Remembering the Harlem Renaissance

Edited by
Cary D. Wintz

The Harlem Renaissance 1920–1940

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Series Editor

Cary D. Wintz

Texas Southern University

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Contents of the Series

1. The Emergence of the Harlem Renaissance
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3. Black Writers Interpret the Harlem Renaissance
4. The Critics and the Harlem Renaissance
5. Remembering the Harlem Renaissance
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Series Introduction

The Harlem Renaissance was the most significant event in African American literature and culture in the twentieth century. While its most obvious manifestation was as a self-conscious literary movement, it touched almost every aspect of African American culture and intellectual life in the period from World War I to the Great Depression. Its impact redefined black music, theater, and the visual arts; it reflected a new more militant political/racial consciousness and racial pride that was associated with the term "New Negro"; it embodied the struggle for civil rights that had been reinvigorated by the founding of the N.A.A.C.P. and the ideology of W.E.B. Du Bois; and it was an aspect of the urbanization of African Americans that first attracted public attention in the early twentieth century with the black migration.

Within this context it is difficult to pinpoint the chronological limits of the Harlem Renaissance. Generally the consensus among scholars is that the Harlem Renaissance was an event of the 1920s, bounded on one side by World War I and the race riots of 1919 and on the other side by the 1929 stock market crash. Some, however, have either greatly expanded or sharply restricted the time span of the movement. In 1967 Abraham Chapman wrote that he saw elements of the Renaissance in Claude McKay's poetry of 1917 and even in W.E.B. Du Bois's poem, "The Song of the Smoke," which was published in 1899.[1] Nathan Huggins argued that the Renaissance began during the years between the beginning of World War I and 1920, when the center of power in the African American community shifted from Tuskegee to Harlem, and he saw the Harlem Riots of 1935 as the end of the movement.[2] John Hope Franklin, on the other hand, wrote as late as 1980 that the Harlem Renaissance extended into the 1960s; more recently he has modified that concept, and now speaks of a first and second phase of the Harlem Renaissance, with the latter phase extending into the 1940s and beyond; he also observes that African American literary creativity was not confined to Harlem, but spread across the entire country[3] Benjamin Brawley, the preeminent African American literary historian contemporary to the Harlem Renaissance, downplayed the concept of the "so-called Negro literary renaissance," which he felt was centered around the publication of Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* in 1926 and which he argued had no significant positive influence on African American literature.[4] Finally, Sterling Brown, one of the Harlem Renaissance poets and later a literary scholar, denied that Harlem was ever the center of a black literary movement.[5]

For the purposes of this collection the Harlem Renaissance is viewed primarily as a literary and intellectual movement. While theater, music, and the visual arts are looked at briefly, the focus is on African American literature, the assessment and criticism of this literature, and the relation of this literature to the political and social issues confronting African Americans in the early twentieth century.

The Harlem Renaissance was a self-conscious movement. That is, the writers and poets who participated in the movement were aware that they were involved in a literary movement and assumed at least partial responsibility for defining the parameters and aesthetics of the movement; black scholars and intellectuals were also aware of the Harlem Renaissance (even if they railed against it) and attempted to define the movement in terms both of literature and the political and social implications of that literature. While it was self-conscious, the Harlem Renaissance lacked a well-defined ideological or aesthetic center. It was more a community of writers, poets, critics, patrons, sponsors, and publishers than a structured and focused intellectual movement. It may be best conceptualized as an attitude or a state of mind—a feeling shared by a number of black writers and intellectuals who centered their activities in Harlem in the 1920s and early 1930s. The men and women who participated in the movement shared little but a consciousness that they were part of a common endeavor—a new awakening of African American culture and creativity; other than that what bound them together was a pride in their racial heritage, an essentially middle-class background, and the fact that all, to a greater or lesser degree, were connected to Harlem at the time that Harlem was emerging as the cultural, intellectual, and political center of black America.

Within this context, the Harlem Renaissance may best be conceptualized as a group of black writers and poets, orbiting erratically around a group of black intellectuals positioned in the N.A.A.C.P., the Urban League, and other African American political and educational institutions. These older intellectuals supported the movement, criticized it, attempted with varying success to define it, and served as liaison between the writers and the white publishers, patrons, and critics who dominated the business of literature in the United States in the 1920s. Complicating and enriching this mix was the fact that the lines between the various types of participants were not clearly drawn. James Weldon Johnson, for example, was a major promoter of the movement and a poet and novelist in his own right; Jessie Fauset, the most prolific novelist of the period, also served as literary editor of *The Crisis* and actively promoted the careers of young black writers; Countee Cullen, Sterling Brown, and Gwendolyn Bennett wrote regular literary columns, while Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes, and several other writers attempted to publish literary magazines; and Carl Van Vechten, a white promoter of African American literature, worked closely with the Knopfs to publish black literature, authored the best-known novel of Harlem life, and almost singlehandedly created the white fascination with Harlem and African American life that characterized the 1920s.

With this definition it becomes a little easier to define the parameters of the movement. The Harlem Renaissance began in the early 1920s, when Jean Toomer published *Cane* and African American writers and intellectuals began to realize that something new was happening in black literature. The movement extended well into the 1930s and included the works of Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes that were published in that decade. As long as they and other writers consciously identified with the Renaissance, the movement continued. It did not, however, encom-

pass the younger writers like Richard Wright, Frank Yerby, or Ralph Ellison, who emerged in the 1930s and 1940s. Like so much else, these boundaries are not exact. Antecedents to the Harlem Renaissance are clear in the first two decades of the twentieth century; likewise it is easy to place some of Langston Hughes's work from the 1940s and 1950s in the Renaissance.

