rabinowitz, a rabbi's son who strongly questions his father's world of values. In the prologue we see young Jackie singing ragtime at a Lower East Side saloon. One day his father, a Cantor at the synagogue, who wants him to follow in his footsteps, hears that his son has been singing "profane" jazz songs. A conflict erupts and Jackie leaves home. However, he still maintains close contacts with his mother, writing letters to her and updating her on his life. The story jumps ten years and we see Jack Robin (Rabinowitz's stage name) making a living as a jazz singer. He is successful also thanks to the support of a talented vaudeville singer, Mary Dale. They are to appear together in a spectacular Broadway revue. Jack decides to visit his mother and during the visit sings the song "Blue Skies" for her. Suddenly, his father enters the room and orders Jack to stop singing and throws him out of the house. The climax of the film takes place on the opening night of the revue which also falls on Yom Kippur. The Cantor has not recovered from the shock and cannot sing. Jack listens to his mother's pleas and comes to visit his sick father. Jack is moved by his father's suffering and sings Kol Nidre to his father. The Cantor dies, but his dream of hearing his son sing the ancient hymn comes true. In the epilogue, we see Jack on the stage of the Winter Garden theatre singing "Mammy" while his mother is occupying a seat in the front row.[73] "Here Mr. Jolson" writes Mordaunt Hall , the reviewer of *The New York Times* on the next day after the first showing of the film, "puts all the force of his personality into the song as he walks out beyond the footlights and [...] with clasped hands, he sings as if to his own mother:"

[71] Ibidem.

[72] Ibidem.

[73] *History of the American Cinema*, Charles Harpole, ed., New York, 2000, vol. 4; Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931*, New York, 1997, p. 109.

Mammy! My little Mammy!
The sun shines east. The sun shines west.
But I know where the sun shines best.
It's on my Mammy I'm talkin' about.
Nobody elses.
My little Mammy!
My heart strings are tangled around, Alabamy.
Mammy! I'm comin'!
I hope I didn't make you wait!
Mammy! I'm comin'!
Oh God, I hope I'm not late.
Mammy! Don't ya know me?
It's your little baby!
I'd walk a million miles for one of your smiles!
My Mammy![74]

That same review reports that "one of the most interesting sequences of the picture [...] is [when] Mr. Jolson [...] is perceived talking to Mary Dale [...] as he smears his face with black. It is done gradually, and yet the dexterity with which Mr. Jolson outlines his mouth is readily appreciated."[75]

Krin Gabbard argues that the film's appropriation of the title *jazz* reflects the cultural understanding of "jazz" during the American Jazz Age. In the 1920s, jazz, referring in general to up-tempo music, represented the emotional release and freedom of a generation striving to break established social conventions. Using jazz to represent Rabinowitz's break from Old World tradition and featuring a finale in blackface minstrelsy, *The Jazz Singer* (as Gabbard argues) lays a foundation for the cultural representations of jazz in American cinema.[76]

The growing motion picture industry, which was completely in white hands – and did not relate in any form to the Harlem artistic movement – very early in its history set the pattern for handling African American themes on the screen. *The Wooing and Wedding of a Coon* released in 1905, "set a precedent for the treatment of colored people in films".[77] Although the producers described it as a "genuine Ethiopian comedy",

[74] Lyrics: Sam Lewis and Joe Young lyrics, music: Walter Donaldson, 1921.

[75] Mordaunt Hall, "Al Jolson and the Vitaphone", *The New York Times,* October, 7, 1927, p. 24.

[76] Gabbard, op. cit.

[77] John Henrik Clarke, ed., *Harlem USA*, Berlin, 1964, p. 122.

it portrayed African Americans as stupid and immoral. Other presentations showed them as devoted slaves who "knew their place", or as in *The Jazz Singer*, blackface entertainers.

Film became a manifestation of popular art as shaped by the tastes of its viewers. It also revealed commercial features, becoming one more product "for sale", although this truth was often challenged by artists. Being a commercial product, film had to fulfill a number of requirements and the expectations of producers. First of all, it had to meet the expectations of consumers; that is, be in accordance with their set of norms and beliefs. According to Antonina Kłoskowska, this was mainly due to the democratization of the audience, which influenced artistic output so greatly.[78] In film, the process manifested itself most distinctly.

Unlike Whiteman or the film producers who saw only the profit-making, commercial side of jazz, Duke Ellington strove to locate African American musical experience in a broader racial and cultural perspective when he said:

> The music of my race is something more than the "American idiom". It is the result of our transplantation to American soil, and was our reaction in the plantation days to the tyranny we endured. What we could not say openly, we experienced in music, and what we know as "jazz" is something more than just dance music. It expresses our personality, and right down in us, our souls react to the elemental but eternal rhythm, and the dance is timeless and unhampered by any lineal form. [79]

However, through the sharing, borrowing, plagiarism, fusion and criss-crossing of musical idioms, seen by some as co-optation and appropriation, African American music was introduced to mainstream culture and began to function as an integral component of the American musical tradition. Also, it was through music, especially jazz, "perhaps more than any other field, [that] the preeminence of the African American was acknowledged by the nation."[80] Soon a whole constellation of talented African American musicians such as Duke Ellington would emerge, taking jazz back in their own hands and elevating it to levels never seen before.

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[78] Antonina Kłoskowska, *Kultura Masowa. Krytyka i obron,* Warszawa, 1980, pp. 150, 162-169.

[79] Duke Ellington, "The Duke Steps Out", (1931), in *Duke Ellington Reader,* Mark Tucker, ed., New York, 1993, p. 49.

[80] Southern, op. cit., p. 265.

5.2. The Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age

The stock market collapse of 1929 negatively affected every aspect of American life and marked the beginning of a new era in the whole of the United States and also in Harlem, where the artistic movement known as the Harlem Renaissance came to an abrupt end. The New Negro and the entire world of Harlem which had fascinated white intellectuals and seekers of the exotic during the two decades prior to the Depression, with all its manifestations of intellectual potential, artistic creativity, and lively entertainment, was now undercut by economic hardship, and slowly began to fade away. "The numerous white sponsors and well-wishers who had begun to flock to Harlem ten years before no longer had the time or money to marvel over Negro life", observed John Henrik Clarke, editor of *Harlem USA*.[81] Langston Hughes wrote: "That was really the end of the gay times of the New Negro era in Harlem, the period that had begun to reach its end when the crash came in 1929 and the white people has much less money to spend on themselves, and practically none to spend on Negroes, for the depression brought everybody down a peg or two. And the Negroes had but few pegs to fall."[82]

Although the extreme interest in the New Negro and African American culture as such demonstrated by some white Americans had lasted a relatively short while, it is interesting to study the forces which made it possible, having in mind the common truth that the Renaissance was not isolated from the surrounding world (neither economically nor culturally), but was nourished by the fruits of broader changes taking place in America at the time. "The Negro was caught up [in] the spirit of the artistic yearnings of the time, which is to say that their experience was part of the common experience."[83] As noted previously, Harlem's artistic achievements were to a large degree the products of broader changes taking place in American society. The 1920's, with its cultural rebellion – often referred to as the Jazz Age – was a "remarkable age in American society" in the atmosphere of which the Renaissance could flourish.[84]

Henry F. May in *The End of American Innocence*, sees the changes taking place in American society preceding World War I, as "cracks

[81] Clarke, op. cit., p. 17.

[82] Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*, New York, 1940, p. 247.

[83] S.P. Fullinwider, *The Mind and Mood of Black America: 20th Century Thought*, Homewood, Ill., 1969, pp. 119-122.

[84] Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, New York, 1971, p. 180.

on the surface" of traditional American values. As noted earlier, rural America was undergoing rapid urbanization with all its consequences. Many values accepted thus far were being threatened by the new. Terry Eagleton writes of "the political and ideological turmoil of the twentieth century" and concludes that "such turmoil is never only a matter of wars, economic slumps and revolutions: it is also experienced by those caught up in it in the most intimately personal ways".[85] Now, conventional nineteenth century moral standards in general, and attitudes toward the sexual life in particular, were being challenged. These new outlooks were stimulated and strengthened by the growing popularity of Freudian psychology which saw the human being as a "neurotic animal" (as one of Freud's commentators worded it) who, unable to cope with his desires, "sublimates" them and directs them toward higher goals facilitating the development of our culture and civilization.[86]

Freud is therefore seen as the propagator of the approach placing instinct over intellect, which places him in opposition to the still prevalent Puritan ideology. In his *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud comes to the conclusion that civilization is based upon the renunciation of "powerful instinctual urgencies" and that the privation of instinctual gratification demanded by culture is the major source of neurosis. No wonder, then, that the popularized Freudianism became "the rationalization of sex primitivism", and gave the "cult of the primitive [...] an extraordinary foothold on this continent".[87] Coupled with such manifestations of the dynamically developing technical civilization as the mass production of Ford's Model T, the wide distribution of moving pictures, and the growing popularity of photography – all affected the quiet world of middle class values. As a result, the tempo of life accelerated greatly. The standard forms functioning in American culture for many years – forms accepted as norms – were strongly criticized. The Anglo-Saxon middle class, with its fundamental beliefs, was being confronted by new norms in literature and art in general. Culture had to catch up with the changing times leaving behind the genteel tradition.

