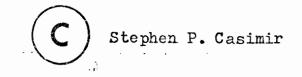
FOLK-LIFE IN THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE NOVEL

by



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ABSTRACT

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The lower-class theme that predominates in the Harlem novel stems from the desire of the black novelist of the Twenties to give aesthetic and social sanction to folk-life as a solution to the American race problem. The thesis begins with a broad survey that attempts to recreate the cultural mood and artistic effervescence of an era that unleashed an unprecedented outpouring of black Part One is concerned with the affirmatalent. tive aspects of the ideal of folk-life. The originality of this study resides partly in its analysis of black folk values and in their description as a kind of racial or group soul. Part Two, which focuses on the critical aspects of the above ideal, explores the historical origins and the fictional expression of the resistance to white And Part Three examines reserva-American culture. tions toward the ideal by dissenting Harlem novelists through a new interpretation of the "passing" theme.

RESUME

La préoccupation avec les basses classes, qui est le trait saillant du roman noir Américain des années 1920, a son origine dans le désir de certains intellectuels de promouvoir une solution culturelle au problème racial. Servant d'introduction à la présente étude de cette solution est une revue générale de l'époque. Elle vise à recréer l'atmosphère essoufflée et d'euphorie qui a marqué la vie contemporaine et qui a vu l'éclosion sans précédent du talent artistic noir. D'abord, on étudie l'aspect positif de la solution. L'originalité de cette démarche réside dans l'analyse des valeurs traditionnelles propres à la culture Afro-américaine et dans l'interprétation de celles-ci comme l'essence de l'âme collective noire. Ensuite, on considère l'aspect négatif de la solution, en examinant les racines du sentiment anti-américain noir et son expression dans le type prolétarien du roman Harlem de l'époque. Enfin. par un procédé nouveau et avec l'aide d'un autre type de roman contemporain, on tente de démontrer les faiblesses inhérentes à la solution culturelle proposée.

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At the completion of this work, my thoughts also go to my very dear deceased mother who, even in her illiteracy, spurred on my sometimes reluctant and budding intellectual efforts.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of the present inquiry is Harlem Renaissance fiction. In this introductory chapter, the subject is examined in a series of four discussions. The first discussion will relate the Harlem novel to a theoretical formulation of the concept of social realism. The second will explore the embodiment of the concept in the Harlem novel by examining the latter's sociological and polemic character. The third will view the novel in terms of two aesthetic principles germane to social realism. The fourth discussion will specify and validate the subjectmatter of the inquiry as well as outline its development. Serving as prologue to these discussions is this general review of the Harlem Renaissance.

The Harlem Renaissance is a name generally assigned to the Afro-American cultural explosion of the Twenties. Its immediate causes lie in the political and economic events surrounding World War I. On the one hand, large numbers of Americans of European origin were hurrying back to their homelands to assist in the war effort; and, as a result of the armed conflict, there was an almost complete stop in the flow of immigrants from the Old World to the New World territories. On the other, the subsequent involvement of the United States in the war increased the demand and production of war supplies, thus creating a great shortage of labor, especially in the manufacturing and service industries of the North. Moreover, with the urgent demand for manpower, the traditional movement of blacks from predominantly rural areas of the southern States and islands to the urban industrial centers of the North received a "new and tremendous impetus."^I More than a million Negroes took part in this mass movement northwards.

In addition to the need for manpower, the harsh conditions to which blacks were subjected in the South helped fuel this Great Migration. These conditions were chiefly hard labor, the denial of basic political and economic rights, and the persistent attacks by anti-Negro groups like the Ku Klux Klan.² As a result of these misdeeds, the North took on the virtues of a promised land and was perceived "in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize ...," notes Alain Locke.³

Harlem, the Negro enclave of New York City, was the chief pole of attraction among northern urban areas. "Great numbers of these migrants headed for New York or eventually got there, and naturally the majority went up into Harlem," states James W. Johnson.⁴ For, in the I920's,

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New York was the leading American city in terms of cultural as well as industrial opportunities; and its expanding Negro community⁵ exerted a great influence on would-be migrants, partly on account of its relatively great size and ancient roots.⁶ These factors helped transform Harlem, where the majority of the city's Negro community lived, into a pre-eminent meeting-place:

> It has attracted ... the West Indian, the Negro American; has brought together the Negro of the North and the Negro of the South; the man from the city and the man from the town and village; the peasant, the student, the business man, the professional man, the artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast. Each group has come with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another.⁷

And this Negro district, in virtue of its ethnic variety and representative population, quickly became the microcosm and symbol of the black world.

Harlem also became the center of the Renaissance. The social interaction of the various ethnic elements within it, aided by the wealth and burgeoning prosperity of the surrounding metropolis, produced an unprecedented group aware-

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ness as well as a strong sense of collective and individual worth. In this respect, Alain Locke (the "originator of the phrase, 'Negro renaissance' ")⁸ observed that "race sympathy and unity [had] determined a further fusing of sentiment and experience,"⁹ and that the Negro quarter of the city was permeated with a feeling of "racial awakening."^{IO}

The latter was first and foremost a proletarian phenomenon. No other enlightened Negro observer of the Harlem scene of the Twenties -- except, perhaps, the sociologist, Charles S. Johnson^{II} -- has articulated this fact with greater felicity than Alain Locke himself. He further perceived "a new spirit [that was] alive in the masses"^{I2} together with a "transformed and transforming psychology."^{I3} Benjamin Brawley, also a Negro scholar and critic of the era, elaborates thus on the new personality which the latter had created: "To be black^{I4} ceased to be a matter for explanation and apology; instead it became something to be advertized and exploited."^{I5}

The dramatization of blackness was undertaken by talented and articulate young Negroes, who had been attracted to Harlem, like their peasant or rural counterparts, from various points in black America and the Caribbean, both before and after the mid-Twenties. Among them were two West Indian fictionists, Eric Walrond and Claude McKay; the New Orleans trumpeter, Louis Armstrong; two Washingtonians, the dramatist, Aubry Lyles and the bandleader, "Duke" Wellington. That their task was viewed with optimism in several quarters can be deduced from such observations as Alain Locke's and Claude McKay's. The former was looking forward to seeing Harlem play the same role that "Dublin ... had played for Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia;"¹⁶ and the latter (so-called "forerunner" of the Renaissance)¹⁷ had thought of a number of cultural rebirths -- the Arabian, Irish, Russian and European -- in conceiving the possibilities of the Harlem Renaissance.¹⁸

As they sought to dramatize various aspects of blackness, the Afro-American writers and artists received support as well as criticism from the Negro press, particularly the two main Negro publications (<u>The Crisis</u>, <u>Opportunity</u>) and from white journalistic organs (<u>Century</u>, <u>Scribners</u>) and publishing houses (Boni, Liveright Publishers). Moreover, Alain Locke's anthology of essays, <u>The New Negro</u>, which helped define and account for what was happening in the Negro world, was an additional source of encouragement and enlightenment in the mid-Twenties.

The main cultural happenings of the Harlem Renaissance were in the area of the performing arts (song, music

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and dance) and literature (drama, poetry and fiction).

In the United States as in Europe, black American music (ragtime derivatives and jazz) increased in popularity. In Harlem, cabarets (Connie's Inn, the Cotton Club, Small's Paradise were among the most respectable) mushroomed, and Negro rhythms and tone combinations were increasingly adopted in the Old World countries. As a result, Negro music and song (mainly blues) became an international vogue. Hence the outstanding success of dance bands (The Clef Club Musicians, The Memphis Students), revues (Shuffle Along, Blackbirds) and artists (Florence Mills, the three Miss Smith singers, Roland Hayes) as well as their influence on audiences at home and abroad. Moreover, the black vogue also aroused the interest of white composers and artists, and many of them were inspired by Negro productions. Milhaud's La Création du Monde, Ravel's "Piano Concerto in D" and William Walton's La Façade are but a few examples of works by white composers that bear imprints of Negro music.¹⁹

New York's reputation as a center for theatre and the stage helped the budding Negro drama greatly. Increasingly, plays with exclusive Negro casts, written by both black and white playwrights, were staged either in all-Negro theatres -- the Alhambra (Harlem), the Howard (Washing-

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ton), the Dunbar (Philadelphia) -- or in national ones (Broadway). Typical of such plays was <u>Porgy</u>, which dramatizes southern life among the fisher-folk of Catfish Row. Even more typical (the latter play is but a dramatized version of a black novel by a white writer, Du Bose Heyward) were Garland Anderson's melodrama, <u>Appearances</u> (1925) and the better-executed <u>Harlem</u> (1929). Written by J. Rapp and Wallace Thurman, the novelist, it is a compelling study of the impact of Harlem on a Negro family fresh from the South.

As for poetry, it has been, with music and (to a lesser extent) dance, the principal art medium of the Harlem Renaissance.²⁰ But, whereas dance and the other performing arts previously mentioned expressed to a great extent the gay and festive spirit of the Twenties, with jazz giving its name to the age,²¹ the poetic medium gave vent (as did fiction) chiefly to its reprehensible aspect. Hence, Harlem Renaissance poetry usually portrays the darker side of that blackness described by Benjamin Brawley preceedingly.

The four representative poets of the period, with the exception of Jean Toomer, wrote more than three collections of verse about the reality of blackness in the world at large. Countée Cullen, in associating this reality with the god-head (as a result of his religious family background) and Africa, sought to give it universal meaning

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and significance, in poems like "Heritage" and "Shroud of Color."

Claude McKay handled the sonnet form nearly as skillfully as Cullen, but had greater recourse to the exotic stereotype of Africa (to be elaborated on later) for his themes. Also, in describing nostalgically his Jamaican homeland and the negative aspects of New York City life (in "North and South," "I Shall Return," "Harlem Shadows," and other poems), he succeeded in dramatizing with great poignancy two sides of blackness -- its rural idyllic beauty and urban squalor.

Langston Hughes is closer to Claude McKay than to Countée Cullen in his frank and brutal depiction of the darker side of blackness, as in such poems as <u>Fine Clothes</u> <u>For the Jew</u>, which recreates sympathetically the poignant ugliness that is so characteristic of <u>Harlem Shadows</u>. But, like Cullen, he probes the African roots of the Afro-American ("I am a Negro/Black as the night is black/black like the depths of my Africa") and, especially, explores the rhythms of blues and jazz, which he incorporates in the fabric of his poetry.

Jean Toomer, the last major representative poet

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of the Harlem Renaissance, has been acclaimed the most gifted man of fiction of the period.²² He wrote <u>Cane</u> (1924), a fusion of poetry and prose written in a terse, symbolic style. In <u>Cane</u>, Toomer indulges in the extensive experimentation that characterizes the poetry of Hughes. But, whereas the latter (as we remarked) experimented with cultural elements that are part and parcel of the black experience, Toomer labored with form and language for a "new idiom," in order to celebrate blackness and his own search for it.²³

The foregoing channels of black cultural expression faltered in I929. The collapse of the Wall-Street stock market in that year brought an abrupt end to an era of prosperity and excess that had largely provided sustenance to the Harlem Renaissance. As Alain Locke had prophesied, in the peak year of I928,²⁴ the New Negro artistic movement lost a great number of its supporters in the wake of the collapse.²⁵ Hughes describes the situation thus:

> 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 had much less money to spend on themselves, and practically none to spend

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on Negroes, for the depression brought everybody down a peg or two. And the Negroes had but few pegs to fall.²⁶

The Harlem Renaissance has been accused of being an American "fad."²⁷ This, in turn, has raised the problem of assessing its quality. Ironically, among its critics are a number of its own literary spokesmen, as these observations by McKay and Hughes indicate:

> I was surprised when I discovered that many of the talented Negroes regarded their renaissance more as an uplift organization and a vehicle to accelerate the pace and progress of smart Negro society.²⁸

The Negro writers of the twenties did not take themselves as seriously as the writers of the thirties -- the hungry era, when proletarian authors were in vogue.²⁹

This last criticism is extensively treated by Wallace Thurman in his bitter, caustic satire (<u>The Infants of the</u> <u>Spring</u>) of the bohemian literary and artistic fringe of the Renaissance movement. Like the visionaries in Nathaniel Hawthorne's utopian work (<u>The Blithedale Romance</u>), the characters of this Harlem novel engage persistently in selfdefeat through mediocrity and dissipation; and, thus, lay bare their tragic lack of talent or fail to carry it through to fruition.30

The criticisms of these and other Harlem novelists, regarding the quality of their own artistic explosion, have given way to a variety of standpoints among post-Renaissance commentators. Examples of those holding diametrically opposed positions are Harold Cruse and Abraham Chapman. The first has discovered virtually no redeeming points, attributing this to the absence of a "cultural philosophy"³¹ and to the disinterestedness of the black bourgeoisie in Negro art. On the other hand, the second, who views the Renaissance in terms of its impact on succeeding artists and writers (Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin),³² concludes: "it is clear ... the Negro ... movement that welled up then was no flash in the pan, no literary dud."33 Other critics like N.I. Huggins and Robert A. Bone hold a more balanced position. Although deploring the excesses of the movement, the first views it with sympathy and understanding, while the second has discovered in it "a serious attempt by the Negro to interpret his own group life."34 A more recent appreciation, that of Amritjit Singh, also strikes a balanced note. While conceding that the Harlem Renaissance output was hampered by a lack of commonly shared artistic perceptions. Singh nevertheless feels that it helped forge "some of the latter-day Afro-American concepts -- such as the Black Aesthetic."35

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Having surveyed the Harlem Renaissance, I will now proceed to the four preliminary discussions on the Harlem novel initially announced. As I mentioned, the first discussion involves a definition of social realism and the study of its relation to the Harlem novel. An analysis of social realism is provided by George Lukacs, the Hungarian critic, in his Studies in European Realism. In it, he describes what he considers the fundamental elements of this concept -- wholeness and appropriateness of subjectmatter. The former, he argues, should underlie the creation of all fictional characters, while events and situations should act like "social determinants."³⁶ molding and shaping those characters into types representative of the whole of society. He further argues that the writer of fiction should by all means draw his themes or subject-matter from those issues that are prominent or serious for his society, perceived as a number of warring components.

For Lukacs, these qualities of literary realism are incompatible with at least two important tendencies in the modern novel -- the objectivism of the naturalistic school of Zola and the subjectivism of the psychologist school of Joyce. These he dismisses as extreme artistic conceptions which distort social reality. On the other hand, he finds the above aesthetic qualities in some nine-

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teenth-century fiction, notably that of Honoré de Balzac and of Leo Tolstoy. To him the works of these writers are characterized by an ideal all-roundedness and are built upon "the burning problem of the community"³⁷ or "the great universal problems of their time."³⁸ He therefore considers them the latest standard-bearers in the great tradition of social realism.

It is, in my view, appropriate to associate the Harlem Renaissance novel with this tradition in the light of Lukacs' strictures. As we shall see, wholeness in creation and adequacy of subject-matter are basic considerations in this novel for both the novelist and critic. Hence, it may be asked: To what extent does the Renaissance novel reflect this social realistic tradition or to what degree does it comply with the above twin stipulation of the realistic genre (comprehensiveness of treatment and prominent social theme)?

As a means of formulating an adequate answer, a study of the two basic dimensions of the Harlem Renaissance novel -- the sociological and the polemic -- will be undertaken. The discussion of the sociological will cover in-group relations or the quality of social life among Negroes; and the polemic the nature of group intercourse or the impact of white American social attitudes on Negro life.