The goal of this series is to reprint articles and other materials that will delineate a clear picture and foster an understanding of the Harlem Renaissance. Three types of materials are included in this series. First, and most important, are the critical and interpretive materials on the Harlem Renaissance written by participants in and contemporaries of the movement. These firsthand accounts will assist readers in understanding the efforts of Harlem Renaissance writers, poets, and critics to define the movement and enable readers to glimpse the dynamics of the movement. Second, this series includes a retrospective look at the Harlem Renaissance through the eyes of participants and contemporaries, as well as by writers and critics who were involved in post-Renaissance black literature. Finally, the series presents a sample of the scholarly analysis and criticism of the movement from the 1950s through the early 1990s. The selections come from articles, essays, columns, and reviews in periodical literature; selections from memoirs, novels, histories, and books of criticism; and essays from scholarly journals. These materials are supplemented by a selection of previously unpublished materials, including letters, speeches, and essays. Not included are the literary works of the Harlem Renaissance. There are a number of anthologies of African American literature that already serve that purpose well.

This series also reflects one of the major problems confronting the study of the Harlem Renaissance in particular and African American history in general—the difficulty of accessing needed source materials. For years the study of African American history was handicapped by the fact that many of its primary sources had not been preserved or were not made available to scholars. If they had been preserved, they were housed in scattered collections and often incompletely processed and catalogued. The sharp increase in interest in African American history during the last thirty years has improved this situation enormously, but problems still persist. This series is in part an effort to make material related to one aspect of African American history more available to students and scholars. Unfortunately, it also suffers from the problem that some resources, even when located, are not readily available. For this reason a number of items by James Weldon Johnson had to be excluded; likewise, a very valuable retrospective on the Harlem Renaissance that was published initially in *Black World* is missing here. In the future, perhaps these and other barriers that impede research in African American history will be lifted.

As in any project of this nature there are scores of persons who have provided valuable support and assistance; it is impossible to name them all here. I want to especially thank Leo Balk and Carole Puccino of Garland Publishing. Leo with patience and firmness guided this series to completion; Carole worked diligently to arrange permissions for the publication of the material that appears here. In addition, I want to thank Paul Finkelman, who played a key role in helping me conceptualize the scope and nature of this project. Wolde Michael Akalou, Howard Beeth, Merline Pitre, and my other colleagues and students at Texas Southern University provided valuable feedback as the project developed. I also had wonderful assistance from the staff at the libraries

I visited while collecting the material for this series. I want to especially acknowledge the staff at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, the Beinecke Library at Yale University, and the Heartman Collection at the Robert J. Terry Library at Texas Southern University; in addition, librarians at the Fondren Library at Rice University, the M.D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston, the Perry Casteñeda Library at the University of Texas at Austin, and the library at the University of Houston, Clear Lake helped me track down the copies of the more elusive journals and periodicals used for this collection. I also want to thank Kathy Henderson and and Barbara Smith-Labard, who helped arrange for permission to publish previously unpublished materials from the collections at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center. Finally, research for this project was supported in part by a Travel to Collections grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Cary D. Wintz

Notes

1. Abraham Chapman, "The Harlem Renaissance in Literary History," *CLA Journal* 11 (September 1967): 44–45.
2. Nathan Irvin Huggins, ed., *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 6–10.
3. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1980), 383; John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994), 379–80.
4. Benjamin Brawley, *The Negro Genius: A New Appraisal of the American Negro in Literature and the Fine Arts* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1937), 231–68.
5. Sterling Brown, "The New Negro in Literature (1925–1955)." In *The New Negro Thirty Years Afterward*, ed. by Rayford W. Logan, Eugene C. Holmes, and C. Franklin Edwards (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1955).

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Volume Introduction

The Harlem Renaissance faded away in the early 1930s. The onset of the Depression, the retirement, death, or dispersion from Harlem of key black writers and intellectuals, and the emergence of a new generation of black writers not connected to the Renaissance contributed to the decline of the movement. Some, like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston, continued to write throughout the 1930s, although Hughes shifted his base of operations from Harlem and focused more and more on economic and political themes. Others, like Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, and Nella Larsen, virtually stopped writing; Cullen became a schoolteacher and writer of children's stories, while Larsen and Toomer dropped from sight and faded into obscurity. Sterling Brown and Arna Bontemps continued to write, but more as literary historians and critics than as poets or novelists.

The African American intelligentsia that had supported the Renaissance also lost interest in the movement as they moved away. W.E.B. Du Bois left *The Crisis* and New York City in 1934; Charles S. Johnson left *Opportunity* and moved to Fisk in 1927; James Walden Johnson followed him in 1931. The impact of these departures on the Harlem Renaissance is best seen in the case of Charles S. Johnson and *Opportunity.* While the Urban League journal continued to promote African American literature (Sterling Brown continued to publish his literary column until September, 1935), the emphasis of the magazine shifted from literature and culture to economic development, and the journal suspended its literary prizes, instead establishing an award for the best true story of economic advancement.

A series of tragic events also signaled the end of the Renaissance. Death claimed Rudolph Fisher, Wallace Thurman, and James Walden Johnson before the end of the decade. Then in 1935 the image of Harlem as the black metropolis and center of a great literary and cultural Renaissance was shattered by a race riot. The riot was precipitated by the arrest of a young Puerto Rican for shoplifting on 135th Street on March 19, 1935; by the next morning, three African Americans were dead, 200 stores were smashed and burned, and $2,000,000 worth of property damage had been done. Worse, the riot exposed a truth that many had long ignored. Harlem was a ghetto and suffered from all of the social problems that typify ghettos—poverty, overcrowding, unemployment, exploitation, and racism. In the future, other African American writers would live and work in Harlem, but Harlem would never again be the center of a literary

movement; Harlem would never again be the African American symbol of progress and hope.