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85 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory. An Interpretation*, Oxford, 1968, p. 151.

86 Ibidem.

87 Oscar Cargill, *Intellectual America*, New York, 1941, p. 608.

5.2.1. In Pursuit of the Primitive

One sensitive area of middle class belief, beside the sphere of sex, was the race problem. Rejecting in general the genteel tradition, young cosmopolitans of the pre-war years questioned the racial attitudes of their fathers as well. It should be noted here that this group was limited to the intellectuals and artists of the epoch, mainly members of the Lost Generation and political revolutionaries (as critics tend to call them), who for example were excited by the Sixty-Ninth Regiment Armory art show opened in New York in February 1913. According to Henry F. May, the show contained an: "[...] excellent collection of every variety of contemporary non-representational, non-moralizing, untraditional experiment: The postimpressionists, the Fauves, the expressionists, the primitives, the cubists, and the abstract sculpture."[88] Mabel Dodge, the spirit of Greenwich Village before the First World War, called the show "[...] the most important event in America since 1776."[89] Though her opinion was an obvious exaggeration, the show nevertheless turned out to be a success both financially as well as artistically, giving strong boost to the new.

The turn of the century marked the beginning of the discovery of African art (considered more closely in Chapter Three here but from a different perspective). Following the British expedition to the ancient city of Benin in 1897, a considerable amount of cast bronze and carved ivory was brought to London where nearly half the treasure was bought by the Berlin Museum – to become the basis for the famous collection of African art at the Berlin Ethnographic Museum. Also in Vienna, thanks to the activity of Felix von Luschen an African collection was started. Some French West Coast fetish carvings were accidentally found by young painters and critics in Paris. "L'art nègre", as African art was referred to by enthusiasts, began to radiate onto the new style and philosophy of artistic output.

> What formerly appeared meaningless took on meaning in the latest experimental strivings of plastic art. [Artists] came to the realization that hardly anywhere else had certain problems of form and certain technical ways of solving them presented themselves in greater clarity or success than in art of the Negro. It then became apparent that previous

[88] Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence*, Chicago, 1964, p. 245.

[89] A letter by Mabel Dodge, *Mabel Dodge to Gertrude Stein: Flowers of Friendship*, Donald Gallup, ed., New York, 1953, p. 71.

> judgements about the Negro and his art characterized the critic more than the object of criticism. The new appreciation developed instantly a new passion; [many] began to collect Negro art as art, became passionately interested in a corrective reappraisal of it and made out of the old material a newly evaluated thing.[90]

The art exhibition in New York City, which came to be known as the Armory Show of 1913, demonstrated convincingly the influence of African art on post-impressionist/modernist art, mainly on sculpture and cubist painting. Henri Matisse (1869-1954) was the first to yield to the fascination of African sculpture – his *Torso* (1906) being highly inspired by it. This work influenced Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), who a few months later painted the famous *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* relying greatly on a mask from Congo which enchanted him by its simplicity and geometrical form. A new door was opening before European artists, a door leading to new paths in art. African artistic heritage merged with European aesthetic concepts, opening new horizons and launching modernism in numerous spheres of artistic activity.[91]

The previously mentioned Armory Show played a major role in introducing the American public to Modernism with its African heritage. Its effect was staggering not only to the bewildered public but also to the young artists searching for new avenues of expression. There was a common need to redefine traditional standards in art and in social life. The search for new art was also a consequence of the growing awareness of the standardization of life that had resulted from the introduction of mass production methods to American industry – the "Machine Civilization" which "drives the hundred millions steadily toward uniformity."[92]

The commercialism and standardization which resulted from the increasing industrialization led to an increasing nostalgia for the simple. Consequently, a search began for symbols of the epoch later to be named "the jazz age". Inevitably the eyes of young intellectuals and artists turned toward African Americans – a people possessing, according to W.E.B. Du Bois, "[...] a certain joyousness; a sensuous, tropical love of life, in vivid contrast to the cool and cautious New England reason;

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90 Margaret Just Butcher, *The Negro in American Culture*, New York, 1956, p. 224.

91 There was an attempt to apply aspects of African visual art to literary theory in the movement known as "Vorticism" (London, 1910s); Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound may best represent its ideas.

92 Carl Van Doren, "The Negro Renaissance", *The Century Magazine,* March 1926, p. 637.

a slow and dreamful conception of the universe; a drawling and slurring of speech, an intense sensitiveness to spiritual values[...]"[93] Robert Bone echoes the characteristic when he views the Negro as one who "represent[s] the unspoiled child of nature, the noble savage – carefree, spontaneous and sexually uninhibited".[94]

Fascination with the primitive, the noble savage, had long fascinated American common folk as well as intellectuals and artists, and found numerous projections in artistic manifestations.[95] He is present in the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville, as well as Ambrose Bierce. The fascination continued into the twentieth century with its interest in the home-grown symbol of the primitive – the Negro: America's "outcast". During the 1920's the African American, the embodiment of the primitive, became the symbol of freedom from restraint and an intellectual source of energy and sensuality.

The conviction was expressed, especially by the Village Bohemians, young writers gathered in Greenwich Village, that "[...] Western civilization had been badly maimed by an omnivorous industrialism."[96] Hence, as Lewis further notes, the growing interest in Afro-Americans who had been for so long excluded from dehumanizing institutions, was a logical consequence of this conviction – becoming a "perfect symbol of cultural innocence and regeneration".[97] The view became common "that Negroes had retained a direct virility that the whites had lost through being overeducated".[98] And in effect "[...] the man who was least touched by civilizing influences could be more immediate, more passionate, more healthy. Civilizing artifice stripped away, men could dance, sing, and love with freedom".[99] America's "outcast" was discovered in the "semi-mythical dreamland" of Harlem.[100]

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93 W.E.B. Du Bois , The Gift of Black Folk: The Negro in the Making of America, Boston, 1924, p. 320.

94 Robert Bone, *The Negro Novel in America*, New Haven, 1958, p. 59.

95 In the European classical music tradition fascination with "the primitive" found numerous manifestations. Notable examples are: Bella Bartok's *Allegro Barbaro* (1911) and Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (1912-13).

96 Lewis, op.cit., p.91.

97 Ibidem.

98 Ibidem.

99 Huggins, op. cit., p. 87.

100 Gilbert Seldes, "The Negro's Songs", *Dial,* March, 1926, pp. 247-51.

The African American became the center of attention of the artists and intellectuals of the 1920s and found his way into fiction, drama, poetry, painting and sculpture. The artistic value of African American culture, with its spirituals, folk legends and stories, blues and jazz, was revealed to the general American public. Opinions were voiced that Negro music had contributed significantly to world culture. Likewise did scholars, in particular anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Melville Herskovits, publish their pioneering studies of African American culture. In literature, following the trend set by Gertrude Stein's *Melanctha* (1909) and Vachel Lindsey's *The Congo* (1914), Eugene O'Neill, Sherwood Anderson, and e.e. cummings followed by drawing heavily from black life and culture. O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, which was constructed around Negro characters and themes, best illustrates the fascination of writers of the time with elements of African American culture as an inspiration in their search for fresh images and material.[101] Sherwood Anderson confirms the intensity of feelings of the Lost Generation writers toward African Americans when he writes to H.L. Mencken: "Damn it, man, if I could really get inside the niggers and write about them with some intelligence, I'd be willing to be hanged later and perhaps would be."[102]

The Negro appeared in the spotlight; he was now in vogue. One of the midwives of the Harlem Renaissance, Carl Van Vechten, in his article "Negro Blues Singers", published in *Vanity Fair,* announces the fact of the Negro being at the moment "in ascendancy".[103] It was in fashion among wealthy white New Yorkers to search for the "noble savage" and the "exotic Negro" uptown, in Harlem. This Negro community was "discovered" as a place of laughing, singing, and dancing – an ideal location to escape the prudishness of the middle class. Harlem in the Twenties became a "great playground" – America's replica of Paris.[104] The image spread throughout the United States and abroad to such a degree that tourists coming to America visited Harlem with its "exotic" night spots as one more attraction. As Kevin J. Mumford has noted, numerous travel guides published during the 1920s presented Harlem as a district

[101] John Cooley, "In pursuit of the primitive: black portraits by Eugene O'Neill and other village bohemians" in *Harlem Renaissance Re-examined: A Revised and Extended Edition*, Victor A. Kramer, Robert A. Ross, eds., Troy, 1997, p. 83.