It is necessary to survey the socio-economic structure of the Negro community as a pre-requisite to the discussion of the sociological. I am here referring to the tripartite class system (lower, middle and upper class) that has been adopted as an analytical tool in Negro social history, at least since the beginning of the present century. The lower-class, with more than eighty per cent of the population, was made up of rural and newly arrived urban blacks employed in agriculture (farmers, tenants, day-laborers), industry (unskilled and semi-skilled workers) and domestic or service occupations (house-servants, porters, longshoremen). At the other end of the social ladder was a tiny upper-class (about six per cent in size) composed of Negroes with a respectable family history, a high income, educational or social status arising from their function as business, intellectual or professional leaders in the black community. Between these two poles lay the middle-class, approximately twelve per cent. It included Negroes with a primary or secondary education, college teachers, successful entertainers, and those holding minor municipal or civil service jobs in the urban areas. The Negro class structure of the period, then, resembled a stee-

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ple in form. As such, it was substantially different from the white class structure of the times, which carried a respectively smaller and larger lower and middle class. However, in the black fiction of the Twenties and in the criticism associated with it, these three classes are usually reduced to two -- a lower-class and an extended middle-class. The name, "talented tenth," originating from the black scholar W.E.B. DuBois, frequently designates the hard-core members of this enlarged middle-class.³⁹ Besides, the terms "lower" and "upper" are commonly used in Renaissance literature to take into account variations within each of the two classes, consequent upon the increase in Negro urban living, education and training.

Furthermore, throughout the period, class distinctions within the Negro group were usually cut along color lines or were reinforced by them. The terms "black," "dark" and, to a lesser extent, "brown," became associated with the lowerclass, because the majority of its members were so pigmented and, generally, their origins could be traced to field Negroes of exclusively African descent on the American slave plantations. On the other hand, a fairer color (mulatto, quadroon or octoroon, for example) was a prime factor in the attribution of middle-class status. The miscegination that characterized the greater part of the middle-class had its origin in the slave era, when "countless male aristocrats

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... tried valiantly to wash a whole race whiter than snow."40 The resultant progeny of mix-bloods became privileged house-servants, enjoying a number of exclusive social advantages, which the proximity to their masters conferred. Moreover, by the I920s, these class and color divisions within the Negro group had already crystalized into a permanent system of caste that set a barrier to in-group interaction and sympathy. Thus, the majority of the colored middle-class could not identify itself with the lower-class for, having accepted the valuations of skin color of the white group, it tended to view itself as superior to the darker lower-class -- a feeling that the better job opportunities for fair-skinned Negroes as well as other social advantages only served to strengthen and perpetuate. On the other hand, the lower-class viewed the middle-class with misgiving or dislike and as being no different from the white middle-class, whose manners and assumed values (thrift, industry, initiative, perseverance) it tried to pursue and emulate. The color question, central to the study of the Harlem era, will be re-examined in later chapters.

The above dichotomous class structure provided the base for Renaissance fiction. The so-called writers

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of the "Harlem School,"⁴¹ made up of the younger and, fictionally, more radical elements of the Harlem Renaissance, opted for the portrayal of the economically underprivileged. They wrote the folk novel, which purported to represent the life of the folk Negro. Charles S. Johnson, sociologist and political activist of the period, describes that social type thus:

> Within the lower classes a distinction should be made between the 'folk Negro' and the rest of the population. This distinction is important and more cultural than economic; it refers to the family habits and values evolved by the Negro culture under the institution of slavery. Stripped of their basic African culture by the exigencies of life in America, they evolved a social life and culture of their own."⁴²

These writers, for the most part, acquired their lower-class sympathy partly from their first hand knowledge of this subgroup with whom they lived or worked out of economic necessity or free will. Notable among them are Claude McKay and Langston Hughes, some of whose writings commonly reveal that sympathy:

> There, coming off the road like homing birds, we trainmen came to rest awhile and fraternize with our friends in the city --

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elevator runners and porters -- and snatch from saloon and cabaret and home a few brief moments of pleasure, of friendship and of love.⁴³

From all this pretentiousness Seventh Street was sweet relief, Seventh Street is the long, old, dirty street, where the ordinary Negroes hang out, folks with practically no family tree at all I liked the barrel houses of Seventh Street, the ... churches and the songs.⁴⁴

The most typical models of the folk novel are Claude McKay's <u>Banjo</u> and <u>Home to Harlem</u>, and Arna Bontemps' <u>God Sends Sunday</u>. Milder forms of this type are Langston Hughes' <u>Not Without Laughter</u>, Wallace Thurman's <u>The Blacker</u> <u>the Berry</u> and McKay's <u>Banana Bottom</u>. These last novels are so identified because a relatively more prominent place is given in them to middle-class life. Their treatment of the middle-class, however, remains peripheral, in that it does not constitute the primary focus of attention; its role being essentially to help dramatize lower-class life.

Whereas some writers of the Renaissance drew their themes from lower-life material, other writers issuing from a similar background, in terms of education and family circumstances, decided to perpetuate the genteel tradition of the Old Guard novelists (I890-I920) by portraying middle-class mores in what is generally labelled the apologist novel. This type of novel, championed mainly by Walter White, Nella Larsen and Jessie Fauset, depicts the life of educated, wealthy or aspiring Negroes. As a result, lower-class life has a function similar to that which middle-class life bears in the folk type of novel. Lowerclass life is treated in the apologist novel either peripherally (<u>The Fire in the Flint, The Chinaberry Tree</u>) or like a faded reality of the past largely cut off from the present (<u>There is Confusion, Plum Bun</u>).

The decision by most Negro Renaissance writers to restrict their fictional perspective to one or other of the social classes was questioned by a number of critics in the literary controversy that ensued. A short review of the latter is necessary here. Not only will it bring out the conflicting arguments underlying the two artistic viewpoints and some of the problems peculiar to Harlem Renaissance aesthetics. Such a review will also throw light upon much that is to follow in this study.

In the debate, the folk novelists argued for the exclusive use of low-life material in fiction. Claude McKay, the most aggressive of the "rebel" writers, wanted the Renaissance to create "things that would be typical of their group."⁴⁵ Langston Hughes, milder in temperament

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but no less a staunch defender of this position, felt that "the masses had given the race a heritage valuable in itself -- a heritage it should be proud of."⁴⁶ In an impassioned declaration on behalf of his colleagues, he declared:

> We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.⁴⁷

Moreover, through journals like <u>Fire</u>, <u>Independent</u> and <u>The New Republic</u>, Wallace Thurman kept up the attack, exhorting the Negro writer to sever relations with the old tradition that rejects "the seamy or sordid side of life or the 'low down,' common, everyday, black life-style."⁴⁸

The elder wing of the Harlem Renaissance literati -- conservative critics and race leaders for the most part -- maintained a diametrically opposed position to that held by the radical writers. They did, of course, realize the necessity for cultural affirmation through fiction and even supported it;⁴⁹ but portraying the underprivileged was objected to on several grounds. W.S. Braithwaite and W.E.B. DuBois respectively deplored the presence of "atavistic impulses"⁵⁰ and "minstrel characteristics"⁵¹ in the folk novel; and Benjamin Brawley denounced what he thought were themes got "in dives or cabarets or with women of easy virtue."⁵² Besides moral considerations, aesthetic ones constituted another reason for the rejection of low-life material. Benjamin Brawley, for instance, argued that the lush emotionalism of the Harlem School was producing second-rate novels.⁵³ Social considerations, too, were a major element in their opposition, as Claude McKay's comment on the attitude of his literary oppenents indicates:

> Their idea is that Negroes in literature and art should be decorous and decorative. These nice Negroes think that the white public, reading about the doings of the common Negroes, will judge them by the same standards.⁵⁴

A statement by Jessie Fauset, a writer of the apologist novel, tends to support this opinion: "they must learn to write with a delineation so fine and distinctive that their portraits ... will be acceptable to the white publisher and reader alike.⁵⁵

A few Negro writers, however, rejected the exclusive lower-class or middle-class viewpoint in favor of a more comprehensive treatment of Negro life. Among them is the elder black writer of the turn of the century, Charles W. Chesnutt. While advocating absolute freedom in the selection of literary material, he nevertheless cautioned that "a true picture of life would include the good, the bad and the indifferent."⁵⁶ The much younger Renaissance novelist, Countée Cullen, thought similarly:

> We must create types that are truly representative of us as a people, nor do I feel that such a move is necessarily a genuflexion away from true art.⁵⁷

As a result of this latter attitude, there were fictional efforts that aimed at giving a more balanced view of lower and middle class living. This mixed type of novel was written by Cullen himself (One Way to Heaven) and by Rudolph Fisher (The Walls of Jericho, The Conjure-Man Dies). These novels, contrary to the two previously mentioned types (the folk and the apologist), do display some degree of class sympathy generally, their intermediary characters functioning as a link bridging the solitude of the two social classes. Moreover Cane, written by Jean Toomer, can also be considered a mixed novel.58 Like the preceding works, it presents a panorama of Negro types and situations. However, it lacks the Troilus-and-Cressida type of plot structure so characteristic of the mixed novels above. Instead, the action proceeds cinematically, in the form of a series of largely detached scenes or sketches of lower and middle class life.

In the foregoing part of this discussion, I have attempted to circumscribe the sociological element of the Harlem Renaissance novel, which concerns class relations within the Negro group. I will now examine the novel's polemic quality or its treatment of black and white relations within Western society. The underlying aim of the present discussion, as I have indicated (pp. I,I3), is to determine the level of conformity in this novel to a type of social realism.

The era of the 1920s saw the transformation of the Negro novel into a vehicle of social protest comparable to that waged by the various organs of the Negro press, notably <u>Crisis</u> and <u>Opportunity</u>. The new mood in the black novel arises from the negative socio-economic effects of the white caste system, which had replaced the plantation system that governed master-slave relations in America for centuries. The white cast system, from which the Negro caste system arose,⁵⁹ imposed a pattern of widespread discrimination and segregation upon the black communities. In Jamaica and some other West Indian islands, the colored middle-class sometimes succeeded in evading the bad effects of the white caste by aligning itself with the white middle-class in the exploitation of the lower-class. In the United States, the Negro middle-class had also hoped to bypass those ef-

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fects through its "color, breeding, gentility, wealth and prestige."⁶⁰ But its expectations had fallen through, as the white group has traditionally regarded the Negro group as a monolithic entity and, therefore, has persistently been blind or insensitive to its internal color and class distinctions in the matter of human or civil rights recognition.⁶¹ These injustices accruing from the white caste system as well as efforts to cope with them by both white and black are traditionally referred to as the Negro problem.

It is the novelists' efforts to grapple with the adverse conditions of the Negro problem that impart to Renaissance fiction its polemic quality. Before examining the latter, I will survey those conditions in the first decades of this century -- a period which roughly corresponds to the one that is now under study.

W.E.B. DuBois writes bleakly of those conditions at the turn of the century:

> The bright ideals of the past, -- physical freedom, political power, the training of the brains and the training of the hands, -all these in turn have waxed and waned, until even the last grows dim and overcast.⁶²

The situation just described worsened with the American war

effort. For the trek to northern cities created new difficulties: the acceleration of the phenomenon of ghettoization as well as increased recreational, occupational and residential discrimination in the urban industrial centers. Similarly, the optimism generated by American involvement in World War I was soon dealt a mortal blow, as tensions arose in the recruitment of black servicemen, who were generally relegated to stevedore positions or failed to obtain due promotional advancement at home and abroad. As a result, with the end of the war "... went most of the illusions and high hopes American Negroes had felt would be realized," notes James W. Johnson.⁶³ So optimism gave way to disappointment and outrage:

> A general feeling of unrest, defiance, impatience, and even bitterness, swept over black communities, and few Negroes were unaffected.⁶⁴

These feelings soon erupted in sporadic outbursts of violence, notably in I917 and I919, in numerous American cities.

Events such as these gave a new impetus to efforts by militant associations to find a viable solution to the Negro problem. One extreme and minority group called for "complete amalgamation and cultural assimilation" with the dominant white society.⁶⁵ Another extreme but more important group -- Marcus Garvey's Universal Improvement Association -- saw the only hope of survival in "withdrawal from American society and the creation of African States."⁶⁶ A third, headed by Phillip A. Randolph, viewed the destruction of Capitalism, through the combined socialist action of whites and blacks, as the only hopeful avenue of liberation.⁶⁷ An intermediate and moderate solution, which called for improvement for blacks within the present capitalistic system, was advocated by the two most influential movements of Negro-white militancy -- the NAACP and the National Urban League, respectively championed by W.E.B. DuBois and Charles S. Johnson.⁶⁸

In general, the responses of the Renaissance novelists to the foregoing problems of the Negro in white American society resemble as well as differ from those held by the various militant groups just mentioned. Thus the Harlem School opted for isolationism, whereas the writers of the Old Guard or more conservative wing of the Renaissance settled for a middle-of-the-way position that may best be described as accommodative. The isolationist solution proposed by the Harlem School novelists is more cultural than physical, as it differs from the separation preached by

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Marcus Garvey, which would have involved emigration to makeshift African colonies. Essentially, their isolationist ideology, as dramatized in the novels, is an outright rejection of white American and European culture in favor of the native Negro culture. This extreme solution is thus rationalized by James W. Johnson:

> There is in us all a stronger tendency toward isolation than we may be aware of. There come times when the most persistent integrationist becomes an isolationist, when he curses the white world and consigns it to hell. This tendency toward isolation is strong because it springs from a deep-seated, natural desire -- a desire for respite from the unremitting, gruelling struggle; for a place in which refuge might be taken. We are again and again confronted by this question. It is ever present, though often dormant.⁶⁹

The isolationist stand on the Negro question also drew Alain Locke's sympathy. However, he argued strongly against the separation of Negroes from the larger stream of American life:

> But this forced attempt to build his Americanism on race values is a unique social experiment, and its ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions.⁷⁰

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Alain Locke's intervention prefigures one of the practical difficulties the Harlem School writers were to encounter in the fictional elaboration of this solution: the inevitable necessity of reconciling isolationism with everyday black life within the context of white society.

Now the accommodative response of the Old Guard writers to the Negro problem will be examined, as I continue to explore the polemic dimension of the Renaissance novel's conformity to Lukacs' type of social realism. This response is the fictional equivalent of the one held by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Negro Urban League. Since these more conservative writers had adopted the values of the white culture, which they continued to reproduce within the confines of their own select Negro sub-group, they could not but have considered suicidal the isolationist ideology of the Harlem School. On the other hand, the New Negro cultural affirmation of the Twenties, coupled with a natural desire to be loyal to one's own ethnic identity, precluded the endorsement of an absolute rejection of all elements of the native culture. As a result, the solution to the Negro problem advanced by these writers consisted in making the best of the two worlds. That is, they accepted certain values of the two cultures that were deemed worthy of retention; and they laboured to soften or even level the caste barriers between

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whites and blacks that the intervening years from Emancipation to World War I had entrenched. Like the cultural absolutism of the Harlem School, this purely acculturative solution was not without raising serious difficulties for both writer and character within the fabric of the novel. I shall mention some of these later.