In the years following the Renaissance, participants (including writers, critics, and others associated with the movement) attempted to assess the movement in literary histories, essays, and memoirs. In addition, several African American publications produced retrospective studies of the Renaissance, using a combination of participants, literary critics, and historians. *Phylon* magazine in 1950 and *Black World* in 1970 each dedicated an entire issue to the Renaissance. In 1955, Howard University Press published a collection of essays, *The New Negro Thirty Years Afterward*. These efforts constituted the initial efforts to analyze the movement and assess its long-term impact on black culture.

This volume begins by reproducing selections from three books originally published in 1937, Benjamin Brawley's *The Negro Genius: A New Appraisal of the American Negro in Literature and in the Fine Arts* and two studies by Sterling A. Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction* and *Negro Poetry and Drama*. Next are selections from three retrospective studies of the Harlem Renaissance, the one published by *Phylon* in December, 1950; Howard University's study, *The New Negro Thirty Years Afterward*, published in 1955; and a book, *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered*, edited by Arna Bontemps in 1972. The *Phylon* number and the Howard University collection contain essays written primarily by participants in the Renaissance, or contemporaries of the Renaissance, while the Bontemps book contains essays written primarily by graduate students or other scholars who studied the literary movement under the Harlem Renaissance poet's supervision. Finally, this volume concludes with a selection of essays published either by participants in the Harlem Renaissance or post-Renaissance African American writers.

Remembering the Harlem Renaissance

VIII

PROTEST AND VINDICATION

W. E. BURGHARDT DUBOIS—WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE—JAMES WELDON JOHNSON—LESLIE PINCKNEY HILL—ALICE DUNBAR NELSON—GEORGIA DOUGLAS JOHNSON—WALTER WHITE—JESSIE FAUSET—COUNTEE CULLEN—ALAIN LOCKE

ONE day in August, 1905, there assembled at Niagara Falls a company of men whose influence on the literature of the Negro has been beyond all estimate. Forty years after the Civil War the reaction against Reconstruction was so complete, disfranchisement had been so successful, and lynching was so atrocious that to many earnest thinkers it seemed necessary to make a simple declaration of human rights. The twenty-nine men who now came together were representative of a far larger number of Negro people who were not only concerned about the immediate future but who also had misgivings about the larger import of the program of Booker T. Washington. They were not wealthy, and to more than one even the trip to Niagara meant a financial problem; but, bound by a noble zeal, they were embarked in what to them was a holy cause.

Their manifesto declared their aims to be freedom of speech and criticism, an unlettered and unsubsidized press, manhood suffrage, the abolition of caste distinctions based on race and color, the recognition of the principle of human brotherhood as a practical present creed, the recognition of the highest and best training as the monopoly of no race or class, a belief in the dignity of labor, and united effort to realize these ideals under wise and courageous leadership.

The meeting at Harper's Ferry the next year, amid scenes reminiscent of John Brown, took on the solemnity of a crusade. Already, however, lines of cleavage were appearing in the organization, and to some observers there seemed to be something a little too ingenuous about high-sounding pronouncements that pointed no way to realization. In the meeting in Boston in 1907 the lack of coherence was apparent, and the Niagara movement as such declined. Yet it had not failed. For one thing it had paved the way for a larger and stronger organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In addition it had fixed attention upon a teacher and scholar in Atlanta about whom it was felt more and more that he was needed on the national scene.

Already, in 1903, two years before the meeting at Niagara, W. E. Burghardt DuBois had published the book that made him famous, *The Souls of Black Folk.* This included a straightforward criticism of the leader at Tuskegee. The author said that in Negro

thought Mr. Washington represented the old attitude of adjustment and submission, his propaganda giving the impression that the South was justified in its attitude toward the Negro and that the prime cause of the Negro's failure to rise more quickly was his wrong education in the past. It was maintained that Mr. Washington had accepted even if he had not directly favored the disfranchisement of the Negro, the legal creation of a status of civil inferiority, and the withdrawal of aid from institutions of higher learning. It was necessary accordingly to get at the facts, to study Negro housing and schooling and crime, to see what justification, if any, the South had for its position, and, not least, to see that facts favorable to the black man but previously suppressed were brought to the light of day.

This led to study of the history of the Negro and to interest in sociology, in both of which fields Dr. DuBois had become distinguished. Already he was editing from year to year the Atlanta University Studies of Negro Problems, and he was soon to become editor of the *Crisis,* the organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He may not have intended it, but in taking the position that he did he practically founded a school of writers, one given to protest against the discrimination practiced upon the Negro, and to vindication of the black man's right to the full heritage of American citizenship. This is not to say that everyone mentioned in

this chapter was directly under his influence; five or six years previously Alice Dunbar Nelson had published a volume of Creole stories, and Mr. Braithwaite was already making a reputation in another field. At the same time it is worthy of note that several of those now under consideration have had official connection either with the *Crisis* or the National Association, and that all have either contributed to the *Crisis* or otherwise had close touch with it.

The matter may be stated differently. It will be observed as we proceed that those now under consideration have moved in the more favored walks of life. They are the editors, the teachers, the school officials, the executive secretaries. Some have done excellent work in creative vein, but for the most part there is an air of propaganda about their work, and they are generally self-conscious. As for the Negro, they are the defenders, the apologists. The writers studied in the chapter to follow, the realists, those closer to the proletariat, would say that these represent the bourgeoisie. Yet let no one discount their achievement. At its best it reaches the highest point attained by the literature of the Negro in America and is a contribution to that of the nation.