[102] Sherwood Anderson quoted in Lewis, op. cit., p. 99.

[103] Carl Van Vechten, "Negro Blues Singers", *Vanity Fair*, March, 1926.

[104] Beverly Smith, "Harlem – Negro City", *New York Herald Tribune*, February 10, 1930.

inhabited by exotic primitives; a "site of pleasure" that whites could venture to, to unleash their repressed sexual desires.[105] The following *New York Age* advertisement informs "inquisitive Nordics" of the services of the "Slumming Hostesses":

> Here in the world's greatest city it would both amuse and also interest you to see the real inside of the New Negro Race of Harlem. You have heard it discussed, but there are very few who really know [...] I am in a position to carry you through Harlem as you would go slumming through Chinatown. My guides are honest and have been instructed to give the best service [...] Your season is not completed with thrills until you have visited Harlem.[106]

"Thousands of whites came to Harlem night after night", Langston Hughes later wrote in his autobiographical *The Big Sea*, "thinking the Negroes loved to have them there, and firmly believing that all Harlemites left their houses at sundown to sing and dance in cabarets because most of the whites saw nothing but the cabarets [...]."[107] Mainly it was a search for pleasure in numerous night-clubs and cabarets (some of them catering exclusively to whites), where at first ragtime and blues, and later jazz – as well as whiskey, cocaine and sex – were the main attractions. Hughes' *The Big Sea* is full of vivid descriptions of the numerous parties thrown by notable Harlemites, such as for example A'Leila Walker, and less prominent citizens. Hughes quotes Geraldyn Dismond of the *Interstate Tattler* who reported on one of Taylor Gordon's "fiestas":

> What a crowd! All classes and colors met face to face, ultra aristocrats, Bourgeois, Communists, Park Avenuers galore, bookers, publishers, Broadway celebs, and Harlemites 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 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 Taylor himself brought out everything from "Hot Dog" to "bravo" when he made high C.[108]

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[105] Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*, New York, 1997, p. 143.

[106] "The Slumming Hostess", *New York Age,* November 6, 1925.

[107] Hughes, *The Big Sea*, op. cit., p. 225.

[108] Ibid., pp. 243-244.

These parties were often advertised by announcements distributed in the district. Most of them included alluring messages:

We got yellow girls, we've got black and tan
Will you have a good time? – YEAH MAN!
A Social Whist party
-- GIVEN BY --
MARY WINSTON
147 West 145th Street Apt. 5
Saturday EVE., MARCH 19th, 1932
GOOD MUSIC REFRESHMENTS[109]

The man-about-town, the party-goer is characterized in *The New Yorker* (1926) by an anonymous proprietor of a Harlem night club as "a fellow who has a different girl for every suit of clothes and a different suit of clothes for every time he comes in here during the evening."[110] In his biography Bruce Keller remembers: "A close friend of Carl's [Van Vechten's] reflected in all seriousness that nobody ever completely sobered up. They moved from party to party, from club to club, drinking anything offered them. People drank all night, every night; when they slept has never been ascertained."[111] Handsomely dressed whites enjoyed good times dancing the Charleston, Turkey, or Black Bottom, listening to jazz or watching revues at the Savoy, Connie's Inn or the Cotton Club – Harlem's best known night-spots (in majority catering exclusively to whites) – which had "the hottest shows in town". Jimmy Durante, a well known comedian, in his book about New York's night clubs, notes that the vitality of Harlem's night life surpassed that of Broadway itself. He also vividly describes the unforgettable atmosphere of Harlem in those days: "From midnight until dawn it is a seething cauldron of Nubian mirth and hilarity. You go sort of primitive there with the bands moaning blues like nobody's business, slim, bare-thighed brown-skin gals tossing their torsos, and the Negro melody artists bearing down something terrible on the minor notes."[112] Victorian moral repressiveness had been cast aside; now the African American with his lively musical culture, particularly jazz, became a symbol of the rebellion against old morality.

[109] Ibid., p. 229.

[110] *The New Yorker*, October 2, 1926, p. 21.

[111] Bruce Keller, quoted in Jervis Anderson, *This was Harlem* , New York, 1982, p. 213.

[112] Jimmy Durante and Jack Kofold, *Night Clubs*, New York, 1931, p. 113.

At first glance, the trip uptown was a search for down-to-earth thrills but, as Nathan Irvin Huggins convincingly argues, symbolically it was a trip into the subconscious. It is possible that whites found Harlem, just like the French journalist, "the only relief from the relentless engine" of American civilization.[113] Being disenchanted with the reality around them, in Harlem they found fulfillment of their psychological needs. "The white hunter in New York's Heart of Darkness" through music and dance "uncoiled deep inner tensions".[114] Harlem became a space in which white troubled souls found comfort and peace. According to Huggins, "Harlem, became a kind of therapy for deeper white needs".[115]

It would be fruitful, I think, to consider now a very interesting idea presented by T.J. Jackson Lears on the emergence of the therapeutic ethos as a basic factor in the rise of consumer culture in America. [116] According to Lears, around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a fundamental transformation took place in American society when "[...] the crucial moral change was the beginning of a shift from a Protestant ethos of salvation through self-denial toward a therapeutic ethos stressing self-realization in this world [...]"[117] Opposition against the Victorian way of life, its morals and values, was growing in strength. "It was no wonder, then, that so many young Americans found themselves gasping for air in their parents' Victorian homes, no wonder, they yearned to fling open the doors and experience 'real life' in all its dimensions."[118]

"Real life" meant many things. In general it was a dream of intense experience, not of the intellect but of the body, which was to bring a "revitalized sense of selfhood"[119]; a temporary escape from the moral norms of society promised to bring relief and psychic security. One may describe such behavior as a response to the "overpressure" of the

[113] Paul Morand, *New York,* New York, 1930, pp. 369-70.

[114] Huggins, op. cit. , pp. 89 and 90.

[115] Ibid., p. 91.

[116] The rise of the therapeutic ethos of self-realization was closely studied by T.J. Johnson Lears in *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880 – 1920*, New York, 1981; and repeated in a compressed form in an essay "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880 – 1930.", found in *The Culture of Consumption. Critical Essays in American History. 1880 -1980*, edited by Richard W. Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, New York, 1983.

[117] Lears, *The Culture of Consumption*, p. 4.

[118] Ibid., p. 10.

[119] Ibidem.

surrounding world, a growing acceptance of what William James (the celebrated spokesman of the pragmatic philosophy), called "the gospel of relaxation".[120] The escape to Harlem of white intellectuals, artists, bohemians and pleasure-seekers was in fact an escape into the "real world", away from the "[...] stuffy unreality of bourgeois culture".[121] It was an ideal place to experience life with emotional intensity and achieve revitalization and fulfillment. Therefore, the therapeutic dimension of Harlem's night life should not be overlooked.

5.2.2. White Patronage

Prosperous whites not only marked their presence in the night-clubs of Harlem but significantly influenced the developing Negro artistic expression. It was the passive presence of the white patrons and sponsors that was crucial to the developing Negro art. Their "capital and influence [...] hovered over the New Negro world of art and literature like a benevolent censor, politely but pervasively setting the outer limits of its creative boundaries".[122] African American artistic output developed to a large degree with the commercial demand created by white sponsors who encouraged the Harlem literati – the "niggerati" to use Wallace Thurman's bitterly ironic term quoted by Langston Hughes in *The Big Sea* – to incorporate "the jungle and the primitive" into their works. This demand was generally met, especially in the domain of literature. Langston Hughes very early in his career noticed that black Harlem and "downtown" were connected by inseparable ties: "Downtown! I soon learned that it was seemingly impossible for black Harlem to live without white downtown. My youthful illusions that Harlem was a world unto itself did not last very long."[123]

Zora Neal Hurston coined the term "Negrotarians" – meaning people interested in Afro-Americans, their art and advancement in American society. On the base of Hurston's term, David Levering Lewis differentiates and characterizes several groups of "Negrotarians", each distinguished by a set of specific features. In the first group are members of the Lost Generation, who "[...] were drawn to Harlem on the way to Paris because it seemed to answer a need for personal nourishment and

[120] William James, "The Gospel of Relaxation", *Scriber's,* April, 1899, pp. 499-507.