More specifically, the polemic nature of Renaissance fiction stems from the literary efforts of the two schools of thought to communicate their respective solutions or attitudes regarding the problem of the color-line to their audiences. Generally, these efforts find expression through propaganda and protest, whose characteristics vary from novel to novel. Basically, however, in the polemic of the Harlem School, the writer usually turns his attention to the people of his own cultural group, whom he tries to convince of the validity and viability of isolationism: But, with the Old Guard writer, the protest and propaganda are directed toward the white group, his aim being

> to apprise educated whites of the existence of respectable Negroes, and to call their attention -- now politely, now indignantly -to the facts of racial injustice.⁷¹

The necessity for the Renaissance writer to address himself

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to one or other of the two social groups is referred to by James W. Johnson as the problem of the double audience. Johnson further observes that

> ... it is a divided audience, an audience made up of two elements with differing and often opposite and antagonistic points of view.⁷²

The tendency to engage in polemic has resulted in the appearance of four main character types in the Renaissance novel. One extreme type figures in the folk and mixed novels, and involves a protagonist with exclusive lower-class sympathies or attachment, coupled with a marked indifference -sometimes bordering on dislike -- for everything that savors of middle-class respectability, white or black. Jake Brown (<u>Home to Harlem</u>) and Sam Lucas (<u>One Way to Heaven</u>) are among the finest examples of this type. In the other extreme type, the protagonist, who happens to be fair and middle-class, is so enamored of life beyond the color-line and so hateful of it within his own as to commit an act of disloyalty by severing all ties with his group. This situation (generally known as "passing"⁷³) is described extensively in the apologist novels (p. 19). In the third character type, the protagonist subscribes to the ideal of cultural pluralism (that incorporates the best elements of the two cultures) and adopts the role of advocate or martyr (Fire in the

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Flint, There is Confusion). Richard Wright identifies this type as

the prime and decorus ambassadors who went a-begging to white America, dressed in the 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.⁷⁴

Finally, there is a character type on whom lower-class life exercises a powerful influence. This type is described as having some middle-class upbringing, but he, nevertheless, encounters difficulties -- sometimes light, sometimes serious -- in his efforts to embrace or rediscover his native culture. These, then, are the four main character types of the Harlem Renaissance novel.

Subsequent to the study of the sociological and polemic aspects of the Harlem Renaissance novel, an examination of its conformity to George Lukacs' brand of social realism follows. To begin with, I will apply to the novel one of Lukacs' two aesthetic criteria -- adequacy of subject-matter.

I have already noted (pp. I2-I3) that realistic literature of the kind now being discussed calls for a social theme of high prominence and gravity. In my view,

the Renaissance novel does fulfill this requirement in its depiction of the Negro problem. That it was serious and of overwhelming concern is evident in the adverse events and situations of the Twenties already described (pp. 24-26) and in the persistence of anti-Negro thought at this time in Europe and America. Actually, this anti-Negro thought was but the expression of the continuing debate that endeavored to rationalize the origin, history and status of the Afro-American.⁷⁵ I am here referring to works like Charles W. Gould's America a Family Matter (1922) and Dr. Charles W. Josey's Race and National Solidarity (1923), which kept racial controversy alive, in spite of the neutralizing effect of pre-Renaissance studies in cultural anthropology, like Franz Boas' The Mind of Primitive Man (1911). Moreover, observations like George S. Painter's in 1919 --"the race problem has long been an aggravating one 76 ... and tends to become more so⁷⁷ -- underscore the seriousness of American race relations. The Renaissance novel, then, by making the Negro problem its underlying theme, does fulfill one of the criteria of realism -- a social issue of great magnitude.

I will now relate the Harlem novel to another criterion of social realism. This second principle, as I mentioned earlier, stipulates that in fiction the subject-matter

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should be treated comprehensively through the creation of types that are representative of society. To what extent, it may be asked, has this novel depicted fully the Negro problem of the Twenties? To answer this question, we will have to review the discussion bearing on the dual nature of the Negro problem. Thus, in the preceding discussion, I mentioned how the era produced three kinds of novels: one which focuses on the Negro problem within lowerclass life (the folk novel), another within middle-class life (the apologist), and the third (the mixed) depicting both levels of stratification. Moreover, it was said that together the three kinds of novels involved made use of only four character types with, of course, a limited number of variations, as this inquiry will point out.

It is therefore obvious that the Harlem Renaissance novel falls short of the ideal in the matter of fullness of portrayal. Its depiction of one or other of the two social classes as well as its limited number of character types betrays a certain narrowness of fictional outlook and workmanship. It is true that the mixed novel, in its combined representation of the lower and middle class aspects of the Negro problem, is a commendable attempt

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to evade the limitations of the folk and apologist novels. The results of the attempt, however, have not always been completely successful, as in <u>One Way to Heaven</u>, in which the treatment of the two classes is but a summary reproduction of some elements of the two other novels as well as of their character types. This narrow idealism, which is based on a sectarian view of Negro life, has evoked the following remark from George C. Morse, a contemporary observer:

> Though many novels have been written about Negroes, there are none that can afford any just critic to say that this book is a true saga or depiction of the entire negro minority of America. Just as we await the great American novel, which we almost welcomed in <u>Main Street</u>, we will await the novel that adequately satisfies our comprehension of the Negro and the problems that are peculiar to him.⁷⁸

Supporting this view is Sterling Brown, another contemporary writer of Negro life. In the first full-length literary survey of the period, he mentions some areas of the Negro problem that have been overlooked:

> ... the Harlem (Renaissance) school, like the plantation tradition, neglected the servitude. Except for brief glimpses, the

drama of the workaday life, the struggles, the conflicts, are missing. And such definite features ... as the lines of the unemployed, the overcrowded schools, the delinquent headed straight to petty crime, the surly resentment -- all of these seeds are conspicuously absent.⁷⁹

In the subsequent pages of this inquiry into lower-class life, the reasons (conscious or unconscious) for the exclusion of such important areas of the Negro problem from the novel will become progressively evident.

In this fourth and last preliminary discussion, I will briefly indicate the area in the above survey of the Harlem Renaissance that is to be developed in this study, the manner in which the development is to take place, and the reasons for having settled on the chosen subject-matter and approach.

This inquiry, as I have mentioned, will focus on the theme of lower-class life -- a subject which cuts across the entire length and breadth of Harlem Renaissance fiction. We have shown how this theme is present in varying degrees and in descending order of importance in the folk, mixed and apologist novels. More specifically, this inquiry into lower-class Negro life will be concerned with the various aspects of the folk culture and with its depiction in the Renaissance novel.

Furthermore, this inquiry into the Negro folk culture will comprise three separate studies: Negro Folk Values, Anti-Folk Values, and the Problem of identity. In the first of these studies on the Renaissance novel, the positivistic nature of the values will be examined. These I have identified as the affirmative, hedonistic, humoristic, mnemonic, imaginative and the expressive. The second study will discuss the assumption that the so-called white values (derived from Protestantism, the educational system and the economic process) constitute a destructive social force for the Negro group. And the third study will cover the drama involved when an alien (a member of the middleclass) discovers lower-class life. More precisely, this last study will rationalize various responses that an irresistible attraction to lower-class values arouses. Moreover, throughout these related studies of Negro folk values, the frame of reference will continue to be Afro-American social history and those aspects of American life that have had a determining influence on those values.

It is necessary to justify the present inquiry

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into lower-class life in the Harlem Renaissance novel in view of the extensive criticism that the latter has undergone, since the 1920's, and which has in part become evident in the foregoing discussions. But, in spite of numerous literary studies on the era, there is still a deplorable absence of in-depth, exclusive analyses of the theme of lower-class life. This situation is all the more a matter for concern since, as we have observed, the latter theme predominates in the fiction of that period. As for the value approach to the study of this theme, its use is no less imperative. Above, I have mentioned how that theme finds expression through the dramatization of the folk culture. It is well-known that there exists an organic relationship between culture and values. For, "man cannot have culture if there are no values;"80 and it is impossible to describe culture ... and at the same time exclude values."^{8I} This fact thus validates the proposed value method for examining the theme of lower-class life. The method finds additional validation in the frequent allusions to values in Renaissance literary criticism. In a bitter attack on white literary attitudes toward the Negro, Alain Locke, for example, warns that black "values are not to be read by intrinsic but ... extrinsic coefficients."82 Charles I

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Glicksberg, like Alain Locke (p. 27), cautions the Negro intellectual against "the accentuation of the racial to the neglect of other values."⁸³ The concept of values also finds mention in more recent studies on the Harlem era. Gunnar Myrdal, for instance, alludes to "family habits and values evolved by the Negro culture;"⁸⁴ and Robert A. Bone argues that the artistic effervescence of the I920's "helped [the Negro] to discover unsuspected values in his own folk culture"⁸⁵ as against those of bourgeois America.

It is the above-mentioned void in Renaissance criticism as well as the natural desire to interpret the old in a fresh manner that has prompted the present inquiry into the Harlem novel.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

^I James W. Johnson, "The Making of Harlem," Survey Graphic, LIII (March, 1925), 636.

² For a more detailed account of causes, see Louise V. Kennedy, <u>The Negro Peasant Turns Cityward</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), pp. 45-53.

³ Quoted in the "New Negro," Alain Locke, ed., <u>The</u> New Negro (New York: Alfred and Charles Boni, 1925), p. 6.

⁴ James W. Johnson, op. cit., 637.

⁵ See <u>ibid</u>., pp. 635-39; Charles S. Johnson, "Black Workers and the City," <u>Survey Graphic</u>, LIII (March, 1925), 641.

⁶ See James W. Johnson, op. cit., 635.

⁷ Alain Locke, op. cit.

⁸ Claude McKay, <u>A Long Way From Home</u> (New York: Lee Furman, Inc., 1937), p. 312.

⁹ Alain Locke, "Harlem," <u>Survey Graphic</u>, LIII (March, 1925), 630.

10 Ibid., 629.

II See Arna Bontemps, "The Awakening: A Memoir," in Arna Bontemps, ed., <u>The Harlem Renaissance Remembered</u> (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1972), p. I.

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I2Alain Locke, "The New Negro," op. cit., p. 3.

¹³<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 7.

¹⁴The racial implications of this term will be examined later in this preliminary discussion and elsewhere.

¹⁵Benjamin Brawley, "The Negro Literary Renaissance," <u>The Southern Workman</u>, LVI (April, 1927), 177.

I6Alain Locke, "The New Negro," op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁷Claude McKay, op. cit., p. 321.

18 Ibid.

¹⁹See Eileen Southern, <u>The Music of Black Americans</u>: <u>A History</u> (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1971), pp. 361-65.

²⁰Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," op. cit., p. 254.

^{2I}See Richard Lehan, <u>F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and</u> <u>His Works</u> (London: Forum House Publishing Co., 1969), p. 132; K. G. W. Cross, "The Jazz Age Laureate," <u>Scott Fitzgerald</u> (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1970), pp. 20-41.

²²Robert A. Bone, <u>The Negro Novel In America</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 80-81; Gorham B. Munson, "The Significance of Jean Toomer," <u>Opportunity</u>, III (Sept., 1925), 262-63.

²³This search is reminiscent of Ezra Pound's and George Eliot's. See Todd Lieber, "Design and Movement in <u>Cane</u>," <u>CLAJ</u>, XIII (Sept., 1969), 36. ²⁴See Langston Hughes, "The Twenties:Harlem and Its Negritude," <u>African Forum</u>, I (1966),14.

²⁵H.M.Gloster, <u>Negro Voices in American Fiction</u> (New York: Russel and Russel, 1965), p.191.

²⁶Langston Hughes, <u>The Big Sea</u> (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1940), p. 247.

²⁷See H.M. Gloster, op. cit.

²⁸Claude McKay, op. cit., p. 32I.

²⁹Langston Hughes, "The Twenties: Harlem and Its Negritude," op. cit., 20.

³⁰For a brief explanation, see Langston Hughes, <u>The</u> <u>Big Sea</u>, op. cit., p. 238; Mae G. Henderson, "Portrait of Wallace Thurman," <u>The Harlem Renaissance Remembered</u>, op. cit., p. 165.

^{3 I}Harold Cruse, <u>The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual</u> (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1967), p. 38.

³²Langston Hughes, in "The Twenties: Harlem and Its Negritude," II, confirms this opinion: "Wright influenced Ellison in the nineteen-forties, as I had influenced Wright in the thirties, as Claude McKay and James W. Johnson influenced me in the twenties."

³³Abraham Chapman, "The Harlem Renaissance in Literary History," <u>CLA Journal</u>, II (Sept., 1967), 45.

³⁴Robert A. Bone, op. cit., p. 61.

³⁵Amritjit Singh, The Novels of the Harlem Renaissance: Twelve Black Writers, 1923-33 (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), p. 37.

³⁶George Lukacs, <u>Studies in European Realism</u> (New York: The Universal Library, 1964), p. II.

³⁷<u>Ibid</u>., p. I2.
³⁸<u>Ibid</u>., p. I3.
³⁹See Robert A. Bone, op. cit., p. I3, for a fuller

explanation of this and the following writers for a more detailed discussion of Negro class structures: A. Meier, "History of the Negro Upper Class in Atlanta, Georgia, 1890-58," Journal of Negro History, XXVIII (Spring, 1959), 128-39; Louise V. Kennedy, op. cit., p. 52; E.F. Frazier, "Social and Economic Stratification," The Negro in the United States (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1949), pp. 273-304; Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 673-700; St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, Black Metropolis (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945).

40 Robert A. Bone, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

41 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 13.

42 Quoted in Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 387.

43 Claude McKay, op. cit., p. 49.

44 Langston Hughes, The Big Sea, op. cit., pp. 208-09.

45 Claud McKay, op. cit., p. 321.

⁴⁶ Quoted in S.P. Fullinwider, <u>The Mind and Mood of</u> Black America (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1969), p. 161.

47 Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," The Nation, CXXII (June 23, 1926), 694.

⁴⁸ M.G. Henderson, "Portrait of Wallace Thurman," Arna Bontemps, ed., op. cit., p. 152. ⁴⁹ See, for example, William S. Braithwaite, "The Negro in Literature," <u>The Crisis</u>, XXVIII (Sept., 1924), 204-210.

> ⁵⁰ <u>Ibid</u>., 204. ⁵¹ <u>Ibid</u>., 209.

52 Benjamin Brawley, op. cit., 178.

⁵³ Benjamin Brawley, "Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History," <u>The Journal of Negro History</u>, XIX (Jan., 1934), 56.

54 Claude McKay, "A Negro to His Critics," <u>Books</u>, 8 (March 6, 1932), 5.

⁵⁵ Jessie Fauset, "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed," The Crisis, 32 (June, 1926), 71.

⁵⁶ Charles W. Chesnutt, "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed," The Crisis, 33 (Nov., 1926), 28.

57 Countée Cullen, "The Negro in Art," <u>The Crisis</u>, 32 (Aug., 1926), 193.

⁵⁸ See Robert A. Bone, op. cit. p. 82-88.

⁵⁹ Gunnar Myrdal declares, in op. cit.,p. 669, that "the class order within the negro group is chiefly a function of the historical caste system of America."

⁶⁰ Sterling Brown, <u>The Negro In American Fiction</u> (Washington: The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1937), p. 139. ^{6I} For a good discussion of this issue, see Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., pp. 696 ff.

⁶² W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Souls of Black Folk</u> (New York: Allograph Press Corporation, 1903), pp. IO-II.