Here too, if we were considering literature in the large, we should have to include the work of some other men known for the distinctive quality of their effort, especially Robert R. Moton, Carter G. Woodson, and Charles S. Johnson. Dr. Moton, who has

now retired after twenty years as president of Tuskegee Institute, is the author of an autobiography, *Finding a Way Out,* and *What the Negro Thinks.* Dr. Woodson, editor of the *Journal of Negro History,* has written *The Negro Church, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861,* and numerous other works. Mr. Johnson, after several years as editor of *Opportunity,* is now a professor in Fisk University and the author of *The Negro in American Civilization* and the forthcoming *The Negro College Graduate.*

Distinguished also are some speakers on the public platform. Just now we might note Reverdy C. Ransom, Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, and Mary McLeod Bethune, each of whom in some way eminently represents the Negro Genius. Dr. Ransom, a bishop of the A. M. E. Church, has exhibited at times an exalted eloquence that reminds one of the old orators. Among his addresses are eulogies of William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and John Brown. "What kind of Negroes do the American people want?" he asks in the first of these. "Do they want a voteless Negro in a republic founded upon universal suffrage? Do they want a Negro who shall not be permitted to participate in the government which he must support with his treasure and defend with his blood? Do they want a Negro who shall consent to be set apart as forming a distinct industrial class, permitted to rise no higher than the level of serfs or peasants? Do they want a Negro who shall accept an inferior social

Photograph by A. N. Scurlock

W. E. BURGHARDT DU BOIS

position, not as a degradation, but as the just operation of the laws of caste based on color? What kind of Negro do the American people want? Taught by the Declaration of Independence, sustained by the Constitution of the United States, this nation can no more resist the advancing tread of the hosts of the oncoming blacks than it can bind the stars or halt the resistless motion of the tide." Dr. Johnson, who in 1926 became president of Howard University, attracted national attention by a speech at the Harvard Commencement in 1922 on "The Faith of the American Negro." Since then on numberless occasions he has seemed almost to weave a spell over his audience, his speaking being practical but ever directed toward a spiritual end. Mrs. Bethune has served as president of Bethune-Cookman College, as president of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, and very recently as director of work for the Negro in the National Youth Administration. There is a warm human appeal in her addresses, something that keeps in mind the destiny of her people and the country, and that awakens in all who listen the angels of their better nature.

W. E. BURGHARDT DUBOIS

William Edward Burghardt DuBois was born at Great Barrington, Massachusetts, February 23, 1868. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts at Fisk University in 1888, the same degree at Harvard in

1890, that of Master of Arts at Harvard in 1891, and, after a season of study at the University of Berlin, that of Doctor of Philosophy at Harvard in 1895, his thesis being *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America.* Dr. DuBois taught for a brief period at Wilberforce University, and for a time was an assistant and fellow in sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, producing in 1899 his study, *The Philadelphia Negro.* In 1896 he accepted the professorship of history and economics at the old Atlanta University. For a number of years he was the moving spirit of the Atlanta Conference, and by the Studies of Negro Problems which he edited in this connection became known as one of the foremost sociologists of the day. In 1910 he left Atlanta to go to New York as director of publicity and research for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. At the close of the World War he organized the Pan-African Congress, the first meeting being held in Paris. After twenty-four years of service in New York, he went in 1934 to the reorganized Atlanta University to assist in placing that institution on a graduate basis. About the same time he became chairman of the board of editors of a proposed *Encyclopedia of the Negro.* In 1920 he was awarded the Spingarn Medal.

Aside from his more technical studies Dr. DuBois has written seven books that must be considered in a review of Negro literature. Of these one is a biog-

raphy, two are novels, two are collections of essays and sketches, and two are in the nature of apologetics, each defending a definite thesis. In 1909 appeared *John Brown,* a contribution to the series of American Crisis Biographies. The subject was one well adapted to treatment at the hands of the author, and in the last chapter, "The Legacy of John Brown," he showed that his hero had a message for twentieth century America as well as for his own day, this: "The cost of liberty is less than the price of repression."

The two novels not unnaturally reflect the public work of the writer. *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911) has three main themes: the economic position of the Negro agricultural laborer, the subsidizing of a certain kind of school, and Negro life and society in the city of Washington. The tone is frequently one of satire, the chief characters are hardly plausibly developed, and in general the work offered little that could add to the reputation of the author. Nearly two decades later appeared *Dark Princess* (1928), a production more intense even if not better organized. In this the real theme is the furious conflict in the hearts of Negro men. The book is episodic and kaleidoscopic, but certain characters stand out clearly. Matthew Towns passes through tragedy to a deeper understanding of his people. "We come out of the depths," he says, "the blood and mud of battle. And from just those depths, I take it, came most of the things worth while in this old world." Then there is

Perigua, the revolutionist, who blows himself up with the dynamite intended for others; also Sara Andrews, the woman of the world, who cares nothing for those less fortunate, satisfied if she alone is smug and comfortable.

The two collections of essays give the author's reaction to the seething cauldron in which he has lived most of his life. In 1903 fourteen papers, some of which had appeared in such magazines as the *Atlantic* and the *World's Work*, were brought together in a volume entitled *The Souls of Black Folk.* The style of the book as well as its content at once commanded attention. "The Dawn of Freedom" is a study of the Freedmen's Bureau; "The Meaning of Progress" is a story of life in Tennessee, told by one who has been the country schoolmaster; "The Training of Black Men" is a plea for liberally educated leadership, while "The Quest of the Golden Fleece," like one or two related essays, portrays conditions in the "black belt." The production as a whole is a powerful plea for justice; nor can a note of pessimism running through it detract from its literary quality. Not quite so successful was the later collection, *Darkwater* (1920). This was written at white heat just at the close of the war and the tone is somewhat too strident for the most felicitous effect. The book has the interest, however, of including a introductory autobiographical sketch.