[121] Lears, op. cit., p. 11.

[122] Lewis, op. cit., p. 98.

[123] Hughes, *The Big Sea*, op. cit. p. 210.

to confirm their vision of cultural salvation coming from the margins of civilization."[124] In the second – the revolutionaries who believed that Afro-Americans would become a significant force in shaking the old order. The next group stood behind the banner of Freudian theory, viewing the Negroes as possessing features of innocence, a pure embodiment of the "ego". Still others, mainly publishers, were calculating the market possibilities of Negro literary output, interested in making money on the booming business of black topics (this group being named by Lewis as "dollars-and-cents salon Negrotarians").[125] Another group of significant philanthropic contributors to Afro-Americans were prosperous Jews who sponsored the New Negro movement for several reasons, two of which seem to be the most important: charity flowing from the Talmudic sense of social duty, and similarities in treatment by Christian whites – the discrimination of the Ku Klux Klan hit the Jew with nearly equal force as it did the African American. We can repeat after Lewis that: "The motives of [white] philanthropy were an amalgam of inherited abolitionism, Christian charity and guilt, social manipulation, political eccentricity, and a certain amount of persiflage".[126]

A relatively small group of white celebrities came to the then-creative African American artists as influential art patrons, sponsoring various forms of creative activity. Although this patronage is often viewed as having been limited only to the economic and artistic spheres, the example of Langston Hughes' relationship with his patron demonstrates a deeper level of interdependence which developed into a psychic bond, as time has shown, difficult to break. Mrs. Charlotte Mason, wife of Dr. Rufus O. Mason, a parapsychologist, continued her husband's interest in the subconscious, believing in the great spiritual potential of the "primitive" and "child race" such as the Indians and Negroes. According to this outlook, by virtue of their living close to nature did these ethnic groups presumably experience life more intensely. As Hughes later recalled:

> Concerning Negroes, she felt that they were America's great link with the primitive, and that they had something precious to give to the Western World. She felt that there was mystery and mysticism and spontaneous harmony in their souls, but that many of them had let the white world pollute and contaminate that mystery and harmony, and make it

[124] Lewis, op. cit. p. 99.

[125] Ibidem.

[126] Ibidem.

> something cheap and ugly, commercial and, as she said, "white". She felt that we had a deep well of the spirit within us and that we should keep it pure and deep. [127]

When Hughes first entered Mrs. Mason's Park Avenue apartment, he did not realize the consequences of this act for his future, nor his "Godmother's" influence on his artistic output. She covered all of his expenses; she encouraged him to write; she was a mother to him. No wonder Hughes remembers: "No one else had ever been so thoughtful of me or so interested in the things I wanted to do or so kind and generous toward me".[128] Being so dependent, Hughes became aware of the dangers to his personal and artistic integrity. He was beginning to resent the fact that "she possessed the power to control people's lives – pick them up and put them down when and where she wished". [129] He could no longer play the role of "primitive". Instead, a rebellion was ripening in him to burst out in the poem "Poet to Patron":

> What right has anyone to say
>
> That I
> Must throw out pieces of my heart
> For pay?
>
> For bread that helps to make
> My heart beat true
> I must sell myself
> To you ?
>
> A factory shift's better,
> A week's meager pay,
> Than a perfumed note asking
> What poems today?[130]

A similarly friendly and helpful contribution to the Harlem Renaissance was manifested by the previously referred to white, New York literary celebrity Carl Van Vechten. Martin Green in his book *Children of the Sun*, speaks of the English upper-class dandies as *"Sonnenkindern"*,

[127] Hughes, *The Big Sea*, op. cit. p. 316.

[128] Ibid., p. 315.

[129] Ibid., p. 324.

[130] Although the poem was published in *The American Mercury*, June 1939, p. 147, according to Faith Berry, *Langston Hughes. Before and Beyond Harlem*, Westport, 1983, it had been written nine years earlier, during his stay in Harlem and directly refers to the breaking up with Mrs. Charlotte Manson.

a term which, according to Jervis Anderson, is applicable to Carl Van Vechten as well. Vechten was one of those privileged few, who were "… preoccupied with style, worshipped Adonis or Narcissus, were rebellious against both their fathers' and their mothers' modes of seriousness – were in love with ornament, splendor, high manners; and so on." [131] In the case of Vechten, to this set of characteristics should be added one more feature: a great fascination with the Negro and his culture. During the years of the Renaissance he was either in the heart of Harlem, getting "intoxicated by gin"[132], or inviting Harlem to his apartment at West Fifty-fifth Street for legendary "integrated" parties. George Gershwin, Theodore Dreiser, Scott Fitzgerald, Pola Negri, Rudolph Valentino, and the cream of Harlem's young artists were among the present. "The mix at Van Vechten parties", relates David Levering Lewis, "made a popular joke of the day seem as likely as amusing: "Good morning Mrs. Astor", says a porter at Grand Central Station. "How do you know my name, young man?" "Why, ma'am," the porter explains, "I met you last weekend at Carl Van Vechten's".[133] The famous parties not only symbolize Van Vechten's connections with the Harlem Renaissance, but mainly his great contribution to popularizing Negro themes and culture in general. "Jazz, the blues, Negro spirituals, all stimulate me enormously [...]" Van Vechten wrote to H.L. Mencken.[134] He was one of the group of New Yorkers who promoted the creation of Harlem artists during those years using all possible means: he supported them financially but also – which seems to have been even more important – helped to get their novels and collections of poems published in prominent publishing houses like Alfred Knopf (Langston Hughes's *The Weary Blues*), Albert and Charles Boni (Alain Locke's *The New Negro*) – to name just a few.

What white celebrities discovered in Harlem was just one side of the picture: the glittering and shining, the laughing and dancing. Underneath the visible splendor was the deteriorating ghetto, with its humiliation and suffering, of which Hughes wrote:

> Because my mouth
> Is wide with laughter

131 Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: A Narrative of "Decadence" in England After 1918,* New York, 1976, p. 6.

132 Lewis, op. cit., 183.

133 Ibid., p. 184.

134 Van Vechten to Mencken, May 29, 1925, H.L. Mencken Collection, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library.

And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain
So long?

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not hear
My inner cry?
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing.
You do not know
I die?[135]

If we do not count the small group of dedicated social workers – Osofsky calls them "urban progressives"[136] who were aware of the poor conditions and the need for racial reform for African Americans in northern cities and particularly in Harlem – the majority of American society did not notice the problem. More socially sensitive artists, like Hughes, observed the emergence of Harlem as a slum and a ghetto. This is demonstrated vividly by his poem "Esthete in Harlem" published in James Weldon Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, where the illusive expectations clash with the reality:

Strange,
That in this nigger place
I should meet life face to face;
When, for years, I had been seeking
Life in places gentler-speaking,
Until I came to this vile street
And found Life stepping on my feet![137]

The promised land had been transformed into a segregated ghetto. Carl Van Vechten voiced this in the title of his 1926 novel where the surface reality might seem to the observer a "nigger heaven" – but it is to be

[135] Langston Hughes, "Minstrel Man", in: *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, eds., New York, 1994, p. 61.

[136] Osofsky, op. cit. p. 53.

[137] Langston Hughes, "Esthete in Harlem", in: James Weldon Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, New York, 1922, p. 239.

remembered that "nigger heaven" in slang also indicated the segregated back balconies that African Americans had to occupy in theatres.