⁶³ James W. Johnson, <u>Black Manhattan</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), p. 245.

⁶⁴ Eileen Southern, <u>The Music of Black Americans:</u> <u>A History</u> (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1971), p. 413.

65 A. Meier and E. Rudwick, <u>From Plantation To</u> <u>Ghetto</u> (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), p. 102.

⁶⁶ <u>Ibid.</u>; W.E.B. DuBois, "The Years of Triumph and Tragedy," ed. John H. Clarke, <u>Marcus Garvey and the Vision</u> of Africa (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. IIO-II.

⁶⁷ See Meier and Rudwick, op. cit., pp. 225-27; Harold Cruse, op. cit., p. 40.

⁶⁸ Meier and Rudwick, pp. 224-25.

69 Quoted in Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 808.

⁷⁰ Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro," <u>Survey Graphic</u>, LIII (March, 1925), 634.

71 Robert A. Bone, op. cit., p. IOI.

⁷² James W. Johnson, "The Dilemma of the Negro Author," <u>American Mercury</u>, 15 (1928), 477. ⁷³ Moreover, this situation is an element of the color-line problem to be re-examined later. Cf. p. I6.

74 Robert A. Bone, op. cit.

75 Idus A. Newby maintains that anti-Negro thought is marked by three stages: I890-I920, I920-54, and onwards. Sed <u>The Development of Segregationist Thought</u> (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, I968), pp. 3-4, IO, and 20.

⁷⁶ For this, see Charles A. Gardiner, "The Future of the Negro," <u>Northern Review</u>, 139 (1884), 79.

77 George S. Painter, "The Future of the American Negro," American Anthropologist, New Series, 21 (1919), 410.

⁷⁸ George C. Morse, "The Fictitious Negro," <u>Outlook</u> and Independent, 152 (Aug. 21, 1929), 649.

⁷⁹ Sterling Brown, op. cit., p. I49.

⁸⁰ M. Mujeeb, <u>Education and Traditional Values</u> (Calcutta and Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1965), p. 5.

8I Ralph B. Perry, <u>Realms of Value: A Critique of</u> <u>Human Civilization</u> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 357.

⁸² Alain Locke, "American Literary Tradition and the Negro," Modern Quarterly, 3 (1926), 216.

⁸³ Charles I. Glicksberg, "The Negro Cult of the Primitive," The Antioch Review, 4 (1944), 47.

⁸⁴Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. I387.

⁸⁵ Robert A. Bone, op. cit., pp. 61, 71.

PART ONE: EMPHASIZING THE ORAL TRADITION

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Chapter I: Origins

In the introductory chapter, I stated that some novelists of the Harlem Renaissance presented the folk values of black Americans as the final solution to the underdog position they held in western society. This recourse was adopted, as mentioned, in the wake of disenchantment with the poor state of Negro over-all progress in the Americas. As this inquiry will demonstrate, the responsibility for this situation was put squarely on America's economic and religious institutions. Because of their alleged role in perpetuating the white caste system, these institutions were accused by the more radical novelists of being co-artisans of the Negroes' social retardation. No wonder, then, that the kind of life issuing from the adoption of black folk values is made to clash, as we shall see. with its white counterpart within the fabric of the novel. Thus the so-called religious values (meekness and hope) as well as those already described as economic (arbition, industry, thrift) are shown to be diametrically opposed to the alleged emotional values of the Negro

folk culture. The dramatization of this opposition is fundamental to the Negro novel of the Twenties. In the main, it is to this opposition that the present inquiry wishes to address itself. As a means of analyzing the various aspects of this opposition, I have adopted a three-sectional approach for the inquiry. Section I will cover exclusively the folk values that make up Aframerican culture. Section 2 will account for the rejection of white cultural values by the radical Harlem novelists. And Section 3 will examine the conflict arising from the reciprocal attraction to both cultures.

The fictional formulation of black values was greatly influenced by white intellectual opinion as expressed through racial dogma and primitivism. In Chapter I, therefore, I will examine the impact of these two cross-currents of Euro-American thought on the Negro novelists' view of their own culture. Chapter 2 will describe the values historically or in terms of the black experience in America. And Chapter 3 -- the last in this initial section -- will show how these values are dramatized by the folk protagonist.

As mentioned above, the present chapter will be concerned with the influence of racial dogma on the radical Harlem writers. It should be noted at the outset that such an influence was largely indirect. First, race ideology influenced the older black intellectuals' view of their own culture; and, later, the younger writers of the Renaissance, through the reaction to it of their elders.

The influence of racial dogma on the Old Guard writers is best seen in their response to the charges of black inferiority. These charges permeate early pseudoscientific studies on race, like François Bernier's in the seventeenth century ^I and Johann F. Blumenback's (<u>The</u> <u>Natural Variety of Mankind</u>) in the eighteenth. They are also found in numerous non-scientific works, such as Voltaire's <u>Le Nègre de Suriname</u> and Thomas Jefferson's <u>Notes on Virginia</u>.

These charges, moreover, arise from the principle of racial inequality that progressively won general acceptance in Europe and America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to this principle, the so-called pure races ² were either superior or inferior to one another. Racial ladders were conceived on which was indicated the place of such traditional groups as whites and blacks. D.K. Chute and others placed the former

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"at the head" of the ladder and, the latter, "at the bottom." 3 Besides, internal group differentiations were made wherein were specified the respective positions of the constituents of a given group. Thus, within the white group, the northern Europeans (Anglo-Saxons, Germans, Scandinavians) were said to be superior to their southern and eastern counterparts (the Italians, Austrians, Poles). Notable among the exponents of such a view were William Z. Ripley (The Races of Europe, 1899), Count de Gobineau (Essay on the Inequality of Human Races, 1853-55) and his disciples: Houston S. Chamberlain (Foundations of the Nineteenth Century, 1899) and Madison Grant (The Passing of the Great Race, 1916). Similarly, within the non-white group, race exponents distinguished between a number of sub-groups: Mongolians (Finns and Tartars), Malayans (Oriental peoples), Ethiopians or Africans and Americans or Indians. Prominent among those supporting these categories were the Englishman, Robert K. Smith (The Races of Man, 1850) and the Alabama physician, Josiah Nott (Types of Mankind, 1855).

The foregoing ideas on racial inequality find expression in a number of conceptions that underwent considerable modifications and improvement in the nineteenth century, when anthropological speculation was at its highest. As a prelude to the discussion of the black intellectual response to the charges of Negro inferiority, I will now review the nature of these racial conceptions. One of them, the germ theory of history, establishes a causal relationship between nature and race. Formulated by the holders of Nordic (northern European) supremacy and by Albert B. Hart, ⁴ this theory maintains that all human species underwent a primeval period of gestation during which their respective characteristics were formed under environmental conditions peculiar to their native habitat. The following remarks summarize the main arguments underlying this theory:

> ... climatal and environing conditions produce peculiar types of man; they tend, indeed, to bring the most diverse races into something like the same moral and intellectual state. It is not easy for those who have been bred in high altitudes (i.e., Caucasians) to conceive the way in which Nature effects ... the equatorial races; the northern winter rather than the summer of Aryan lands has shaped their The struggle with a rude Nature which motives. our ancestors have endured in the ages while their race characteristics were making, has been one long war with winter trials. In the battle they have learned thrift, the habit of continuous labor, the consummate art of sparing

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the moment's pleasure It is very different with the intertropical man; there the nearly uniform temperature takes the need of much clothing, and makes heat unnecessary save for cooking food. Such food as the fields or wilderness afford, is generally to be had at all times of the year It was in these lands of enduring ease that our African people were cradled, while our savage and barbarian ancestors were combatting the winters in the stubborn fields of the high North. 5

Another theory that is similar to the preceding establishes a correlation between temperament and climate. In the eighteenth century, Montesquieu, a French writer, mentions it in his Théorie des Climats:

> Les peuples des pays chauds sont timides comme les vieillards le sont; ceux des pays froids sont courageux comme le sont les jeunes gens. 6

Madame de Staël, another French writer, reasserts the association in <u>De la Littérature</u>, a nineteenth century romantic study:

Les peuples du Nord sont moins occupés des plaisirs que de la douleur, et leur imagination n'en est que plus féconde. Le spectacle de la nature agit fortement sur eux; elle agit comme elle se montre dans leurs climats, toujours sombre et nébuleuse.⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the association reappeared in Ellen C. Semple's <u>Influences of Geographic Environment</u> (1911). In this work, the American disciple of German anthrogeographer, Frederick Ratzel,⁸ maps out temperamental charts not only for northern and southern Europeans, but for non-whites (mainly blacks) as well.⁹ Besides, she found in the Negro "deeply ingrained race traits in which the instinctive and the impulsive predominated over the rational."^{IO} Similarly, G. Stanley Hall, in a comparative study of the Negro in Africa and America, referred to his "tropical imagination,"^{II} while other writers discovered a "tropical exuberance"^{I2} of temperament.

The principle of racial inequality also derives from Charles Darwin's theory on evolution (<u>On the Origin</u> <u>of the Species</u>, I859), itself a product of T.R. Malthus' <u>Essay on the Principles of Population</u> (I798).¹³ Fundamental to Darwin's enunciation is the belief that all plant and animal life become warring elements in a process of continued struggle for life in which the weaker species ultimately disappear and the stronger ones survive. This belief in natural selection, not in itself a direct statement on race, was made amenable to racial speculation

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by Social Darwinists like John Fiske and Herbert Spencer.¹⁴

Quite obviously, these racial conceptions are not poles apart, but share some common elements. For example, the influence of nature on individual human types permeates the germ and climate theories, while the belief in physical struggle also underlies the latter theory and Darwinism. However, the influence of natural forces on human development seems to be more fundamental to the germ than to the climate theory, as is the idea of struggle to Darwinism.

In a continued effort to show the impact of racial dogma on the Renaissance novelist's view of his folk culture, I examined the inequality principle (comprising the twin concepts of inferiority and superiority) and then the three theories through which these concepts find expression. This effort will be continued in the following discussion that explores the negative application of these theories to non-white minority groups in the Americas, particularly blacks. More precisely, it will be shown how the concept of black inferiority was used to interpret various aspects of American Negro life.

In America, white supremacists applied Darwin's

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survival-of-the fittest law to Indians and blacks. There had been a slow extinction of native American peoples on the slave plantations of South America (the Mayas and the Incas), the West Indies (the Caraibs and the Arawaks) and the United States (the Mohawks and the Moheg= ans). Contrary to what befell these native Indian groups. Negroes had been able to resist, for the most part, slow extermination under slavery. Some observers have attributed their resistance to a sturdier constitution and fertility.¹⁵ It is well-known that during the slave era, and the years immediately following it, the American black population was increasing more rapidly than its white counterpart.¹⁶ This was due mainly to a very high birth-rate, which was neutralizing the negative effects of a high mortality rate. 1880, however, marked the beginning of a depopulation process, which persisted until the end of the 1930s, when the birth-rate began again to exceed the mortality rate to the point of offsetting the steady decline of previous decades.

But the Negro population decline was more a reality of the cities. More and more ex-slaves and freedmen were pouring into them because of the increasing labor demand and the seemingly better economic prospects. In his important study of the American Negro problem, Freder-

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ick L. Hoffman notes this movement away from the rural areas:

The tendency of the colored population to leave the country and congregate in the large cities, either of North or South, is one of the most distinct phenomenon of the past thirty years.¹⁷

Robert A. Bone further notes: "More than two million people left the farm in these early decades."¹⁸ In the aggregate, between I860 and I9I0, the urban Negro population in the North and South increased from 5.I per cent to I0.4 and from 6.7 to 22.0 per cent respectively.¹⁹ Besides, by I930, the southern migration to the North had made a phenomenal jump to approximately I6 per cent from a low of 8 in I9I0.²⁰ The Negro population was, therefore, rapidly becoming a largely urbanized community. And this urban community was becoming more and more an acceptable criterion for determining general growth prospects.

In the urban centers of the North and South, the social conditions of the new Negro migrants grew from bad to worse, as the family structure collapsed under what E. Franklin Frazier has termed the "disintegrating forces of urban life."²¹ These negative forces, which will be reviewed in the second part of the inquiry, are inherent in the white-caste system. In the urban centers, they brought about such ills as alienation, loneliness and unemployment. The effects of the family collapse just mentioned -- illegitimacy, desertion, juvenile delinquency and pauperism -- boosted the already high level of disease and infantile mortality. Such a situation could not but please white supremacists concerned about the possibility of Negro numerical superiority.²²

Furthermore, white supremacists, applying the preceding racial conceptions to the Negro urban situation, attributed the above-mentioned social evils and the declining population trend they triggered to physical inadaptability. Among those sharing this opinion was Dr. R. Pearl: "The negro is biologically a less fit animal in the American environment ... than the white."²³ But the northern portion of the United States -- the so-called "land of the Caucasians"²⁴ -- was more frequently alluded to as proof of the inadaptability thesis, on account of its colder temperature, which was presumed to affect the Negro more adversely than the hotter southern climate. This view was shared by Robert F. Lee, the great Confederate General and by Alexis de Tocqueville, the French philosopherhistorian, both of whom were believers in the germ and clim-

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ate theories. The first held that Negroes were "not adapted to the environment of the Northern states"²⁵ and the second argued that they could "subsist more easily" in the South, "a territory which ... seem ed more peculiarly destined for them."²⁶

Moreover, some believers in Social Darwinism interpreted the negative population growth in the urban centers as proof that the Negroes were losing the numerical battle within American society. Hence their dire prophecies of imminent black extinction. Such prophecies, abundant during the last quarter of the last century, continued unabated, at least up to the years immediately preceding the Renaissance. Thus, in 1893, Dr. Eugene R. Corson asserted: "The Negro race was destined to disappear, a victim of 'the struggle for existence against a superior race.' "27 In The Color Line, a few years later (1905), Prof. William B. Smith celebrated his "vision of the Negro race vanishing before its superior," because of its "accelerating rate of disease and death."²⁸ An example of a late extinctionist is E.A. Ross, an eminent sociologist. In 1919, he made a similar prophecy: "In the North the climate does not suit them," he argued, "and they tend to die out,"²⁹ thus becoming a smaller percentage of the over-all American population.

White supremacists also applied the foregoing racial theories to the American Negro's economic performance, the subject of Part 2 of this inquiry. His much lower achievement in the areas related to industry and material wealth -- such as education, employment and business -- was viewed as a manifestation of inborn inaptitude and not as the result of untoward social conditions. I have already indicated (p. 50) how the germ theory, in particular, had denied the people of African descent qualities normally associated with material success. One of those who applied this theory to the Negro's economic record was Alexander Tillinghast: "In his motherland the negro received a very poor heritage of industrial knowledge."³⁰ Others, like Senator Benjamin R. Tillman, an extreme southern racist, applied the idea of social rivalry (originating in Social Darwinism) to the Negro's economic condition: "The old struggle of survival of the fittest is beginning in dead earnest, and it is not saying too much to predict that the negro must do better or 'move on.' "³¹

The foregoing are the racial ideas that the elder black writers had to react to in the decades preceding and coinciding with the Harlem Renaissance. To recapitulate, the application of these theories to the Negro American problem involved proving the charge of inferiority

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through urban demographic decline and an unsatisfactory economic record. In their reaction to this charge by white supremacists, these writers happened to define a view of Negro culture. That view was to help the younger novelists define their own attitude toward that same culture. The discussion that follows will be concerned with the various elements of the elder black intellectual response to the above ideas.