Different was *The Gift of Black Folk* (1924), pro-

jected as a contribution to a series advanced by the Knights of Columbus largely to offset the propaganda of the KuKlux Klan. The book was hastily done, but in its optimistic temper, its catholicity of interest, and its constructive spirit, it was a pleasant surprise. The central chapter, "The Reconstruction of Freedom," shows "how the black fugitive, soldier, and freedman after the Civil War helped to restore the Union, establish public schools, enfranchise the poor white, and initiate industrial democracy in America." "The North, being unable to free the slave, let him try to free himself. And he did, and this was his greatest gift to the nation." The main idea of the book was carried further in *Black Reconstruction* (1935). This large work attempted nothing less than the changing of the conventional view of the period with which it dealt, and, in spite of some shortcomings in method, was in the main successful. It showed that the decade immediately after the Civil War had been given such distorted treatment by supposedly reputable universities and so exploited by men of journalistic temper, that truth cried aloud for a hearing. "The chief witness in Reconstruction, the emancipated slave himself, has been almost barred from court. His written Reconstruction record has been largely destroyed and nearly always neglected." Many of the chapters in the book are repetitious and might have been more firmly organized, but the last one, "The Propaganda of History," is brilliant in its

exposure of the fallacies of popular authors. In general it is made clear that "we have been cajoling and flattering the South and slurring the North, because the South is determined to re-write the history of slavery and the North is not interested in history but wealth."

This book has its interest and the merit of a trail-blazer. Even after the lapse of years, however, it appears that, from the strictly literary standpoint, *The Souls of Black Folk* remains the author's best work. This it is that shows his style at its best. That style is marked by all the arts of rhetoric—strong antithesis, frequent allusion, liquid and alliterative effects, and poetic suggestiveness. The color-line is the "Veil," the familiar melodies the "Sorrow Songs." The following paragraphs may be considered representative:

> I have seen a land right merry with the sun, where children sing, and rolling hills lie like passioned women wanton with harvest. And there in the King's Highway sat and sits a figure veiled and bowed, by which the traveler's footsteps hasten as they go. On the tainted air broods fear. Three centuries' thought has been the raising and unveiling of that bowed human heart, and now behold a century new for the duty and the deed. The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.
>
> . . . . .
>
> I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color-line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded

halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they all come graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia? Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pisgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?

. . . . .

My journey was done, and behind me lay hill and dale, and Life and Death. How shall man measure Progress there where the dark-faced Josie lies? How many heartfuls of sorrow shall balance a bushel of wheat? How hard a thing is life to the lowly, and yet how human and real! And all this life and love and strife and failure—is it the twilight of nightfall or the flush of some faint-dawning day?

Thus sadly musing, I rode to Nashville in the Jim Crow car.

W. E. Burghardt DuBois combines in unusual degree the temper of the scholar and the romanticism of the Negro race. Forced by the pressure of circumstance, gradually he was led from the retreat of the scholar into the arena of social struggle. He has passed through storms; a "Close Ranks" editorial in the *Crisis* at the time of the war aroused protest in some quarters, and some years later a seeming willingness to accept the principle of segregation, in part at

least, led to new discussion. Yet for more than three decades now he has striven to interpret the desires and aspirations of his people. He gave to them a new sense of literary values and scholarly achievement, and, so doing, he became an inspiration to many younger men.

WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE

The work of William Stanley Braithwaite belongs not so much to Negro literature as to American literature in the large. With singleness of purpose he has given himself to books and the book world, and it is by this devotion that he has won the success he has achieved.

Born in Boston December 6, 1878, Mr. Braithwaite was largely self-educated. In 1904 he published a small volume of poems entitled *Lyrics of Life and Love*. This was followed four years later by *The House of Falling Leaves*. Thereafter he gave little time to his own verse, becoming more and more distinguished as a critic of American poetry. For several years he was a valued contributor to the *Boston Evening Transcript*, and he has had verse or critical essays in the *Forum*, the *Century*, *Scribner's*, and the *Atlantic*. He published the *Anthology of Magazine Verse* for each year from 1913 to 1929, and also collected and edited *The Golden Treasury of Magazine Verse*, *The Book of Elizabethan Verse*, *The Book of Georgian Verse*, and *The Book of Restoration Verse*.

In 1917 he brought together in a volume, *The Poetic Year,* a special series of articles which he had contributed to the *Transcript.* The aim of this was, in the form of conversations among a small group of friends, to whom fanciful and suggestive Greek names had been given, to discuss the poetry that had appeared in 1916. After the war appeared *Victory: Celebrated by Thirty-eight American Poets* and *The Story of the Great War* for young people. There were also other anthologies. In 1934 Mr. Braithwaite was called to the new Atlanta University, his special field being that of writing in creative vein. Already, in 1918, he had received the Spingarn Medal.

Lyrics of Life and Love brought together the best of the poet's early work. The little book contains eighty pages, and no one of the lyrics takes up more than two pages, twenty being just eight lines in length. This appearance of fragility, however, is a little deceptive. While Keats and Shelley are constantly present as the models in technique, the yearning of more than one lyric reflects the deeper romantic temper. The bravado and the tenderness of the old poets are in the two Christmas pieces, "Holly Berry and Mistletoe" and "Yule-Song: A Memory."

> December comes, snows come,
>   Comes the wintry weather;
> Faces from away come—
>   Hearts must be together.