> Nigger Heaven! That's what Harlem is. We sit in our places in the gallery of this New York theatre and watch the white world sitting down below in the good seats in the orchestra. Occasionally they turn their faces towards us, their hard, cruel faces, to laugh or sneer, but they never beckon. It never seems to occur to them that there isn't another seat, that something has to be done.[138]

"The average colored man you see along the streets in Harlem doesn't know any more about" the night life of the artistic bohemia "than the old maid in North Forks, South Dakota."[139] According to Lewis, "[...] most of Harlem was sober and hardworking. Those with money and inclinations to roam Lenox and Seventh Avenues or the Jungle until the crack of dawn probably represented well under 10 percent of the total".[140] The city within the city, as Harlem was often called, was visibly divided into two distinctive worlds: a night world populated by visiting whites, and a day world of African American economic hardship. Hughes remembers:

> Some Harlemites thought the millenium had come [...] They thought the race problem had been solved through Art [...] I didn't know what made any Negroes think that – except that they were mostly intellectuals doing the thinking. The ordinary Negroes hadn't heard of the Negro Renaissance. I had a swell time while it lasted. But I thought it wouldn't last long [...] how could a large and enthusiastic number of people be crazy about Negroes forever?[141]

The Great Depression which started on the infamous Black Tuesday brought an abrupt end to the concept and ideas connected with the New Negro. As Alain Locke later observed: "The rosy enthusiasms and hopes of 1925 were [...] cruelly deceptive mirage[s]."[142] The Depression shattered the image of Harlem as an erotic playground where people inhabiting the dreamland never ceased to dance, love and laugh. Bread-lines sobered white intellectuals and bohemians as well as Negro artists.[143] A

[138] Carl Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven,* New York, 1926, p. 149.

[139] Durante, op. cit., p. 211.

[140] Lewis, op. cit., p. 211.

[141] Hughes, *The Big Sea*, op. cit., p. 228.

[142] Alain Locke, "Harlem: Dark Weather-Vane", *Survey Graphic,* August, 1936, pp. 457-62.

[143] Osofsky, op. cit., 186.

new era opened for the African American artist, who began the search for racial and artistic integrity anew, which, as some critics (Huggins for example) maintain had been absent during the Renaissance years.

The above mentioned case of Mrs. Mason and her relationship with Hughes may serve as an example of the negative influence of the patron on artistic integrity during those years. We may treat Hughes' breaking all ties (financial, artistic, and emotional) with his patron symbolically, connecting this concrete case with the more general condition of artistic output of African Americans during the Renaissance. The rejection of Mrs. Mason's sponsorship by Hughes coincided with the close of a golden era in the artistic history of the Negro in the United States. A chapter in the career of Hughes, too, had definitely closed. The early poems of jazz and blues – so characteristic of the time during which they were written – did not find continuation in the Depression. His early career was over; now he could move, as did many African American artists, into a new direction. The new direction was no longer charted by patrons but by radical leftists who shouted in the *New Masses*: "[P]oetry must become dangerous again. Let's have poems thundering like 10-ton trucks and aeroplanes."[144] Hughes chose this radical magazine to make his new beginning by writing an open letter to the Editor "Greetings to Soviet Workers" and a poem "Merry Christmas", both published in the December, 1930 issue:

> Merry Christmas, China,
> From the gunboats in the river,
> Ten-inch shells for Christmas gifts
> And peace on earth forever.
>
> Merry Christmas, India,
> To Gandhi in his cell,
> From righteous Christian England,
> Ring out, bright Christian bell!
>
> Ring Merry Christmas, Africa,
> From Cairo to the Cape!
> Ring Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!
> (For murder and for rape.)
>
> Merry Christmas, Haiti
> (And drown the voodoo drums) –

[144] Michael Gold, "Cornevali and other essays", *New Masses*, December, 1926, p. 18.

We'll rob you to the Christmas hymns
Until the next Christ comes.

Ring Merry Christmas, Cuba!
(While Yankee domination
Keeps a nice fat president
In a little half-starved nation.)

And to you down-and-outers,
("Due to economic laws")
Oh, eat, drink and be merry
With a bread-line Santa Claus –

While all the world hails Christmas
While all the church bells sway!
While, better still, the Christmas guns
Proclaim this joyous day!

While Holy steel that makes us strong
Spits forth a mighty Yuletide song:
SHOOT Merry Christmas everywhere!
Let Merry Christmas GAS the air!

The African American artists of the Harlem Renaissance, created in the very comfortable conditions of a greenhouse isolated from the hardships of the outside world, saw how that arrangement had been shattered by the Depression. There were, afterwards, only two alternatives to choose: either adapt to the new, often extreme, conditions, or fade away. A militant, political voice was beginning to take shape and be heard louder and more clearly. In his essay, "The New Negro in Literature" published in *The New Negro Thirty Years Afterward*, Sterling Brown pertinently remarks: "Negro authors of the thirties, like their compatriots, faced reality more squarely. For the older light-heartedness, they substituted sober self-searching; for the bravado of false Africanism and Bohemianism, they substituted attempts to understand Negro life in its workday aspects in the here and now...."[145] The realistic creativity of Richard Wright, later of Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, and recently of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, are all successful endeavors by African American writers to overcome the stifling forces which limited the African American artist at the time of the Harlem Renaissance.

[145] Sterling Brown , "The New Negro in Literature (1925-1955)", *The New Negro Thirty Years Afterward*, New York, 1955, p. 62.

CONCLUSION

It was the author's intent to demonstrate that social, economic, intellectual and cultural forces of the American reality seemingly shaped the artistic movement of the Harlem Renaissance. It has been argued that the African American experience was deeply rooted in the general American experience which, at first, was viewed by social scientists as a "melting pot" – an assimilative concept, demonstrating the strong conviction that out of amalgamation (both biological and cultural) a new national quality would emerge. The ideals of democracy, the cornerstone of the American nation, were to become at last the keystone of the "nation of the nations", where every ethnic and racial group would maintain its cultural identity, cultivating links with its homeland, and developing its cultural heritage. In this perspective, African Americans also saw their hopes for cultural fulfillment.

Time had also come for the African American minority to transform its social position from that of humiliation to the ultimate experience of full participation in the life of American society. The Johnsonean slogan that "[T]he Negro is a creator as well as a creature [..] a giver as well as [...] a receiver [...]"[1] was in itself a new idea which emerged from the times, finding rationale in the developing multicultural concepts.

In this context, the sudden eruption of African American artistic expression during the first decades of the twentieth century was not an unnatural phenomenon but deeply rooted in the contemporary American reality, as were other spectacular manifestations of the creative possibilities of the new nation. The concept of the New Negro – basic to the ideology of the Renaissance – can be compared to other slogans of the day that the generation of the 1920s discovered, much like a number of other "newnesses" of the age: New Humanism, New Thought, New Science, New Era, New Words, New Morality, etc.

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[1] James Weldon Johnson, ed., *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, New York, 1922, p. 3.

African Americans felt a strong obligation to prove to themselves and to fellow Americans that they possessed artistic potential and were capable of creating significant works of art manifesting in this form their participation in the culture of the nation. This force drove young aspiring African American artists of the 1920s to create in an American idiom but at the same time manifest racial self-expression.

The feeling of being torn between two opposing forces often brought about frustration, creating obstacles too difficult to overcome by the majority of artists. The racial dilemma, which left its imprint on all of the artistic manifestations prior to the Renaissance, was carried over and permeated the creation of the New Negro. In spite of these limitations, Locke and other intellectuals encouraged artists to reevaluate the Negro past and turn to Africa as a source of artistic inspiration and ethnic pride. However, the basic truth that the Negro was and is a member of American society, with all the implications such membership should carry with it, could not be overcome even by the most idealistic and revolutionary program. The ambition to achieve success in the white dominant culture brought, in many cases, disillusionment.

The artists of the Renaissance, like their predecessors and successors, were caught between two forces: the need to express black identity on the one hand, and the constant pressure of the ever-present American ideals on the other. These two forces conditioned, and in a sense limited, their creation. The American Dream "to make it", although at times consciously opposed by some African American artists, shaped their artistic output. Furthermore, the accepted white middle-class values could not provide the foundation of a black aesthetic by a black artist or critic. In a wider sense, an existential crisis came into being; the problem of reconciling two diverse identities – "the Negro" and "the American". Success in any sphere of American life, social or artistic, would result in the artist's alienation from his or her own ethnic/racial background, while not entering the white cultural context fully. In effect, black artists did and do find themselves to a large extent excluded from both worlds. The arguments here presented demonstrate that even though African Americans as a group underwent the process of acculturation, they nevertheless retained certain elements of racial and cultural identity which would eventually become cornerstones of the black aesthetics developed in the 1960s and 1970s.