These black intellectuals, for the most part, accepted the general conclusions of the racial debate, in particular, the social struggle and individuation concepts; but considered their application to the black American's condition prejudicial or erroneous. To recapitulate, the first concept partly refers to the vying for hegemony or supremacy -- considered a natural and inevitable process -- among different social groups; and the second to the idea of specificity according to which every human species carries peculiar and unchangeable characteristics as part of its natural inheritance.³² Motivating the acceptance of these two concepts by the elder Negro writers was the almost universal conviction that they were scientifically irrefutable and overwhelmingly conclusive.³³ This conviction is evidenced in the flood of racial writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of which these discussions can

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furnish but a pale reflection.

I will now consider the acceptance and rejection of the above two concepts more at length in separate discussions. Among those endorsing the concept of social struggle were W.E.B. DuBois and Archibald H. Grimke. In an article in the Proceedings of the Negro Academy, the first writer recognized the generally assumed inevitability of black-white confrontation: "We are subject to the same natural laws as other races ... these people cannot live in the same territory without ... fatal collision."³⁴ The second writer, in another article in the Proceedings of the Academy, arrives at a similar conclusion. To him the laws of nature were "inexorable" and "proved only for the survival of the fittest," in a world marked by "industrial struggle [and] commercial rivalries."³⁵

On the other hand, these older writers rejected the application of the concept of social struggle to the black urban demographic problem. This rejection involved refuting the claim of biological or physical weakness and of impending racial extinction. The very idea of Negro depopulation was openly challenged in a number of quarters. Charles Gardner and Frederick Douglass (reputed ex-slave and prominent Civil Rights leader), for example,

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continued to express optimism in Negro growth prospects and even discounted the popular opinion that the blacks were losing ground to whites numerically.³⁶ Thirteen years later, Kelly Miller expressed a similar skepticism. Replying directly to Richard L. Hoffman's devastating anti-Negro statistical attack, he pin-pointed apparent errors and inaccuracies in current black census procedures.³⁷ As for the charge of Negro constitutional weakness, it was challenged, at the beginning of this century, by Archibald H. Grimke, who pointed out the Negroes' fine demographic record in the pre-Civil War era:

> The negro did not succumb to ... his environment [He] exhibited instead extraordinary vitality and reproductive vigor.³⁸

Moreover, unlike Douglass and Gardner alluded to above, Eugene K. Jones admitted the depopulation trend in the 1920s, but indicated a progressive improvement in the mortality rate since 1912.³⁹ At the end of the Renaissance era, W.E.B. DuBois' confidence seems to re-echo the general optimism of the black community as regards its numerical future: "We are physically able to survive," he argued, "... and yet remain the most prolific, original element of America."⁴⁰ These words were uttered at a time when Negro population growth appeared to be reverting to its pre-1880 vitality.

These black intellectuals not only rejected the negative application of the concept of social struggle to Negro demography. They also refused to apply the concept to the Negroes' economic lag and relative lack of material well-being. That is, they did not believe that the Negroes' inability so far to match the whites' level of material organization and prosperity was evidence pointing to innate industrial inferiority, as white supremacists were charging. Basic to their refutation was that Negro economic progress since Emancipation days had been far from unsatisfactory, granting the relatively recent history of Afro-american business enterprise. Such a view was held by Charles Gardner, 41 Arthur A. Schomburg, 42 and W.E.B. Du-Bois.⁴³ Thus, refusing to ground the low level of Negro economic prosperity on a lack of competitive ability arising from an alleged inferior African inheritance, these writers went on to attribute it to the adverse social conditions or attitudes fostered by the white caste system. Arthur Miller, for example, imputed the Negroes' industrial record to the hostility of white workers 44 and cited their good performance under slavery as proof against the charge of innate economic inability.⁴⁵ Pursuing this line of thought,

Archibald H. Grimke argued that the Negroes' normal progress was purposefully kept down -- through the denial of education and employment opportunities -- in order to perpetuate the notion of his innate inferiority.⁴⁶ He therefore advised white America to give the black man a fair chance to prove what he is or what he is not:

> All attempts to push and tie him down to the dead level of an inferior caste, to restrict his activity for the white race, with regard to his possibilities for higher things, is ... an economic blunder, pure and simple, to say nothing of the immorality of such action. Like water, let the Negro find his natural level If nature has designed him to serve the white race forever, never fear. He will not be able to elude nature Let the Negro freely find himself, whether in doing so he falls or rises in the scale of life.⁴⁷

In the foregoing analysis, I have reviewed that part of the social struggle concept that was accepted and rejected by the Old Guard writers. Likewise will I examine their dual response to the individuation concept. As mentioned (p.53), the latter concept underlies the germ and climate theories. As with the social struggle concept,

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the elder black writers admitted the general principle that all human groups differ essentially from one another. Thus W.E.B. DuBois wrote about the need for a broader humanity, which freely recognizes "physical differences of blood, color and cranial measurements."48 But greater emphasis was placed on what he called "the deeper ... spiritual, psychical, differences" that to him were infinitely more transcending."49 In these latter differences. he saw the basis of "racial genius"⁵⁰ and "identity."⁵¹ Also supporting the individuality idea was the London Pan African Conference of 1900, which recognized racial differences in "the color of skin and the texture of the hair."⁵² Moreover, the foremost Negro national organization. the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, also "believed in Negro blood and ... genius."⁵³ Furthermore, in 1924, when only two of the eighteen-odd novels of the Renaissance had been published, the idea was being suggested in such allusions as Alain Locke's "characteristic traits"⁵⁴ and, three years later, in Kelly Miller's "native genius."55 And, at the end of the era, the continuing use of the term "genius" to describe Negro individuality resurfaced in Benjamin Brawley's studies.⁵⁶

Of course, the terminology, like the concept of racial individuality itself, did not originate in the

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Negro intellectual community, but was concocted in the minds of white supremacists and race theoreticians as they attempted to define alleged group differences. Gunther, for example, had already referred to "the genius peculiar to the Nordic race;"⁵⁷ Robert Bean, who exceptionally combined medical practice with racial speculation, once alluded to the "character and genius of each race;"⁵⁸ and Howard W. Odum, one of the foremost champions of the racial individuality idea, had observed that the Negroes "had a most distinctive ... society of their own."⁵⁹

But the endorsement of racial individuality by the Negro intelligentsia of pre-Renaissance times extended beyond the concept itself and its repetitive terminology. More importantly, it embraced the various qualities -- characteristics, traits, tendencies, as they were indiscriminately called -- that had been assigned to the black and white groups. As we noted in the discussions on the germ and climate theories, to the black group was attributed the "temperamental" (sensitivity, sensuousness, passion, emotion or instinct) and to the white group the "mental" (intellection, creativity, energy, foresight). The black intellectuals also endorsed the white man's embodiment of temperamental qualities in Negro folk arts

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(song, music, dance and tale) and its associated values.⁶⁰ So Charles S. Johnson asserts: "The humor of the negro has been regarded as one of his 'native characteristics;' "⁶¹ and DuBois associates "the development of Negro genius" with the study of "negro ... art."⁶² The allusion, here, to art cannot but signify Negro folk-art since, at this time at least, the Negro had no other indigenous form of group expression and since he was generally ostracized, because of caste restrictions, from participating in white forms of art.⁶³ A third example of the black writer accepting the definition of black individuality in terms of the temperamental and its cultural embodiments (folk arts and values) is Arthur A. Schomburg's allusion to the Negroes! "characteristic rhythm" and "peculiar songs and chants."⁶⁴

As in the case of the social struggle concept, the acceptance of the concept of racial individuality by black intellectual leaders was accompanied by the rejection of its negative application to Negroes -- the assumption that the temperamental characteristics assigned to them were inferior to the characteristics assigned to whites. Motivating this rejection was the different-but-equal view shared by leaders of the Negro community, at least from the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ This view was forcibly expressed in the manifesto of the Second Pan-African Congress:

> The absolute equality of races -- physical, political and social -- is the founding stone of world peace and human advancement. No one denies great differences of gift, capacity and attainment among individuals of all races, but the voice of science, religion and practical politics is one in denying the Godappointed existence of super-races, or of races naturally and inevitably and eternally inferior.

That in the vast range of time one group should in its industrial technique, or social organization, or spiritual vision, lag a few hundred years behind another, or forge fitfully ahead, or come to differ decidedly in thought, deed and ideal, is proof of the essential richness and variety of human nature, rather than proof of the coexistence of demigods and apes in human form.⁶⁶

The proscription by white supremacists of the temperamental element of what may conveniently be called the passion-intellect dichotomy in Western thought actually precedes the foregoing racial speculation. I have traced this dichotomy to the Aristotelian theory of the human psyche. This theory states that the human scul is made up of two parts, "a rational and an irrational ... from which spring the appetites and desires in general."⁶⁷ This theory further states that the "irrational," which is equivalent to the latter-day temperamental, cught to be "submissive and obedient"⁶³ to the "rational," its superior. Such ideas concerning the psychological make-up of man have left their mark in numerous works, including medieval Thomistic philosophy. Shakespeare's drama (he paints great pictures of the mind acting on or superintending the body, or conversely, in such tragedies as Macbeth and King Lear), Nathaniel Hawthorne's fiction (his head-and-heart theme is a reflection of the passion-intellect duality in works like The Scarlet Letter and The House of Seven Gables). Racist thinkers, in equating the "irrational" element with the temperamental, thought of Negroes as constituting a "child race" that required "the constant control of whites to keep it in check"⁶⁹ lest, as J. Goddard argues, its members should give vent to their "strong sexual and herd instincts."70

It is such a proscription of the temperamental that the older Negro writers rejected. This rejection was accompanied by a reversal of racial meaning. That is, qualities normally assigned to the mental by whites (in the preceding racial equation or dichotomy) were transferred to the temperamental, thus making it appear more dignified or worthy. As the reader will discover in the course of the present discussion, this dual reversal on the part of elder black intellectuals was not a re-affirmation of the doctrine of different-but-equal (p. 67), but a de facto declaration of Negro superiority.

In the first form of reversal, two qualities normally associated with the mental -- creativity and spirituality -- were shifted to the temperamental. The direct result of this relocation was the perception of Negroes as fundamentally an artistic people, more sensitive to the beauties of the outside world than whites, because of the formers' alleged keener sense.⁷¹ Such a view of the black temperament is echoed in DuBois and in Albert C. Barnes. To these two scholars, the Negro was "an artist"72 and "a poet by birth."⁷³ Moreover, his new artistic role was reinforced by that of spiritual guide or moral teacher. It was generally felt that the psychology of the black man alone could make the white man happy and show him the value of leisure.⁷⁴ Such an opinion was not only inspired by the need to dignify or rehabilitate the black identity. It was also the result of an unconscious dislike

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for material pursuits and interests, bred by persistent alienation from the economic life of western societies.

Negro writers also countered the charge of inferior racial traits by re-interpreting the germ theory. This action constitutes another form of reversal. In this second reversal, the idea of suffering is associated with the temperamental -- a measure which was meant to further retrieve the latter. Regarding this second reversal, I would like to mention two past observations. The germ theory, it will be remembered, makes the so-called superior racial traits dependent upon environmental hardships. Besides. white supremacists had attributed the alleged mental traits of whites to the northern European environment which, they held, was physically and intellectually more challenging than the African. Dispelling the myth that Africa was a land of "enduring ease,"⁷⁵ Negro academic leaders, from the beginning of this century, began to argue that the preceding statement was erroneous and that the inclemency of nature in Africa was, in fact, at least equal to that of northern Europe. This new association of Negro temperamental traits with elemental hardships tended to elevate these traits beyond those assigned to whites. In this respect, efforts aimed at giving the so-called 'dark continent' a new image and, through it, the temperamental, is evident in Benjamin

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Brawley, who observed that "there was something elemental about the race, something that found its origin in the African forest, in the sighing of the night wind."⁷⁶ Charles I. Glicksberg was later to dub this last observation "a bit of anthropological nonsense."⁷⁷ But DuBois was so delighted with it as to include it in his important study, <u>The Gift of Black Folk</u>. Moreover, DuBois, himself, in <u>The Souls of Black Folk</u>, also twists the germ theory around, thus helping to alter the old racial view of Africa,⁷⁸ in keeping with the new effort to revamp the temperamental:

> ... the only race which has held at bay the life destroying forces of the tropics, has gained therefrom ... a sense of beauty, particularly for sound and color, which characterizes the race.⁷⁹

Furthermore, in the elder writer's mind, the sociological environment of the Americas became the extension of the physical environment of ancient Africa. And, just as the hardships associated with the latter were presumed to have produced transcending temperamental traits, so the sufferings inherent in American slavery were held to have spurred the development of these traits. Thus the last writer, reviewing the early history of Negro religious emotion, observes:

... it was adapted, changed and intensified by the tragic soul-life of the slave, until, under the stress of law and whip, it became the one true expression of a people's sorrow, despair, and hope.⁸⁰

Similarly, Benjamin Brawley writes:

... the plaintive quality that is ever present in the negro voice is but the reflection of a background of tragedy There is something grim and stern about it all, too, something that speaks of the lash, of the child torn from its mother's bosom, of the dead body riddled with bullets and swinging all night from the limb by the roadside.^{8I}

It is, therefore, by transferring such qualities as creativity, spirituality and suffering from the white to the Negro character that the rehabilitation of the temperamental was effected in the years prior to the Renaissance.

This rehabilitation by the older Negro intellectuals was also a declaration of superiority:

The Negro leader, W.E.B. DuBois, in bitterness and frustration over the prejudice against members of his race, responded at one point by appealing to a counter-racism based upon the supposed superiority of Negroes to whites.⁸²

Ironically, DuBois also levels such a charge against Marcus Garvey, whose political philosophy differed fundamentally from his own (pp. 25-27): "he sought ... to oppose white supremacy and the white ideal by a crude and equally brutal black supremacy and black idea."⁸³ The following facetious remark by Arthur A. Schomburg carries further proof of the prevalence of the superiority idea:

> The blatant Caucasian racialist with his theories and assumptions of race superiority and dominance has in turn bred his Ethiopian counterpart - the rash and rabid amateur who has glibly tried to prove half of the world's geniuses to have been Negroes and to trace the pedigree of nineteenth century Americans from the (African) Queen of Sheba.⁸⁴

Schomburg's remark also shows the extent to which the idea of Negro pre-eminence had degenerated.