Down the stair-steps of the hours
Yule leaps the hills and towers—
Fill the bowl and hang the holly,
Let the times be jolly.

"The Watchers" and the lines "To Dante Gabriel Rossetti" show the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites, the former also suggesting Kingsley; and the poet's handling of the sonnet may be seen from the following:

My thoughts go marching like an armed host
Out of the city of silence, guns and cars;
Troop after troop across my dreams they post
To the invasion of the wind and stars.
O brave array of youth's untamed desire!
With thy bold, dauntless captain Hope to lead
His raw recruits to Fate's opposing fire,
And up the walls of Circumstance to bleed.
How fares the expedition in the end?
When this my heart shall have old age for king
And to the wars no further troop can send,
What final message will the arm'stice bring?
The host gone forth in youth the world to meet,
In age returns—in victory or defeat?

After a year or two Mr. Braithwaite began to strike a new note of mysticism in his verse, and through this to influence the poetry of his day. It was first observed in "Sandy Star," that appeared in the *Atlantic* (July, 1909). It was also in "The Mystery" (or

"The Way," as the poet prefers to call it) in *Scribner's* (October, 1915):

> He could not tell the way he came
>   Because his chart was lost:
> Yet all his way was paved with flame
>   From the bourne he crossed.
>
> He did not know the way to go,
>   Because he had no map:
> He followed where the winds blow,—
>   And the April sap.
>
> He never knew upon his brow
>   The secret that he bore—
> And laughs away the mystery now
>   The dark's at his door.

It would take an independent study to do justice to the critical introductions placed by Mr. Braithwaite in the successive issues of the *Anthology of Magazine Verse*. The books increased in size from the thin collection of eighty-seven pages for 1913 to the stout Sesqui-Centennial volume for 1926 running to nearly a thousand pages and containing a number of special articles. Clement Wood, writing in *Hunters of Heaven*, said of the editor: "He may be over-catholic in his inclusions, but he has shifted his emphasis from echoes to real poetry. He is an admirable anthologist, and his books are indispensable to a grasp of modern poetry." The *Transcript* said

(November 30, 1915), after a special reception had been accorded the critic in New York by the authors of America: "He has helped poetry to readers as well as to poets. One is guilty of no extravagance in saying that the poets we have—and they may take their place with their peers in any country—and the gathering deference we pay them, are created largely out of the stubborn, self-effacing enthusiasm of this one man. In a sense their distinction is his own."

The method of the critic has been to find out about any author's work that quality which is original or enduring, and so he has endeavored to do in occasional articles about Negro writers in the *Crisis* or *Opportunity*. So generous has he been and so catholic his taste that a reader once told him there was too much perfume in his ink. He holds, however, that few are likely to be injured by a little praise, while it would be fatal not to recognize even one deserving spirit. Thus one young writer after another he has encouraged rather than chastened, and all he has beckoned to the nobler heights of song.

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

With a varied career as teacher, author, and publicist, James Weldon Johnson has been increasingly prominent in the life of the country. Born in Jacksonville, Florida, June 17, 1871, he was educated in the public schools of that city and at the old Atlanta University; later he studied for three years at Colum-

bia; and Talladega and Howard have since conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Letters. For seven years after his graduation in Atlanta (1894) Mr. Johnson was principal of the Stanton Public School in Jacksonville, and, with the tact that was later to prove one of his outstanding qualities, gradually raised the status of an institution doing only grammar grade work to that of a full-fledged high school. Meanwhile he studied law, being admitted to the bar in Florida in 1897. While still in Jacksonville also, he began with his brother, Rosamond Johnson, that collaboration in song-making which within the next few years was to prove so successful. In 1900 one wrote the words and the other the music for "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," now widely known as the Negro National Anthem. This was originally composed for a group of school-children preparing for a Lincoln's birthday exercise, but its noble words and swelling music made it deservedly popular, and it is now regularly sung in Negro schools and colleges throughout the country. In 1901 the brothers launched forth upon the great adventure of their lives, and removed to New York. It was the day of Ernest Hogan, and Williams and Walker in musical comedy; and the Cole and Johnson company became one of the best known of the decade. The writing of the words for popular songs was fairly lucrative, but after a while it palled upon a man with aspirations for higher

things, and in 1906 Mr. Johnson accepted the post of United States consul to Puerto Cabello in Venezuela. Here he remained until 1909, when he was transferred to Corinto, Nicaragua, where he served until 1912. As a consul he saw three revolutions, one in Venezuela and two in Nicaragua, and in general his work for the Government gave him valuable experience. Returning home he found a new life awaiting him, first as field secretary and then as secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In 1915 he made for the Metropolitan Opera the English translation of the Spanish opera *Goyescas,* by Granados and Periquet; and the next year, while connected with the *New York Age,* won a third prize of two hundred dollars in a competition opened by the *Public Ledger,* of Philadelphia, to editorial writers throughout the country. The success of the poem, "The Young Warrior," has been mentioned in connection with the work of Mr. Burleigh, who wrote the music. In 1920 Mr. Johnson went to Hayti to investigate conditions under the American occupation; in 1925 he was awarded the Spingarn Medal; and five years later he became Adam K. Spence professor of creative literature at Fisk University. Since 1934 he has also given each year a series of lectures at New York University.

Mr. Johnson's first formal publication, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* was published anony-

mously in 1912, but in 1927 was given new issue over the author's name. The method of the book is primarily that of fiction, but the writer draws upon his own experience as freely as he chooses. So doing he is able to interpret without any restriction the life of which he has been a part. In the career of the central figure the book touches upon practically every phase of the race question. While it is as fresh to-day as when it was written, it also shows that it anticipated the temper we have had in literature and music since the war. At the close the character of whom we have spoken decides, after many misgivings, to remain beyond the color-line. He is not satisfied, however. Attending a meeting in Carnegie Hall, he hears Booker T. Washington speak and the Hampton students sing, and feels that he too, had he not been small and selfish, might have made his life great, and been part of the making of a people's history.