The racial pride movement of Marcus Garvey, as well as other social and religious ventures, not only consolidated African Americans around often utopian programs, but facilitated the growth of what we today refer to as mass society. Similar to their uprooted African ancestors, the participants of the Great Migration had to adapt in order to survive. The old ways, the traditions, and culture in general, gave way to new, often transitory, qualities. Just as African chants blended with white musical tradition gave the impulse toward the development of spirituals, so did country blues in an urban surrounding become Chicago blues and jazz, "plantation" or "Ethiopian" melodies became self-contained shows, plantation dances became cakewalks and foxtrots. The development of these new cultural qualities took place in a new environment of accessibility to culture wider than ever before. The greater educational opportunities and technological advances of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, though only to a limited degree, also opened the doors of mass culture to African Americans. The dominant oral tradition of the slave, still prevalent in the Reconstruction era, gave way to information spread by the written word of the popular press and, later, by the phonograph and the radio.

Therefore, it would be a mistake not to consider the African American as "a mass receptor" and an element of the "mass market": being a member of American society he was also (as has been stated previously), "the giver as well as the receiver". Considered here have been those elements of mass culture which manifested themselves prior to, and just after, the first threshold of the development of mass culture marked by the expanding influence of the phonograph, film and radio.

In spite of all the dynamism characteristic of the changing times, there exist features which are permanent, or at least subject to change only to a limited degree. Stereotypes, for one, have a remarkable vitality. The plantation tradition of the Negro as an entertainer was never completely discontinued. The image persisted in social consciousness and popular art throughout the Reconstruction era, well into the years of the Harlem Renaissance and long after. Some of the stereotypical images have faded away in contemporary cultural manifestations; however, the widespread opinion characterising the African American as possessing sensuous and rhythmic features still perseveres.

Stereotypical sentiments, deeply rooted in American consciousness, found strong criticism among the artists and intellectuals of the

Renaissance. W.E.B. Du Bois, James W. Johnson, and Alain Locke hoped "high art" would emerge and, through it, the Negro would overcome the negative stereotypes and reach a respectable position in society. As time has revealed, their dreams were unreal: it was in fact in the domains of "low culture" where the energy and the potential of African American culture rested. Blues and jazz, the new growing forms of musical expression, were definitely not the "high art" that influential black intellectuals dreamed of as a form which would elevate African Americans as artists and would have wide human appeal. In spite of the pressure of intellectuals to keep it down, jazz, which has its roots in the depths of African American sensitivity, radiated into both American and world musical culture to become an unquestionable contribution to both. This was possible thanks to rapid developments in recording technology and later radio transmissions and film productions which transformed jazz, a local African American idiom, into a nationally accepted cultural form identified as uniquely American.

When I set out on the venture of this project, I hoped to uncover the truth of the Harlem Renaissance. However, like numerous scholars before me, I find it difficult to establish an ultimate opinion of the movement. Although the Renaissance has often been recognized as merely one of the elements of the vast "cultural mosaic", and in more recent criticism, an ingredient of the "salad bowl" of the American reality, in the history of African Americans it stands out as a significant intellectual and artistic movement which did not supply a ready solution to the race problem, but which at least put forward basic questions on the place and role of African American culture in the dominant American culture – questions recurrently reformulated by every new generation stepping onto the complicated American scene. The identity dilemma which was at the core of the autobiographical writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and many others, also became a fundamental issue in the writings later of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin, and still stirs the minds of contemporary intellectuals, visual artists, writers and poets.

The Harlem Renaissance played an important cultural role not only during the years of its flowering, but its echoes can be heard in the statements of the generations that followed; many of its links reach down to the present. These achievements were absorbed by, and inspired, not only the American scene but also spread onto the black diaspora. Growing

racial awareness in Africa and the Caribbean, where it manifests itself in the Rastafarian movement and reggae music, is greatly indebted to Marcus Garvey and his Back-to-Africa ideology. The Renaissance achievements in literature, visual arts and music which were beginning to fuse into a racial experience during the Harlem Renaissance, may be viewed as the first signs of the emerging African American aesthetics which fully matured in the 1960s and 1970s to be continually reformulated in a wide range of artistic expressions.

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ANNEX

1. Meta Warrick Fuller, *Awakening of Ethiopia*, 1914.
2. Aaron Douglas, *Poster of the Kriwga Little Negro Theatre of Harlem, The Crisis,* 1926.
3. Aaron Douglas, *Rebirth*, published in *The New Negro*, ed. A. Locke, 1925.
4. Aaron Douglas, cover of the magazine *Fire!!*, 1926.
5. Cover of *The Survey Graphic,* 1925.
6. Two drawings by Winold Reiss, "Interpretations of Harlem Jazz", *The Survey Graphic,* 1925.
7. Winold Reiss, "Two Public School Teachers", *The Survey Graphic*, 1925.
8. Page from *The Survey Graphic,* Alain Locke "The Art of the Ancestors" 1925 (Photographs of sculptures from the Barnes Foundation).
9. Cover of *The Crisis*, 1924.
10. Cover of *The Crisis,* 1926.
11. Victor Talking Machine advertisement, *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, 1908.
12. Madam C.J. Walker's advertisement, *The Crisis*, 1926.
13. Madam C.J. Walker's advertisement, *The Crisis*, 1926.
14. Advertisement of Black Swan Records, *The Crisis*, 1921.
15. Advertisement of Black Swan Records, *The Crisis*, 1923.
16. Advertisement of Ajax Record Company, *The Chicago Defender*, 1924.
17. Advertisement of Ethel Waters and Black Swan Records, *The Chicago Defender*, 1921.
18. Poster for *The Jazz Singer*, 1927.
19. Handbill advertising of *The Jazz Singer*, 1928.

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Rozbudowa otwartych zasobów naukowych Repozytorium Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku,
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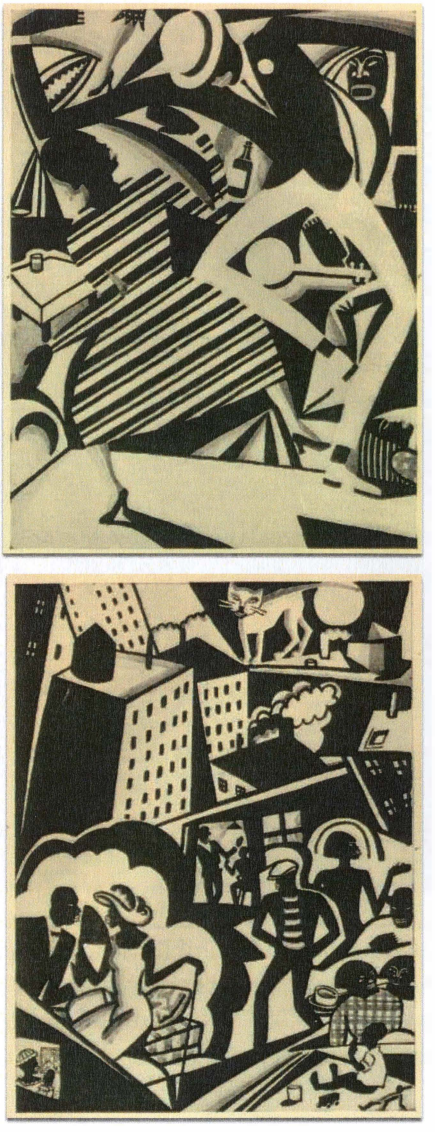

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7. Winold Reiss, "Two Public School Teachers", *The Survey Graphic*, 1925.

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The Art of the Ancestors

FROM one of the best extant collections of African art, that of the Barnes Foundation of Merion, Pennsylvania, come these exemplars of the art of the ancestors. Primitive African wood and bronze sculpture is now universally recognized as "a notable instance of plastic representation." Long after it was known as ethnological material, it was artistically "discovered" and has exerted an important influence upon modernist art, both in France and Germany. Attested influences are to be found in the work of Matisse, Picasso, Modigliani, Archipenko, Lipschitz, Lembruch and others, and in Paris centering around Paul Guillaume, one of its pioneer exponents, a coterie profoundly influenced by the aesthetic of this art has developed.

Masterful over its material, in a powerful simplicity of conception, design and effect, it is evidence of an aesthetic endowment of the highest order. The Negro in his American environment has turned predominantly to the arts of music, the dance, and poetry, an emphasis quite different from that of African culture. But beyond this as evidence of a fundamental artistic bent and versatility, there comes from the consideration of this ancient plastic art another modern and practical possibility and hope, that it may exert upon the artistic development of the American Negro the influence that it has already had upon modern European artists. It may very well be taken as the basis for a characteristic school of expression in the plastic and pictorial arts, and give to us again a renewed mastery of them, a mine of fresh motifs, and a lesson in simplicity and originality of expression. Surely this art, once known and appreciated, can scarcely have less influence upon the blood descendants than upon those who inherit by tradition only. And at the very least, even for those not especially interested in art, it should definitely establish the enlightening fact that the Negro is not a cultural foundling without an inheritance. A. L.