This idea, moreover, which spread like wild fire within the Negro intellectual community during the first three decades of this century, was expressed superlatively in direct allusions to the temperamental or to the folk arts and values through which (as I shall point

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out) it finds expression. Charles S. Johnson's reference to "unique culture traits"⁸⁵ is an example. A more direct allusion to black superiority is this remark by Barnes: "The white man ... cannot compete with the Negro in spiritual endowment."⁸⁶ In yet another example, the pre-eminence assigned to temperamental traits is couched in derogative terms: "the coarse and evil wit" of whites is compared to "the loving, jovial good humor of negroes."⁸⁷

Having reviewed the elder Negro writers' response to the racial speculation of the past centuries, I will now focus my attention on the effects of that response on the Harlem Renaissance writers. As I said earlier (pp. 47-48). that response together with the cult of primitivism of the anti-rationalist movement helped shape the younger novelists' view of their own culture and identity. However, it would be quite erroneous to suggest that these younger black intellectuals got acquainted with white racial dogma only through their more mature counterparts. For a casual reading of their non-fictional writings indicates an independent familiarity with racial literature. This knowledge is indicated, for example, in facetious allusions to whites as "Nordics."88 A knowledge of racial literature is also evident in occasional references to white supremacists and their works. Examples of the latter are Claude McKay's mention of Lothrop Stoddard's <u>The Rising Tide of Color</u>³⁹ and of Herbert Spencer⁹⁰ as well as George Schuyler's allusion to Franz Boas and to Madison Grant, a prominent race theoretician of the early twentieth century.⁹¹ The Old Guard or more conservative writers, therefore, did not pioneer the acquaintance of the younger Renaissance novelists with racial literature. What they did was to communicate to these novelists their own response to that literature through their writings, social and literary contacts. Such a response, in turn, helped the small group of Harlem novelists define their own position vis-a-vis their culture.

Social contacts between the younger and elder Negro writers were occasional, as Claude McKay and Langston Hughes report in their autobiographies.⁹² More importantly, the Harlem novelists became familiar with their elders through the latters' publications and journalistic endeavors to which they sometimes contributed as columnists, subscribers or co-workers. These publications include the principal black journals of the period -- <u>The Crisis</u> and <u>Opportunity</u>, and the burgeoning <u>Journal of Negro History</u>.⁹³ In this way, a great admiration emerged for the leaders of black intellectual opinion, particularly for DuBois, whom George Schuyler dubbed "the dean of the Aframerican literati."⁹⁴ Hughes has paid tribute to DuBois' prose, comparing it with Paul Robeson's vocal skill and Jean Toomer's <u>Cane</u>.⁹⁵ The strongest admiration for him, however, comes from McKay. After stating that his acquaintance with DuBois was occasioned by a chat with his Kansas State College teacher, following his arrival in the United States from his Jamaican homeland (1912), McKay goes on to say:

> I did not feel any magnetism in his personality. But I do in his writings, which is more important The book <u>The Souls of</u> <u>Black Folk</u> shook me like an earthquake. Dr. DuBois stands on a pedestal illuminated in my mind.⁹⁶

This favorable opinion of the leading black intellectual seems to contradict what has been said hitherto about him in a number of remarks. In them were noted DuBois' spirited opposition and that of other elder writers to the Harlem School novelists' portrayal of lower-class life (pp.I9-20). But the above reference by McKay furnishes a clue to this apparent contradiction. As we noted in the literary debate McKay, like the other radical novelists, did not endorse the middle-class and integrationist artistic outlook of the elder black writers, including that of DuBois himself. However, the younger novelists did admire the latter's literary combativeness and vituperative attacks against supremacist detractors. That is why McKay further described DuBois as a fine "passionate polemic"⁹⁷ and Hughes discovered in his writings a "truly racial prose."⁹⁸

The most significant response of the younger writers to their elders' standpoint on racial matters was their endorsement of the Negro specificity argument. Indeed, the idea that black Americans were fundamentally different from their white counterparts later became so generalized as to be axiomatic in radical Renaissance literature. That this was so is partly suggested in occasional racial statements by Harlem School novelists. Thus Wallace Thurman refers to the need to introduce "a Negro note into American literature ... by writing about ... race characteristics;"⁹⁹ and Hughes exhorts the would-be Negro fictionist not "to pour his racial individuality into the mold of American standardization."^{IOO}

The endorsement of the Negro individuality idea by Renaissance novelists also included accepting part of the elder black writer's view of the temperamental traits on which that individuality was founded. Accepted were the various elements making up the temperamental stereotype.

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As I indicated (pp. 62-63), these elements were the alleged emotions and feelings generated by life in Africa and America. These assumed elements of the black psyche were sometimes epitomized in pain and pleasure, as in Hughes' evocation of the "dreams and heart-aches that all negroes know"^{IOI} and in McKay's allusion to Negro suffering: "the Negro, and especially the American, has bitterness in him in spite of his joyous exterior Bitterness is a natural part of the black man's birthright."^{IO2} This pain-pleasure syndrome clearly re-echoes the conservative writers' efforts to ennoble the temperamental through association with racial suffering.

Accepted, too, by these younger writers of the Renaissance was the idea that the temperamental found cultural expression through the medium of art. McKay, for instance, further observes: "For out of his bitterness he has bloomed and created his spirituals and blues ... his humor and his ripe laughter."^{IO3} The following observation by Hughes seens to establish even more forcefully the association between feelings, emotions and art: "But jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America ... the tomtom of joy and laughter and pain, and pain swallowed up in a smile."^{IO4}

The Harlem School novelists also accepted their elders' argument that the virtues of the temperamental (its alleged exuberance, spirituality and origin in racial suffering) conferred distinction and superiority upon Negro culture. Allusions to the latter frequently involved bitter name-calling and innuendo. As in the case of the elder writers, such allusions commonly represented the white group as an unhappy lot. For happiness, as I shall later point out, was linked to, and made dependent on, sensibility, not materiality -- qualities which were respectively attributed to blacks and whites. The assumption that whites were deficient in the former quality prompted Negro writers to describe them in temperate or lifeless terms.¹⁰⁵ London. for example, was said to be a "cold ... city"¹⁰⁶ and the religious songs of the southern whites, unlike those of Negroes, were dismissed as "drab melodies." 107 Sometimes, such derogatory descriptions of whites would degenerate into slurring, as in this second example by McKay:

> I do not know if I ever suggested the superiority of pure-black over pure-white virtues, although I will confess that I do prefer virtues that are colorful to the sepulchral kinds.^{IO8}

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The last reference concludes the first part of this chapter. In it was examined the younger novelists' response to the attitude of their elder counterparts in the supremacist debate. In the light of the foregoing discussion, this response seems fairly positive. It, however, by no means signify complete agreement between these writers, who represent the two poles of black thought in these early days. That this is so is quite evident in the debate over the suitability of lower-class material for black fiction. What the last discussion indicates is a similarity of opinion between these two groups of writers regarding what constitutes the Negro identity.

The second part of this continuing chapter will further examine the influence of white intellectual opinion on the fictional formulation of Negro folk culture by reviewing the anti-rationalist movement in the first three decades of this century. This movement, which spearheaded what is generally known as the cult of primitivism, was more concerned with the temperamental than did the movement which kept the flames of the racial debate alive. Also, the influence of this movement on Negro novelists has been more direct and personal, since it was a contemporary artistic phenomenon with concerns and aims similar to those of

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the Harlem Renaissance. Moreover, unlike their supremacist counterparts, the adherents of this second white movement were overwhelmingly in favor of the temperamental to the extent of making it the corner-stone of their new artistic belief and of becoming its fervent advocates. And, while the tide against the temperamental was slowly ebbing, around the beginning of the second decade of this century, under the onrush of mounting scientific criticism, ¹⁰⁹ support for it was picking up momentum and was to reach its high-water mark at the end of the Twenties. This new sympathy for the temperamental, occurring after the latter had been made the defining yard-stick of Afro-american identity, could not but have a tremendously favorable impact on younger black artists and writers.

The new interest in the temperamental was sparked by widespread dissatisfaction with western culture. Writers such as Joseph Conrad had already criticized its unhealthy concern for expediency and profit in works like "Heart of Darkness" (I899) and <u>Nostromo</u> (I904). Similarly, after World War I, young white radicals were increasingly critical of the industrial society in America, whose evils they attributed to the American tradition. Nathaniel Hawthorne

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had already cast a negative view on the latter in works like "The Maypole of Merry Mount," "The Scarlet Letter," and The House of Seven Gables. It was felt by the white radicals that the pioneer and Puritan had, through their ruthless pursuit of moral rectitude and material aggrandizement, sowed the seeds of repression and denial, later maturing in cultural sterility. Waldo Frank, one of the members of the new movement, discovered a "psychic imbalance"^{IIO} in American life, resulting from what he called "the denial of ... the senses" and the immoderate pursuit of material interests.^{III} The influence of this tradition on the arts was also deplored. Malcolm Cowley, another adherent of the anti-rationalist club, thus wrote about "emotional and aesthetic starvation."^{II2} Carl Van Doren, a third adherent, saw in American literature the need for "free expression of gay or desperate moods."^{II3} Such criticisms resulted in the overthrow of Puritan artistic norms of economy and restraint, and in the search for a new aesthetics grounded on the emotions and senses. The proposed revolutionary form of art is not without reminiscing William Wordsworth's 'overflow-of-powerful-feelings poetry' 114 and the eighteenth century English novel of sensibility.

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Such a search led to the rediscovery of Africa. Oscar Cargill notes that European artists were enamored of the "simplified emotional forms" of African art.^{II5} Alain Locke also notes the "revitalizing influence" that art had on painters (Matisse, Picasso) and sculptors (Epstein, Lembruch).^{II6} This influence was also extended to French painters like Paul Guillaume, the author of several studies on primitive Negro art.^{II7} Besides, Alain Locke argues that French poets (Blaise Cendrars, René Basset) were inspired by Negro "rhythm" and the "expressive technique" in African plastic arts.^{II8}

The search for artistic rejuvenation also led European composers to black America. There they discovered the temperamental in Negro tones and rhythms. Among the compositions which the latter inspired are Milhaud's <u>La Création du Monde</u>, William Walton's <u>La Facade</u> and Krenek's opera, <u>Jonny spielt auf</u>.^{II9} Not all European musicians interested in Negro music travelled to America, for a number of bands (The Memphis Students, The Clef Club Musicians), musical comedies (Shuffle Along, The Plantation Revue) and singers (Florence Mills, Roland Hayes) toured Europe regularly. Reviewing black musical influence in Europe, Martin Cooper observes:

The fashion for American Negro rhythms and

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tone combinations was in fact the symptom of a profound shifting of aesthetic values. The center of the disturbance was France, where the utmost pitch of refinement had been reached by Debussy and Ravel and the reaction set in with corresponding violence. The <u>fureur nègre</u> was an attempt to escape from the exquisite, the evocative, the scented, the precious, into a world of simple, tough, unpretentious reality.^{I20}

This search for a new aesthetics was even more dramatic in America, where the Negro finally became the embodiment and symbol of the temperamental.¹²¹ The younger set of the American revolt movement did not have to pursue their search for very long. For black novelists had already accepted, as stated before (pp. 77-78), the emotions and senses (that underlie the alleged Negro identity) as the basis of their new fictional credo; and Harlem, where most of them resided at one time or other, was not very far from Greenwich Village, the then white radical artistic base. Hence there followed a quick discovery of mutual sympathy, which soon blossomed in a short period of fruitful collaboration. "After World War I," notes H.M. Gloster, "negro writers, especially those in New York City, fraternized with their white contemporaries."^{I22} Another writer, Harold Cruse, writes of an "ethnic and aesthetic inter-

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action"¹²³ between the two groups.

These white and black writers of the revolt movement traded benefits throughout the hectic Twenties, with the second providing inspiration and access to the temperamental and, the first, social recognition, business opportunities and aesthetic encouragement. Black writers and artists became conduits through which their white counterparts could experience Megro cultural life. For example, Wallace Thurman became escort and usher par excellence in black Manhattan.¹²⁴ Incidentally, it was dubbed "the white picnic ground" by Claude McKay, 125 because of the extent to which it catered to the Greenwich Village set. One of the rendezvous points, the Civic Club, was owned by the NAACP and harbored the offices of The Crisis, the prominent Negro journal. These whites also attended Gatsbylike Saturday-night and rent-parties (officiated by prominent hosts and hostesses like A'lelia Walker. the wealthy "Negro heiress" 126) as well as caroused in exclusive cabarets, like the Cotton Club and Barron's or in the humbler Connor's. In such places, white Negrophiles, who were enamored of the temperamental, joined in characteristic Negro dances like jazz and listened to black music (mainly blues), sung or played by popular Negro artists like Paul Robeson, Florence Mills, and Ethel Waters.

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Following is a description by Rudolph Fisher, a Harlem novelist. of one of Ethel Waters' performances:

It was a sure-enough honky-tonk, occupying the cellar of a saloon. Here a tall brownskin girl, unmistakably the one guaranteed in the song to make a preacher lay his bible down, used to sing and dance her own peculiar numbers, resting them with her own originality ... her songs, genuine blues

> Woke up this mawnin' The day was dawnin' And I was sad and blue, so blue, Lord -Didn't have nobody To tell my trouble.¹²⁷

In his autobiography, Hughes lists here and there a number of literary and artistic celebrities, who made the above-mentioned places their occasional haunts.^{I28} Many of them were to produce works inspired by the temperamental Negro subject-matter. Among those mentioned by this writer are: a Mrs. Reagan, the unsuccessful author of a Negro revue; DuBoise Heyward, who wrote <u>Porgy</u>, and George Gershwin who turned the latter drama of simple rural Negro life into a successful musical composition; Eugene O'Neill, whose several studies of the temperamental in Negro life are high-lighted by The Emperor Jones. H.M. Gloster has described it as "one of the most revolutionary plays in the history of the American theatre."^{I29} Perhaps for writers and artists like these such cultural contacts constituted an avenue that, hopefully, would lead to the great work of art, which, Messiah-like, so many were looking forward to, as Albert Harper speculates:

> They seem to believe that out of the Negro will come the great American novel, the epic poem of America or the perfect painting based on solids.¹³⁰

The extent to which internacial contacts inspired the white writer is suggested in a remark by Hughes: "White writers wrote about Negroes more successfully than Negroes did about themselves."^{I3I}

But, in terms of Negro art, this greater success of the white writer was more commercial than aesthetic, argues the same writer.¹³² The reasons for this assertion will now be examined by reviewing some of the problems of the Harlem novelist. For a knowledge of them will help create a greater understanding or appreciation of the white contribution to Renaissance Negro fiction.

In spite of a long literary tradition behind him, the Negro fictionist was very little known by the white intellectual community. Thus, referring to his fellow writers, the younger Harlem novelists, James W. Johnson observed that at the beginning of the Twenties they were still a "novelty and a strange phenomenon."¹³³ This writer also noted the particular difficulties of the black novelist, including the problem of the "double audience." 134 Unlike the white writer of fiction, the Negro could not use white and black materials at will, but was compelled to limit himself to his own ethnic or cultural province. Also, in using his own group material -- black life and character conceived in temperamental terms -- creative freedom was constricted by the biased and stereotyped white view of it. We have a noted¹³⁵ how this view tended to demean the Negro folk culture. This difficulty appears even greater, when one considers that the Negro writer's audience was made up of whites and of only a small number of blacks -- those whose social or artistic viewpoint was that of the dominant white group.¹³⁶ This difficulty of the Negro novelist is poignantly depicted by Carl Van Vechten, a white writer, in his popular Negro novel, Nigger Heaven. In it, the would-be black writer, Byron, is pitted against the white editor, Durwood, whose exclusivist view of black art seems to stifle the young man's fictional inspiration. 137

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H.M. Gloster reports another difficulty:

Although the fiction of Chestnutt and Dunbar was handled by major publishing houses between 1898 and 1905, Negro novels and short stories between the latter year and 1923 were almost invariably presented by small firms that were unable to give their authors a national hearing.¹³⁸

It is in the light of difficulties such as these that should be viewed the white intellectuals' contribution to the Harlem novelist's attempts to represent his group life temperamentally.