In 1917 appeared *Fifty Years and Other Poems,* which also came out some years later in a new edition and with a new publisher. The title piece in noble stanzas celebrates the anniversary of freedom, with a call to courage for the future; and there is a section of "Jingles and Croons" including the threnody, "Sence You Went Away." Chief distinction attaches to such pieces as had appeared in the *Century Magazine,* one of the best being that in which the poet praises the unknown makers of the Negro melodies.

O black and unknown bards of long ago,
  How came your lips to touch the sacred fire?
How, in your darkness, did you come to know
  The power and beauty of the minstrel's lyre?
Who first from 'midst his bonds lifted his eyes?
  Who first from out the still watch, lone and long,
Feeling the ancient faith of prophets rise
  Within his dark-kept soul, burst into song?

There is a wide, wide wonder in it all,
  That from degraded rest and servile toil,
The fiery spirit of the seer should call
  These simple children of the sun and soil.
O black singers, gone, forgot, unfamed,
  You—you alone, of all the long, long line
Of those who've sung untaught, unknown, unnamed,
  Have stretched out upward, seeking the divine.

You sang not deeds of heroes or of kings:
  No chant of bloody war, nor exulting pæan
Of arms-won triumphs; but your humble strings
  You touched in chords with music empyrean.
You sang far better than you knew, the songs
  That for your listeners' hungry hearts sufficed
Still live—but more than this to you belongs:
  You sang a race from wood and stone to Christ.

In 1922 Mr. Johnson brought out an anthology, *The Book of American Negro Poetry,* with an Introduction that was a notable contribution to the literature of the subject; and a revised edition appeared in

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

1931. In *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927) the author endeavored to catch something of the rhythm and imagery of the older Negro preachers; and such subjects as "The Creation," "Noah Built the Ark," and "The Judgment Day" were singularly adapted to the purpose. About the same time appeared *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* and *The Second Book of American Negro Spirituals,* with scholarly introductions by James Weldon Johnson and with the music transcribed or arranged by Rosamond Johnson.

Then God raised His arm and He waved His hand*
Over the sea and over the land,
And He said: Bring forth! Bring forth!
And quicker than God could drop His hand,
Fishes and fowls
And beasts and birds
Swam the rivers and the seas,
Roamed the forests and the woods,
And split the air with their wings.
And God said: That's good!

Then God walked around,
And God looked around
On all that He had made.
He looked at His sun,
And He looked at His moon,
And He looked at His little stars;

* From *God's Trombones*, by James Weldon Johnson. Copyright, 1927, by The Viking Press, Inc., New York, N. Y.

He looked on His world
With all its living things,
And God said: I'm lonely still.

Then God sat down—
On the side of a hill where He could think;
By a deep, wide river He sat down;
With His head in His hands,
God thought and thought,
Till He thought: I'll make me a man!

Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled Him down;
And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of His hand;
This Great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till He shaped it in His own image;

Then into it He blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

Black Manhattan (1930) had as its prime purpose the writing of "the record of the Negro's progress on the New York stage, from the attempted classical performances of the African Company, at the corner

of Bleecker and Mercer Streets in 1821, down to *The Green Pastures* in 1930," but reaches even beyond the metropolis to a consideration of some of the tides in the life of the country at large. *Saint Peter Relates an Incident of the Resurrection Day* (1930), an ironic poem on the Unknown Soldier, was written, as the author says, "while meditating upon Heaven and Hell and Democracy and War and America and the Negro Gold Star Mothers." It was first published in a limited edition for private distribution only, but later there was a larger issue with some other poems. A formal autobiographical work, *Along this Way* (1933), had much attention lavished upon it, yet somehow failed to impress the discerning as one of the author's best books. Perhaps the reason, as some suggested, is that the writer is unduly self-conscious, with a glance too frequently directed at the reader; perhaps it is that at times there seems to be even a suggestion of condescension. Not even these points, however, can alter the fact that the book is the record of a full and varied life, crowded with matter not to be found elsewhere. One comes upon a first-hand sketch of Paul Laurence Dunbar, upon an account of the meeting of kindred spirits at the Marshall in New York, and even of clashes between some of those of sensitive temper. There are sidelights on Woodrow Wilson, Warren G. Harding, Florenz Ziegfeld, H. L. Mencken, Marie Dressler, Madame Schumann-Heink, and a host of other notables. On page after page

there is a glimpse of a fresh scene or the thrill of a new adventure.

Yet, when all is said, one remembers best the early song of aspiration,

Lift ev'ry voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us;
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

LESLIE PINCKNEY HILL

Leslie Pinckney Hill, born in Lynchburg, Virginia, May 14, 1880, attended a high school in East Orange, New Jersey, and was graduated at Harvard in 1903, receiving the Master's degree the next year. He taught for three years at Tuskegee, was then for six years principal of the Manassas Industrial School, Manassas, Virginia, and in 1913 entered upon his career as head of the Cheyney Training School for Teachers, which under his administration has ceased to be a private institution and become one of the standard normal schools of the state of Pennsylvania. Mr. Hill is the author of a collection of poems, *The*

Wings of Oppression (1921), and *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1928), a play in five acts, in blank verse with occasional prose and lyrical passages. In his writing he is almost always conscious of his mission as a schoolmaster and mindful of the uncertain destiny of those before him. His verse may not reveal the greatest inspiration or flexibility, but sometimes, as in the sonnet below, his earnest feeling is embodied in memorable expression.