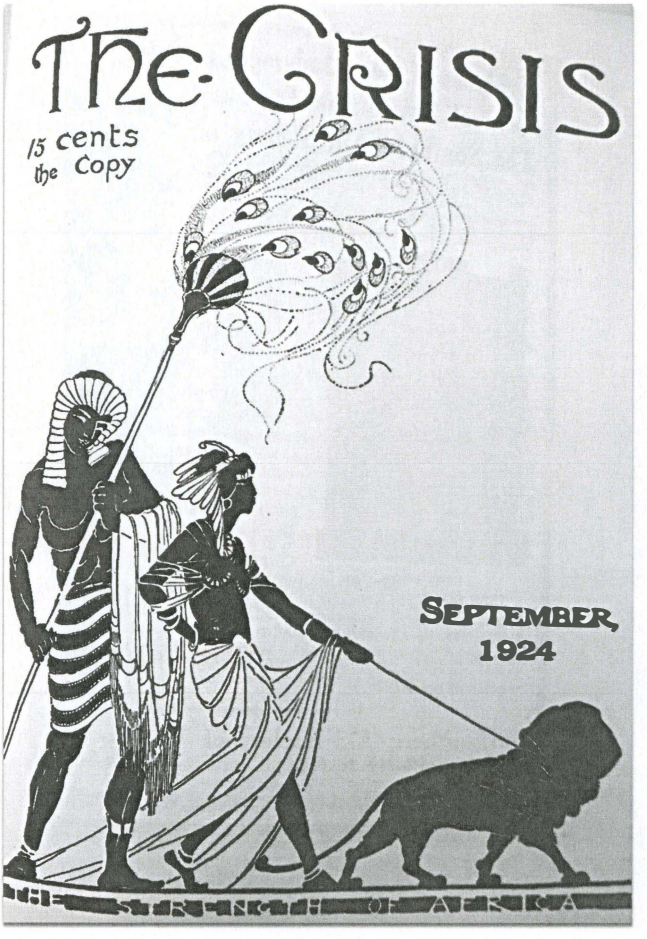
Dahomey (Bronze)

Soudan-Niger

Baoule

Yaboubo

8. Page from *The Survey Graphic,* Alain Locke "The Art of the Ancestors" 1925 (Photographs of sculptures from the Barnes Foundation).



9. Cover of *The Crisis*, 1924.

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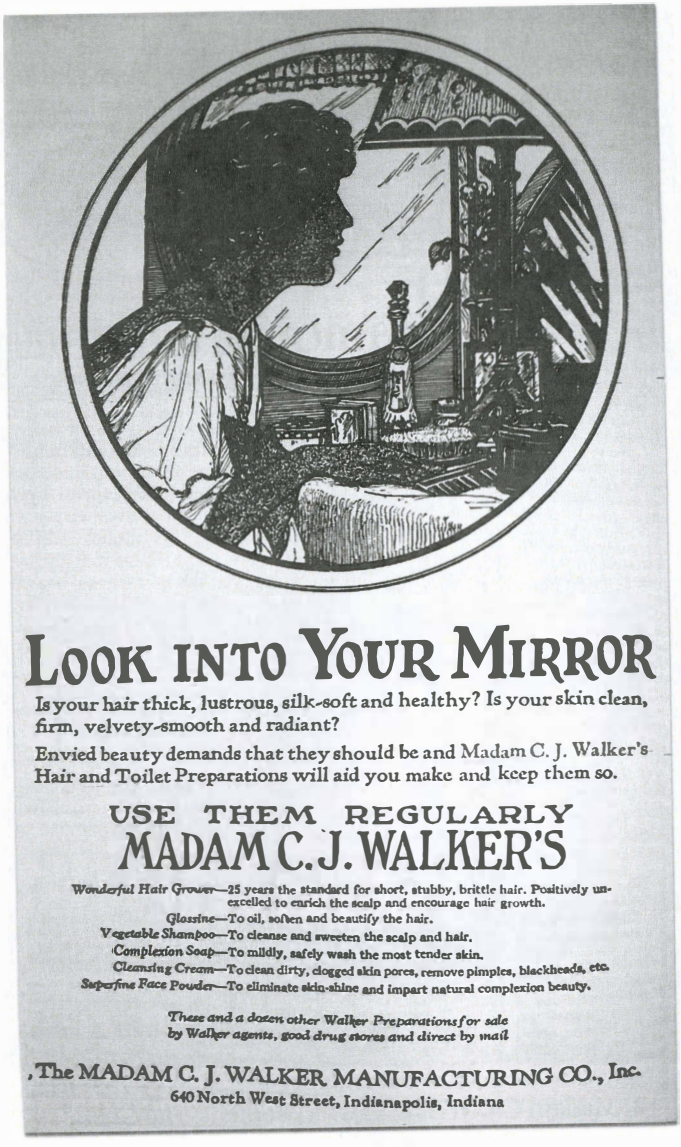
When you write, please mention the Cosmopolitan

11. Victor Talking Machine advertisement, *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, 1908.

12. Madam C.J. Walker's advertisement, *The Crisis*, 1926.



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14. Advertisement of Black Swan Records, *The Crisis*, 1921.

Madam The Chair

15. Advertisement of Black Swan Records, *The Crisis*, 1923.

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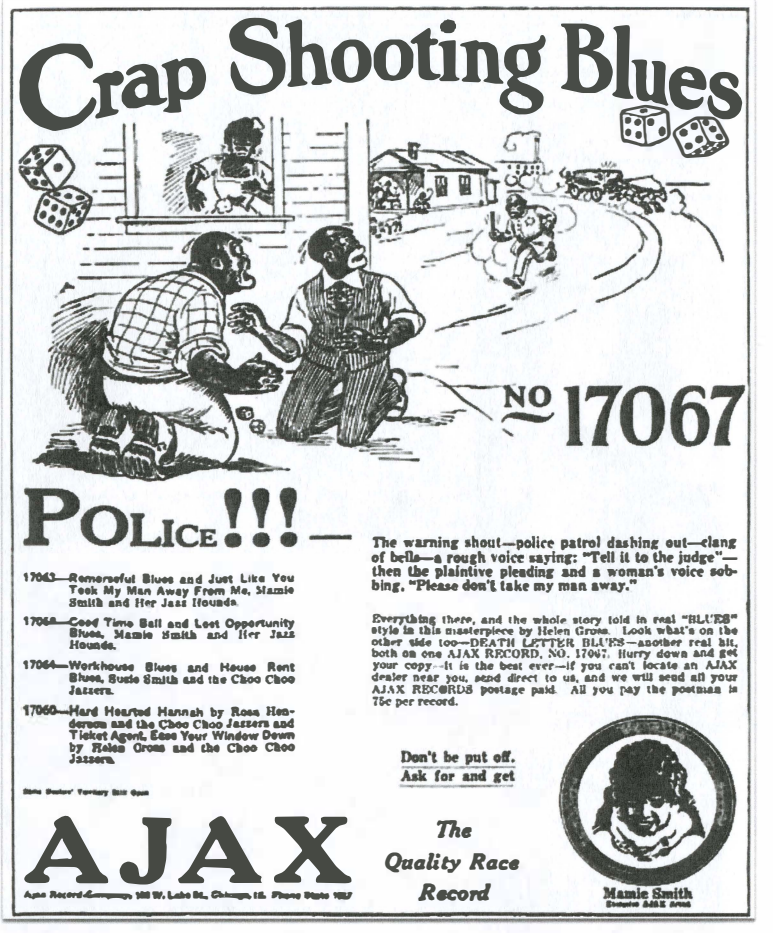