One aspect of this contribution was the widening of the Negro novelist's social recognition. In a number of artistic haunts -- Mabel Dodge's salon in Greenwich Village or the Parisian art colonies of Montmartre and Montparnase -- Negroes rubbed shoulders with their white counterparts. In <u>The Looking Glass</u>, Wallace Thurman mentions how several black artists were thus brought "out of obscurity."^{I39} Besides, some white intellectuals acted as gobetweens, bringing influential whites and blacks together. An example of this is Lewis Gannett's luncheon invitation to McKay, which provided the opportunity for him to meet Carl Van Doren, an editor of the Nation. Introductions like

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the preceding sometimes ripened in business careers in white journalism. It was in this way that McKay became a member of the editorial staff of the <u>Liberator</u> and Thurman of <u>The New World</u>. Of Thurman, Mae Guendolyn Henderson observes:

> His job ... brought him into contact with many leading and influential people in the literary and publishing worlds ... He made connections there which ... would later prove useful.¹⁴⁰

Gunnar Myrdal makes a similar observation: Getting acquainted with the white literati opened up "excellent economic opportunities."^{I4I} In addition, financial aid was another means whereby members of the white revolt movement and their sympathizers encouraged the Renaissance novelist. Awards and donations, like the Springarn prize, were occasionally given by men of letters (Prof. Springarn and Carl Brandt, for example) and by a number of "kind-hearted New York ladies with money to help young writers."^{I42} In <u>The Big Sea</u>, Hughes writes emotionally about one of them -- "a beautiful woman with snow-white hair"^{I43} and "America's finest representative of great wealth,"^{I44} who believed that Negroes had "something very precious ... and a deep well

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of spirit within ..."145 Also, elder members of the white revolt movement sometimes acted like tutors to young Negro novelists, proffering technical or ideological advice. A notable example is Frank Harris' exhortation to McKay: "You are an African ... You must accomplish things for your race ... You must write prose." 146 McKay mentions one instance when he incurred Harris' ire: "You are a bloody traitor, sir!" he snapped. "For if a man is not faithful to his own individuality, he cannot be loyal to anything." 147 These harsh words by the Irish critic and editor of Pearson's Magazine were pronounced at a time when he thought his oupil was swerving away from temperamental rectitude. Noteworthy in Harris' remarks is the allusion to Negro identity -- an issue that has been exhaustively treated in previous discussions bearing on the racial debate.

More importantly, the white contribution to Negro arts and letters also affected the elaboration of the Harlem Renaissance novel. The white intellectual's reformed view of art had some impact on the black novelist. It is not easy, however, to measure its exact extent. This reformed view of art has traditionally been defined as primitivism. In order to examine its impact on the Harlem novel, I shall first describe its nature briefly. Though inspired by the Negro, primitivism has roots in white culture. Besides, primitivism is the temperamental finding an outlet in four of the six values enumerated preceedingly. A detailed study of these values in the next chapter precludes a lengthy discussion of them here. The four values through which primitivism usually finds expression are the expressive, mnemonic, affirmative and the hedonistic. The first three were popularized by the Freudian craze of the I920s:

> Freud, who became popular in the U.S., after a series of lectures at Clark University, in 1909, stimulated an interest in primitivism as an avenue of escape for jaded Americans, by attributing many of the neurosis of human behavior to the suppression of ... instinct.^{I48}

As for the fourth value, the hedonistic, it was rediscovered in the post-World War I period by the non-conformist artists and writers of the revolt movement. The end of hostilities, combined with the sudden, unprecedented rise in material prosperity, especially in the United States, had created a strong need for sensuous indulgence. These values are finely dramatized in the "Lost Generation" works of fiction, like Scott F. Fitzgerald's "Babylon Revisited" and <u>The Great</u> Gatsby, and in Ernest Hemingway's <u>The Sun Also Rises</u> and

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<u>A Farewell to Arms</u>. In these works and others of their kind, self-restraint is replaced by licence and responsibility by withdrawal. Underlying such works, too, is a strong desire to forget the unpleasant experiences of the immediate past. Moreover, regarding the depiction of the Negro identity, white primitivism was mainly concerned about two of the four values mentioned previously -- the affirmative and the expressive. These are the two values which predominate in the white Negro works already cited as well as in others like Gertrude Stein's "Melanctha" and Sherwood Anderson's Dark Laughter.

It is this limited respresentation of the alleged Negro character or individuality by white novelists that is said to have had some influence on their Harlem counterparts. Commenting on that influence, Robert A. Bone says that the black novelists found in the white models a "useful support" for their own creations.^{I49} Another commentator, Amritjit Singh, believes that the use of primitivism by black writers helped them to define their own identity.^{I50} In this respect, Carl Van Vechten's <u>Nigger Heaven</u> has been singled out for special mention. H.M. Gloster argues that "it affected the work of the Negro fictionist more than any other book in the history of American literature."^{I51} Undeniably, a number of Harlem novels, especially of the folk and mixed types reviewed earlier (pp. I8-I9), do dramatize the expressive and affirmative values that permeate <u>Nigger Heaven</u>. These include novels by Claude McKay (<u>Home</u> <u>to Harlem, Banjo</u>), Wallace Thurman (<u>The Blacker the Berry</u>, <u>The Infants of the Spring</u>), Arna Bontemps (<u>God Sends Sunday</u>) and Langston Hughes (<u>Not Without Laughter</u>).

However, McKay and, to a lesser extent, Hughes, have denied any direct or conscious influence of the white Negro model on their works. McKay felt that the white writer lacked the cultural background and experience necessary to adequately represent Aframerican culture or the temperamental self-image of blacks.¹⁵² As a result, he did not value greatly works like "Melanctha" and Nigger Heaven, and even went to great lengths to disown their influence on his creations.¹⁵³ Hughes' case is a little different. Unlike McKay, he did admire and defend the portrayal of Negro character by white authors.¹⁵⁴ Yet, in spite of this and the latters" obvious influence on his works,¹⁵⁵ he continued to suggest that these were independent creations and that he was unable to write primitively. ¹⁵⁶ Besides, Hughes' remark that the white novelist's success in representing Negro character was more commercial than aesthetic tends to accentuate the rejection of primitivistic influence. Elsewhere. however, these writers of the Harlem School have lauded the

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primitive ideal espoused by white intellectuals. Thus Hughes himself observed:

> In the primitive world, where people live closer to the earth and much nearer to the stars, every inner and outer act combines to form the single harmony, life They do not, as many civilized people do, neglect the truth of the physical for the sake of the mind.¹⁵⁷

Similarly, McKay asserted that paradise was "a primitive kind of place"¹⁵⁸ and that he was "a primitive savage and ... a stranger to civilization."¹⁵⁹ It is only natural, therefore, that such an endorsement of the primitive should reflect itself in these writers' novels, in spite of their remarks to the contrary. Hence, I will attempt to rationalize the rejection of the white model.

Before doing so, however, I will briefly mention those Harlem Renaissance novels that seem untouched by the Van Vechten influence. Among them are Rudolph Fisher's mixed novels (<u>The Conjure-Man Dies</u>, <u>The Walls of</u> <u>Jericho</u>) as well as a number of apologist ones, like <u>The</u> <u>Chinaberry Tree</u> and <u>The Fire in the Flint</u>. Other novels, like <u>Flight</u> and <u>Banana Bottom</u>, bear but the attenuated marks of that influence. Thus the influence of the white Negro model on the young black writer has not been so universal and stifling, as a number of commentators have suggested.¹⁶⁰ This fact is partially reflected in a remark by Bone: "The influence of white intellectuals on the Negro Renaissance ought not to be overestimated."¹⁶¹

The reluctance on the part of Negro novelists to admit the influence of primitivism on their works stems from the nature of the white model itself. The fundamental purpose of the Harlem Renaissance novel was to dramatize Negro individuality in terms of the temperamental, its alleged basis. Primitivism, by representing mainly two of the six values issuing from that individuality, produced but a watered-down portrait of it. As a result of this shortcoming, black Harlem writers tended to view the portrayal of Negroes by white novelists as being too shallow or limited.

Also militating against the acceptance of the primitivistic label on the part of the Negro novelists were the peculiar racial awareness of the era and an intensive desire for distinctive group expression. Thus the Harlem School novel, by aiming at a fuller and more authentic portrait of Afro-american identity, through the dramatization of the folk culture is, in many respects, a reaction against the white Negro novel.

Having indicated in the foregoing studies the influence of both racial dogma and the primitivistic cult on the Renaissance novelist's view of Negro individuality, my attention in the following chapter will focus on the black values on which this alleged individuality is founded and which were but partially depicted by white novelists. This study is historical in outlook and will prepare us for another (chapter three) that views Negro folk values as the ingredients of the black soul. Together, these three chapters constitute the first part of the inquiry into the Harlem Renaissance novel.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

^I See Thomas Gossett, <u>Race: The History of an Idea</u> <u>in America</u> (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), pp. 32-33; Michael Banton and Jonathan Harwood, The Race Concept (London: David and Charles, 1975), p. 13.

² This concept is generally rejected by modern intellectual and scientific opinion. See, for example, Theodosius Dobzhansky, <u>Evolution, Genetics, and Man</u> (New York and London: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1961), p. 185; Gunnar Myrdal, <u>An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern</u> <u>Democracy</u> (New York and London: Harper and Rowe, Publishers, 1962), p. 115; Michael Bantos and Jonathan Harwood, <u>ibid</u>., p. 8.

³ D.K. Shute, "Racial Anatomical Peculiarities," <u>The American Anthropologist</u>, IX (April, 1896), 127.

⁴ S.P. Fullinwider, <u>The Mind and Mood of Black</u> <u>America</u> (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1969), p. 57.

⁵ Nathaniel S. Shaler, "The Permanence of Racial Characteristics," in Idus A. Newby ed., <u>The Development</u> <u>of Segregationist Thought</u> (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1968), p. 55. That Africa had a relatively congenial climate, where life was easy, as Shaler argues, has been discounted by serious writers. See, for example, Melville J. Herskovits, <u>The Myth of the Negro Past</u> (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1941), pp. 56-57.

^b A Lagarde and L. Michard, <u>XVIIIe Siècle: Les Grands</u> <u>Auteurs Français</u>, IV (Bordas: Collection Textes et Litérature, 1960), p. 107.

⁷ Ibid., XIXe Siècle, p. 15.

⁸ Idus A. Newby, <u>Jim-Crow's Defence: Anti-Negro</u> <u>Thought in America: 1900-1930</u> (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), p. 27.

⁹ <u>Ibid</u>., p. 28.
^{IO} <u>Ibid</u>.
^{II} Ibid., p. 29.

^{I2} <u>Ibid</u>. The study of the influence of climate on the human constitution has been pursued in later years. See, for example, Theodosius Dobzhansky, <u>Genetics and the Origin</u> <u>of Species</u> (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 152-55.

¹³ Theodosius Dobzhansky, <u>Evolution</u>, op. cit., p. III.

^{I4} Ibid., p. II2.

¹⁵ S.J. Holmes, <u>The Negro's Struggle for Survival</u>: <u>A Study in Human Ecology</u> (New York: Kennikat Press, 1937), p. 56; W.E.B. DuBois and B.T. Washington, <u>The Negro in the</u> <u>South</u> (New York: The Citadel Press, 1972), p. 14.

¹⁶ In the South, the widespread fear that the Negro might overtake whites numerically increased even after the population had started its downward trend. It was felt that the Negroes, who constituted about one-seventh of the population (in the I880s), would largely predominate in the southern States in the near future. Such an opinion was voiced by, among others, Edward W. Gilliam, in "The African in the United States," <u>Popular Science Monthly</u>, XXII (Feb., I883), 438-40 and in "The African Problem," North American <u>Review</u>, CXXXIX (Oct., 1884), 417-30; and by Brooks Adams and Alfred T. Mahan, in <u>The Influence of Sea Power Upon</u> <u>History</u>, (1890). In this respect, see Richard Hofstadter, <u>Social Darwinism in American Thought</u> (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1959), pp. 87-88. Moreover, in his in-depth study of the American Negro problem, Frederick L. Hoffman attempted to dispel the foundation of such fears. See his <u>Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro</u> (New York: The McMillan Company, 1896), pp. 3-5. But such fears resurfaced in the early years of the twentieth-century, inspiring works like Madison Grant's <u>The Passing of the Great</u> <u>Race (1916)</u> and Lothrop Stoddard's <u>The Rising Tide of Color</u> (1920). These studies prove the extent to which Darwinian evolutionary theory was leading to conflicting interpretations of America's changing demographic situation.

¹⁷ Frederick L. Hoffman, <u>ibid.</u>, p. 8

¹⁸ Robert A. Bone, <u>The Negro Novel in America</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 53-54.

19 Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 183.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 192.

^{2I} E. Franklin Frazier, <u>The Negro Church in America</u> (Liverpool: University Press, 1964), p. 48.

²² See footnote I6.

²³ See S.J. Holmes, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁴ Eugene R. Corson, "The Future of the Colored Race in the United States," New York Medical Times, XV (Oct., I887), 230.

²⁵ Quoted in W.E.B. DuBois, "Robert E. Lee," <u>The Crisis</u>, 35 (March, 1928), 97.

²⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, <u>Democracy in America</u>, Henry Reeve trans., vol. I (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1999), p. 382.

²⁷ George M. Frederickson, <u>The Black Image in the</u> <u>White Mind</u> (New York: Harper and Rowe, Publishers, 1971), p. 248.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 256.

29 Thomas Gossett, op. cit., p. 282.

³⁰ Alexander Tillinghast, "The Negro in Africa and America," <u>American Economical Association Publications</u>, 3rd Series, 3 (May, 1903), 137.

^{3I} George M. Frederickson, op. cit., p. 257.

³² Such an absolute claim is refuted by modern science. For example, Prof. T. Dobzhansky notes, in his book already quoted, that "heredity of mental, emotional, and personality development is mostly conditioning, not destiny." See Evolution, op. cit., pp. 373-75.

³³ However, throughout this period of racial controversy, lone white voices were occasionally raised against some of the claims of supremacist advocates. For example, the very concept of race was rejected by J.G. von Herder and John S. Mill in the eighteenth century. So was the idea of specific racial characteristics by Johannes Ranke of Munich and William Schellmayer in the nineteenth. But the greatest advocate of racial equality and the most prominent anti-supremacist champion of the period was Prof. Franz Boas of Boston, whose writings dealt a death blow to racial speculation in the first quarter of the twentieth century. For a discussion of the anti-racial argument, see Bantos and Harwood, op. cit., pp. 44-61; Magnus Hirschfield, <u>Racism</u> (New York: The Kennikat Press, 1973), pp. 53-57, 132-39; and Thomas F. Gossett, "The Scientific Revolt against Racism," op. cit., pp. 441-29.

³⁴ W.E.B. DuBois, "The Conservation of Races," <u>The American Negro Academy Occasional Papers</u>, No. 2 (1897), IO-II.

³⁵ Archibald H. Grimke, "Modern Industrialism and the Negroes of the United States," ibid., I2 (1908), I6-I7.

³⁶ See the series of discussions on "The Future of the Negro," North American Review, 139 (1884), 80-84.