"So Quietly"

(News item from the *New York Times* on the lynching of a Negro at Smithville, Ga., December 21, 1919: "The train was boarded so quietly . . . members of the train crew did not know that the mob had seized the Negro until informed by the prisoner's guard after the train had left the town. . . . A coroner's inquest held immediately returned the verdict that West came to his death at the hands of unidentified men.")

So quietly they stole upon their prey
And dragged him out to death, so without flaw
Their black design, that they to whom the law
Gave him in keeping, in the broad, bright day,
Were not aware when he was snatched away;
And when the people, with a shrinking awe,
The horror of that mangled body saw,
"By unknown hands!" was all that they could say.
So, too, my country, stealeth on apace
The soul-blight of a nation. Not with drums
Or trumpet blare is that corruption sown,
But quietly—now in the open face
Of day, now in the dark—and when it comes,
Stern truth will never write, "By hands unknown."

ALICE DUNBAR NELSON

Alice Ruth Moore (1875-1935) was born in New Orleans and educated in the schools of that city, with later courses at Columbia, Cornell, the University of Pennsylvania, and the School of Industrial Art in Philadelphia. In 1898 she was married to Paul Laurence Dunbar, and ten years after his death in 1906, to Robert J. Nelson, of Philadelphia.

The mature life of this writer was that of a busy teacher and lecturer as well as author. She served for three years in New Orleans and for a term in Brooklyn before her first marriage, and in 1914 began her work at the Howard High School in Wilmington, Delaware. For several summers also she taught at the State College in Dover and other institutions. She was one of the founders of the White Rose Industrial Home in New York, and the Industrial School for Colored Girls in Delaware. Aside from her stories and poems she edited *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence* (1913) and *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer* (1920), this last containing "the best prose and poetic selections by and about the Negro race."

An early collection, *Violets, and Other Tales,* was privately issued in 1895, but was completely superseded by *The Goodness of St. Rocque, and Other Stories,* published by Dodd, Mead and Company in 1899. About this book, with its quaint charm and gentle sentiment, there is something of the air of

yesterday. The style is that of a writer still young—high-flown and generous in its use of adjectives. In one place we read: "There was no moon to-night, but the sky glittered and scintillated with myriad stars, brighter than you can ever see farther North, and the great waves that the Gulf breeze tossed up in restless profusion gleamed with the white fire of phosphorescent flame." Yet even such writing as this seems not wholly unadapated to the Creole life described and the little stories of love and pique and jealousy. The title-piece shows that St. Rocque is a good saint who will grant one's wishes if one will but be sure not to fail to make his novenas with a clean heart. "The Fisherman of Pass Christian" has as its central figure one who was not really a fisherman after all. Perhaps better than the other stories, certainly more tender, is "M'sieu Fortier's Violin," which tells of an old musician fallen on evil days to whom the would-be purchaser of his beloved instrument is generous in the end. " 'Minesse,' he said one day to the white cat,—he told all his troubles to her; it was of no use to talk to Ma'am Jeanne, she was too deaf to understand,—'Minesse, we are gettin' po'. You' père git h'old, an' hees han's dey go no mo' rapidement, an' dere be no mo' soirées dese day. Minesse, eef la saison don' hurry up, we shall eat ver' lil' meat."

The poems of Alice Dunbar Nelson have never been collected but they appeared in various maga-

zines and frequently reached distinction. One of the best is an early sonnet:

I had not thought of violets of late,
The wild, shy kind that spring beneath your feet
In wistful April days, when lovers mate
And wander through the fields in raptures sweet.
The thoughts of violets meant florists' shops,
And bows and pins, and perfumed papers fine;
And garish lights, and mincing little fops,
And cabarets and songs, and deadening wine.
So far from sweet real things my thoughts had strayed,
I had forget wide fields and clear brown streams;
The perfect loveliness that God has made—
Wild violets shy and Heaven-mounting dreams
And now unwittingly, you've made me dream
Of violets, and my soul's forgotten gleam.

In very different temper is such a poem as "I Sit and Sew," suggested by the war.

I sit and sew—a useless task it seems,
My hands grown tired, my head weighed down with dreams—
The panoply of war, the martial tread of men,
Grim-faced, stern-eyed, gazing beyond the ken
Of lesser souls, whose eyes have not seen Death,
Nor learned to hold their lives but as a breath—
But—I must sit and sew.

I sit and sew—my heart aches with desire—
That pageant terrible, that fiercely pouring fire

On wasted fields, and writhing grotesque things
Once men. My soul in pity flings
Appealing cries, yearning only to go
There in that holocaust of hell, those fields of woe—
But—I must sit and sew.

The little useless seam, the idle patch;
Why dream I here beneath my homely thatch,
When there they lie in sodden mud and rain,
Pitifully calling me, the quick ones and the slain?
You need me, Christ! It is no roseate dream
That beckons me—this pretty futile seam,
It stifles me—God, must I sit and sew?

GEORGIA DOUGLAS JOHNSON

Georgia Douglas was a teacher in Atlanta before becoming, in 1903, the wife of Henry Lincoln Johnson, later recorder of deeds in the District of Columbia. She is the author of three small volumes, *The Heart of a Woman* (1918), *Bronze* (1922), and *An Autumn Love Cycle* (1928). While much of her work transcends the bounds of race, her second booklet was dominated by the striving of the Negro; and her sympathy may also be seen in such a later poem as "Old Black Men."

They have dreamed as young men dream
  Of glory, love and power;
They have hoped as youth will hope
  Of life's sun-minted hour.