16. Advertisement of Ajax Record Company, *The Chicago Defender*, 1924.

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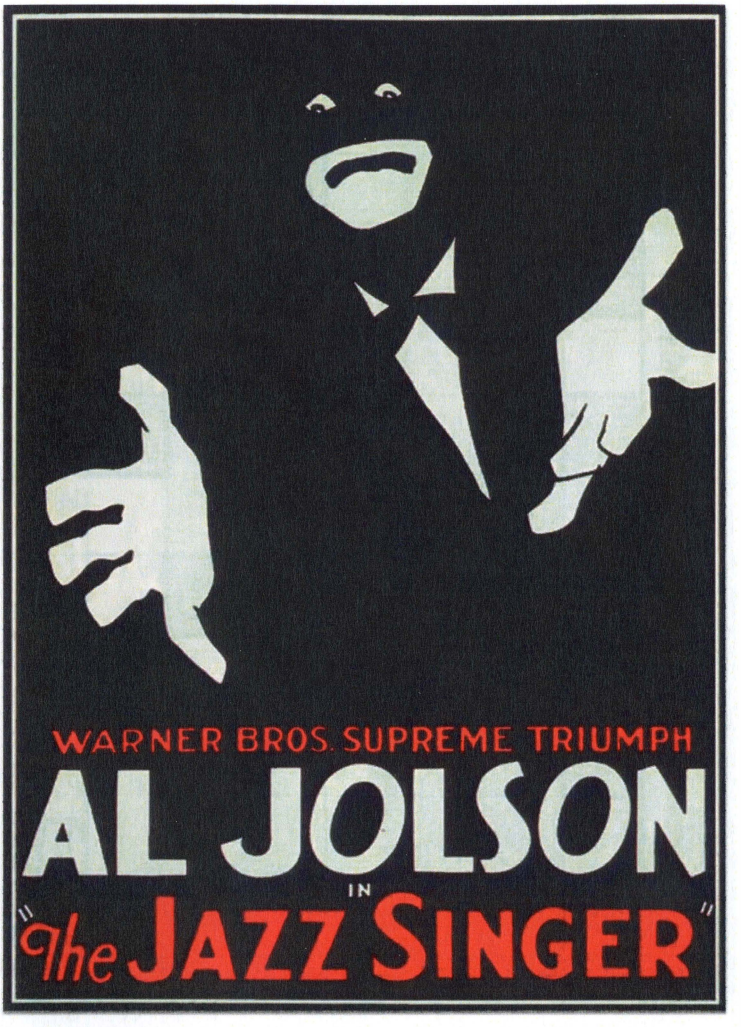

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Rozbudowa otwartych zasobów naukowych Repozytorium Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku,
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NOWY MURZYN WKRACZA NA SCENĘ: KULTUROWE WYMIARY RENESANSU HARLEMOWSKIEGO

Mimo że ludność murzyńska stanowiła część społeczności amerykańskiej od początków XVII wieku, bytowała ona poza głównym nurtem kultury kolonii brytyjskich, a następnie Stanów Zjednoczonych. Na początku XX wieku czarna grupa etniczna wykształciła pewne elementy świadomości przynależności do swojej rasy, czego rezultatem było rozbudzenie się życia kulturalnego i artystycznego określanego mianem Renesansu Harlemowskiego. Ta jakościowa transformacja była w znaczącej mierze skutkiem migracji Afroamerykanów z Południa Stanów Zjednoczonych w kierunku przemysłowych aglomeracji Północy. Wraz ze zmianą miejsca zamieszkania, tradycyjna społeczność wiejska przekształcała się, w sposób często bolesny – komplikowany nadrzędnością czynnika rasy – w masową społeczność wielkomiejską. Rozpoczął się skomplikowany proces integracji, a miejscem gdzie przejawiało się to najjaskrawiej była dzielnica Nowego Jorku – Harlem.

Niniejsza praca jest studium kultury afroamerykańskiej w okresie trzech pierwszych dziesięcioleci XX wieku, a w szczególności koncentruje się na wielowymiarowych kontekstach społecznych i artystycznych Renesansu Harlemowskiego. W pierwszych dwóch rozdziałach, wykorzystując głównie socjologiczne i historyczne narzędzia opisu i analizy, autor śledzi historię dzielnicy Harlem: motywacje migracji na północ, kolejne fale migracyjne, wpływ nowo przybyłych na inne grupy etniczne, wyłanianie się zintegrowanej społeczności afroamerykańskiej z jej społecznymi i kulturowymi instytucjami, i wreszcie skomplikowany proces formowania się świadomości rasowej.

Społeczny i intelektualny ferment towarzyszący procesom migracyjnym, a szczególnie aktywność ludzi tej miary co Du Bois, Locke i Garvey, zaczął przyciągać do Harlemu młodych ambitnych twórców z innych regionów kraju jak i z rejonu Karaibów. Dzielnica powoli stawała się symbolem kształtujących się wyobrażeń Nowego Murzyna, a Harlem okrzyknięto „Mekką" i „Kulturową Stolicą Czarnej Ameryki". Na scenę wstępowało drugie pokolenie – pokolenie wyrażające się nie aktywnością polityczną, społeczną lub intelektualną lecz artystyczną. Rozdziały

trzeci i czwarty poświęcone są manifestacjom artystycznym Renesansu Harlemowskiego w których autor koncentruje się na prześledzeniu procesu poszukiwań tożsamości przez afroamerykańskich artystów i intelektualistów. Ponadto dokonuje przeglądu poprzedzającej Renesans czarnej kultury mającej znaczący wpływ na rozwój koncepcji Nowego Murzyna, aby wreszcie poddać analizie dwie najważniejsze publikacje tego okresu: numer periodyku *The Survey Graphic* poświęcony w całości Harlemowi i antologię *The New Negro*.

Parafrazując spostrzeżenie Margaret Perry, można stwierdzić, że Renesans Harlemowski nie był egzotycznym kwiatem, który rozkwitł na pustyni, lecz ruchem kulturowym silnie uwarunkowanym przez siły wewnętrzne (żywotną i niezwykle witalną czarną tradycję ludową) jak i zewnętrze (otaczającą kulturę białych). Piąty rozdział pracy rozpatruje ten okres w szerszym kontekście kultury i gospodarki amerykańskiej, w szczególności odnosząc się do dominującej w owym okresie filozofii pragmatyzmu jak i do kontekstów rozwijającej się kultury masowej wraz z jej wszechobecnym komercjalizmem.

Murzyni, podobnie jak przedstawiciele innych grup etnicznych, pragnęli przekonać siebie i pozostałych członków społeczeństwa amerykańskiego, że są im równi pod względem możliwości twórczych i zdolni do tworzenia znaczących dzieł, manifestując tym samym swój udział w ogólnej kulturze narodowej. Ta siła kierowała młodych, ambitnych czarnych artystów lat dwudziestych XX wieku ku głównemu nurtowi kultury amerykańskiej, mimo silnie odczuwanej wewnętrznej potrzeby wyrażania rasowej tożsamości. Widoczne rozdwojenie tożsamości niosło ze sobą frustrację i często tworzyło barierę nie do pokonania przez większość artystów. Dylemat, który odciskał swój ślad w dziełach poprzedzających Renesans Harlemowski, mimo deklaracji o zerwaniu związków z poprzednią epoką, został nieuchronnie przeniesiony w lata dwudzieste XX wieku i przenikał także dzieła Nowego Murzyna. Podstawowej prawdy – że Afroamerykanie są i pozostaną członkami społeczeństwa amerykańskiego – nie mógł przezwyciężyć żaden, choćby najbardziej radykalny, manifest artystyczny. Amerykańskie ideały i marzenia – a ściślej wartości klasy średniej akceptowane przez większość Afroamerykanów – nie mogły stać się fundamentem sformułowania „czarnej estetyki". Reasumując, praca bada w jakim stopniu Afroamerykanie jako grupa podlegali procesom akulturacji i na ile udało im

się zachować w dominującej białej kulturze swoją rasową i kulturową tożsamość.

Mimo że wielu krytyków (w szczególności białych) postrzega Renesans Harlemowski jako zaledwie jeden z wielu komponentów kulturowej mozaiki Ameryki, w historii Afroamerykanów ten relatywnie krótki okres pozostaje epoką znaczącą zarówno artystycznie jak i intelektualnie. Nie udzielono wprawdzie definitywnych odpowiedzi na dręczące tę grupę pytania, lecz przynajmniej sprecyzowano stanowiska co do miejsca i roli kultury afroamerykańskiej w głównym nurcie dominującej kultury Ameryki. Należy stwierdzić, że Renesans Harlemowski odgrywał istotną rolę w czasie swego rozkwitu, a i do dziś pozostaje epoką odniesień młodych afroamerykańskich twórców poszukujących swojej tożsamości i form artystycznej ekspresji.

Pracę uzupełnia Aneks zawierający zbiór wizualnych reprezentacji afroamerykańskiej rzeźby, ilustracji i reklam prasowych.

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