³⁷ See his article, "A Review of Hoffman's <u>Race Traits</u> <u>and Tendencies of the American Negr</u>o," in William L. Katz, ed. <u>The American Academy Occasional Papers</u> (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), pp. 3-8.

³⁸ Archibald H. Grimke, op. cit., p. 5.

³⁹ Eugene K. Jones, "The Negro's Opportunity Today," Opportunity, 6 (Jan., 1928), II.

40 Quoted in Henry L. Moon, <u>The Emerging Thought of</u> W.E.B. DuBois (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 179. 41 Charles Gardner, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴² Arthur A. Schomburg, "Economic Contributions by the Negro to America," <u>Papers of the American Negro Academy</u>, No. 19 (Dec., 1915), 54.

43 W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Gift of Black Folk</u> (Boston: The Stratford Co., Publishers, 1924), p. 255.

44 William L. Katz, op. cit., p. 34.

45 Ibid., p. 18.

46 Archibald H. Grimke, "The Sex Question and Race Segregation," <u>Papers of the American Negro Academy</u>, No. 19 (Dec., 1915), 14.

47 Archibald H. Grimke, op. cit., p. 17.

48 W.E.B. DuBois, "The Conservation of Races," op. cit., 8.

49 Ibid.

⁵⁰ <u>Ibid</u>. DuBois was later to discount this. See his book, <u>Black Folk: Then and Now: An Essay on the History and</u> <u>Sociology of the Negro Race</u> (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1939), p. 121.

^{5I} W.E.B. DuBois, "The Conservation of Races," op. cit., 15.

⁵² Henry L. Moon, op. cit., p. 220.

53 Ibid., p. 82.

⁵⁴ See his article, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," <u>The New Negro</u> (New York: Alfred and Charles Boni, 1925), p. 255.

⁵⁵ Kelly Miller, "What has the Negro to Give?" Christian Century, 2 (Aug., 1917), 921-22.

⁵⁶ See, for example, his article, "Science and Invention," <u>Images of the Negro in America</u>, D.T. Turner and J.M. Bright, eds. (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1965), p. 54.

57 Idus A. Newby, Jim Crow's Defence, op. cit., p. 74.

⁵⁸ Robert B. Bean, "The Negro Brain," <u>The Century</u>, 72 (May-Dec., 1906), 778.

⁵⁹ Howard W. Odum, <u>Social and Mental Traits of the</u> <u>Negro</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910), p. 225.

60 Cf. Introduction, p. 36.

⁶¹ Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 960.

62 W.E.B. DuBois, "The Conservation of Races," op. cit., 10.

⁶³ See Langston Hughes, <u>I Wonder as I Wander</u> (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 328.

⁶⁴ Arthur A. Schomburg, op. cit., 50-59.

⁶⁵ Reportedly, the assumption that Aframericans were biologically inferior to whites received wide acceptance not only among the masses, but among Negro leaders as well -including, perhaps, Booker T. Washington himself. This was prior to the twentieth century. See John S. Haller, <u>Outcast from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial</u> <u>Inferiority, 1859-1900</u> (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 207-08; Idus A. Newby, <u>Jim-Crow's Defence</u>, op. cit., p. 15; and H.L. Moon, op. cit., p. 189.

66 Ibid., p. 222.

⁶⁷ Aristotle, <u>The Ethics of Aristotle</u>, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (London and Tonbridge: The Whitefriars Press, Ltd., 1961), pp. 52-53.

68 Ibid., p. 53.

⁶⁹ Melville J. Herskovits, <u>The Myth of the Negro Past</u> (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1941), p. 20.

70 Ibid., p. 23.

71 W.E.B. DuBois, Gift of Black Folk, op. cit., p. 53.

72 Ibid., p. 287.

73 Albert C. Barnes, "Negro Art and America," Survey Graphic, LIII (March, 1925), 668.

74 See, for example, Kelly Miller, op. cit., 922. This belief, widespread among the intellectual and lay Negro communities at this time, originated on the slave plantations, where black minstrel bands were periodically called upon, jester-like, to entertain their masters or the latters' visitors. See James W. Johnson, <u>Black Manhattan</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), p. 87.

75 See quote on p. 51.

⁷⁶ Quoted in W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Gift of Black Folk</u>, op. cit., p. 286.

77 Charles I. Glicksberg, "The Negro Cult of the Primitive," The Antioch Review, 4 (1944), 52.

⁷⁸ At the turn of the last century, the negative view of Africa was slowly beginning to change as a result of a new interest in this continent by both whites and blacks. This inquiry will progressively touch on various aspects of that phenomenon.

⁷⁹ W.E.B. DuBois, op. cit., p. 287.

⁸⁰ W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Souls of Black Folk</u>, op. cit., p. 191.

^{8I} Quoted in W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Gift of Black Folk</u>, p. 286.

⁸² Thomas F. Gossett, op. cit., p. 410.

⁸³ W.E.B. DuBois, "Back to Africa," <u>Marcus Garvey and</u> <u>the Vision of Africa</u>, John H. Clarke, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 110.

⁸⁴ Arthur A. Schomburg, "The Negro Digs His Past," <u>The New Negro</u>, op. cit., p. 236.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 962.

⁸⁶ Albert C. Barnes, op. cit., 668.

⁸⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Souls of Black Folk</u>, p. I2.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Rudolph Fisher, "The Caucasian Storms Harlem," <u>The American Mercury</u>, II (May-Aug., 1927), 398; George S. Schuyler, "Travelling Jim Crow," <u>The American</u> <u>Mercury</u>, 20 (May-Aug., 1930), 425.

⁸⁹ Claude McKay, <u>A Long Way from Home</u>, op. cit., p. 135.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 27I.

⁹¹ George S. Schuyler, "The Negro Art-Hokum," <u>The</u> <u>Nation</u>, I22 (1926), 662-663.

⁹² See Claude McKay, op. cit., pp. 95-155; 306-23; Langston Hughes, <u>The Big Sea</u> (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), pp. 223-40.

⁹³ See Claude McKay, <u>ibid</u>., pp. 67-87; Langston Hughes, <u>ibid</u>., pp. 72, 2II.

⁹⁴ George Schuyler, op. cit., 662.

95 Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," The Nation, I22 (1926), 693.

⁹⁶ Claude McKay, op. cit., pp. I09-I0.

97 Ibid., p. IIO.

98 Langston Hughes, op. cit., 693.

⁹⁹ Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, "Portrait of Wallace Thurman," Arna Bontemps, ed., <u>The Harlem Renaissance</u> Remembered (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1972), p. 153. 100 Langston Hughes, op. cit., 693. A notable exception, however, to the widespread endorsement of black individuality was the satirist, George S. Schuyler, the author of <u>Black No More</u>. a Renaissance novel. In a celebrated article preceding the writing of this novel, he formulates a strong objection to the idea, arguing that "the Aframerican is merely a lampblack Anglo-Saxon and a plain American." See George S. Schuyler, op. cit., 662.

IOI Langston Hughes, The Big Sea, op. cit., p. 285.

IO2 Claude McKay, "The Negro to His Critics," <u>Books</u>, 8 (March, 6, 1932), I2.

IO3 Ibid.

104 Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," op. cit., 694.

¹⁰⁵ As mentioned (p. 50), the germ theory associates temperate lattitudes with the idea of Nordic superiority.

106 Claude McKay, <u>A Long Way from Home</u>, op. cit., p. 304.

107 Langston Hughes, op. cit., 693.

¹⁰⁸ Claude McKay, op. cit., 13.

109 See footnote 33.

IIO Frederick J. Hoffman, "Frank -- Critic of Freudianism," <u>Freudianism and the Literary Mind</u> (Louisiana: State University Press, 1945), p. 257. III Ibid.

II2 Michael B. Stoff, "Claude McKay and the Cult of Primitivism," Arna Bontemps, ed., op. cit., p. 126.

II3 Arna Bontemps, "The Awakening: A Memoir," <u>ibid</u>., p. 14.

^{II4} Carlos Baker, <u>William Wordsworth</u> (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 5.

II5 Oscar Cargill, <u>Intellectual America: Ideas on the</u> <u>March</u> (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 314.

II6 Alain Locke, "A Note on African Art," <u>Opportunity</u>, 2 (May, 1924), 135, 138.

II7 See, for example, Paul Guillaume, "The Triumph of Ancient Negro Art," <u>Opportunity</u>, 4 (May, 1926), 146-47; and, by the same author, "Africa at the Barnes Foundation," <u>Opportunity</u>, 2 (May, 1924), 140-42.

II8 Alain Locke, op. cit., 137.

^{II9} See Eileen Southern, <u>The Music of Black Americans</u>: <u>A History</u> (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1971), p. 396.

^{I20} Martin Cooper, "Revolution in Musical Taste," <u>The Impact of America on European Cultur</u>e, Bertrand Russel, ed. (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), pp. 72-73. ^{I2I} This image of the Negro is but the latest in a series that have marked his literary history in America. For a discussion, see Alain Locke, "American Literary Tradition and the Negro," <u>Modern Quarterly</u>, 3 (1926), 215-22; Seymour L. Gross, "Stereotype to Archetype: The Negro in American Literary Criticism," S.L. Gross and J.E. Hardy, eds., <u>Images of the Negro in American Literature</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. I-25; Sterling A. Brown, "Negro Character as Seen by White Authors," Journal of Negro History, 2 (1933), 179-203.

122 Hugh M. Gloster, <u>Negro Voices in American</u> Fiction (New York: Russel and Russel, 1965), p. 109.

123 Harold Cruse, <u>The Crisis of the Negro Intellec-</u> <u>tual</u> (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1967), p. 23.

124 Mae G. Henderson, op. cit., pp. 158-59.

125 Claude McKay, op. cit., 133.

126 Langston Hughes, op. cit., p. 227.

127 Rudolph Fisher, "The Caucasian Storms Harlem," The American Mercury, II (May-Aug., 1927), 394.

128 Langston Hughes, op. cit., pp. 227, 249, 255.

129 H.M. Gloster, op. cit., p. 107.

For a list of white works inspired by the Negro subjectmatter, see the last-named writer, op. cit., pp. 107-09; Robert A. Bone, op. cit., pp. 60-61, 74. ¹³⁰ Albert Harper, "Whites Writing up the Blacks," <u>Dial</u>, LXXXVI (1929), 294.

131 Langston Hughes, op. cit., p. 228.

132 See James W. Johnson, "The Dilemma of the Negro Author," <u>American Mercury</u>, 15 (1928), 477.

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid.

135 See footnote 121.

¹³⁶ See Melville J. Herskovits, "The Dilemma of Social Pattern," <u>Survey Graphic</u>, LIII (March, 1925), 676.

137 Carl Van Vechten, <u>Nigger Heaven</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), pp. 222-27.

138 H.M. Gloster, op. cit., pp. IIO-II.

139 Mae G. Henderson, op. cit., p. 155.

I40 Ibid.

^{I4I} Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 155.

I42 Langston Hughes, <u>I Wonder as I Wander</u>, op. cit., p. 4.

I43 Langston Hughes, <u>The Big Sea</u>, op. cit., p. 3I4.
I44 <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 3I6.
I45 Tbid.

146 Claude McKay, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

147 Ibid., pp. 98-99.

148_{Theodosius Dobzhansky, Evolution}, op. cit., p. 264.

149 Robert A. Bone, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

¹⁵⁰Amritjit Singh, <u>The Novels of the Harlem Renaiss</u>-<u>ance: Twelve Black Writers</u> (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), p. 55.

¹⁵¹Hugh M. Gloster, op. cit., p. 158.

¹⁵²See Claude McKay, <u>A Long Way from Home</u>, op. cit., pp. 141, 245, 317.

¹⁵³Ibid., pp. 282 ff.

¹⁵⁴Langston Hughes, op. cit., pp. 268-70.

¹⁵⁵See, for example, Benjamin Brawley, "The Negro Renaissance," <u>The Southern Workman</u>, 56 (April, 1927), 182.

156 Langston Hughes, op. cit., pp. 271, 324-25.

157 Ibid., p. 311.

¹⁵⁸Michael B. Stoff, op. cit., p. 130.

¹⁵⁹Claude McKay, "The Negro to his Critics," op. cit., 13.

¹⁶⁰See, for example, Abraham Chapman, "The Harlem Renaissance in Literary History," <u>CLA Journal</u>, II (Sept., 1967), 48; George E. Kent, "Patterns of Harlem Renaissance," Arna Bontemps, ed., op. cit., p. 48.

I61_{Robert} A. Bone, op.cit., p. 61.

PART ONE: EMPHASIZING THE ORAL TRADITION Chapter 2: Survival Value

This chapter will further explore the problem of Afro-american identity through a study of the survival value underlying Negro folk-art. Values, in general, consist of three components. The first, which John Laird calls the "emotional,"^I was examined in the last chapter. The discussions that follow will be concerned with the two other components of value. One of these components refers to the outlets through which all values find expression; and, the other, to the value itself. To Risieri Frondizi, these twin components are respectively the "carriers" and "content" of value.²

Corresponding to the former in black folk culture are the enjoyment or entertaining arts -- particularly dance, music, song and the oral tale. Reportedly, these have been the traditional means whereby the temperamental in Negroes was articulated. Through them, notes Carter G. Woodson, the masses were able to express their "deep feelings and unusual emotions."³ Statements like this, which are numerous in black sociological literature,⁴ sometimes specify the nature of the feeling or emotion as well as the folk outlet involved in the above cultural process. An example is Claude McKay's statement, which links "the bitterness in negro life" with the spirituals and blues.⁵ Another example is Arna Bontemps' argument that these songs are the expression of the "stress and strain" of the Negro's dayto-day existence.⁶

In the preceding chapter, we noted that Negro emotions or feelings were considered a lot more exuberant than those of other human species. We also remarked that writers attributed this apparent condition to hereditary factors or to the hardships of life in the Americas. As a result of this expansive view of the temperamental in Negroes, most black intellectuals represented the expression of feelings through the folk arts as a prime cultural necessity. I shall elaborate on the latter in the next discussion on the folk arts, the second component of value.

Three considerations seem to add credence to the above assumption by black writers. One of these is the proven abundance and diversity of Negro folk-art productions, whether in dance, music, song or the oral tale. These two qualities, which will later become apparent, have impressed all students of black American folklore. Thus Martha Beckwith expressed

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surprise at the latter's "rich ... development,"7 while Howard W. Cdum considered it "inexhaustible."⁸ A second consideration that seems to validate the assumption of a cultural necessity for emotional articulation through the folk arts is the apparent universality of their indulgence. This prompted one writer to say that this kind of indulgence was "common to every part of America where the sons of Africa had been carried."⁹ Another writer, citing storytelling as an example of this widespread immersion in folkart, observed that it was a "deer-rooted habit for negroes of all ages and sexes" and not merely a pastime for the privileged few.¹⁰ Also stressing the universal nature of folk-art involvement is the remark that "the love of fiddling, singing and dancing" was generalized among southern plantation Negroes.^{II} The third consideration tending to validate the belief in the existence of a group necessity for emotional expression through folklore is an alleged artistic faculty. Various epithets -- imagination, impulse, power, genius, talent -- were used to describe it. 12

Moreover, two related aesthetic processes -- improvisation and variation -- were advanced in support of this faculty. The first alleged creative process relates to the compositional activity through which a folk-art item evolves. Students of Negro folklore were quick to point out that,

in terms of content, a tune, dance or tale was not a fixed and pre-arranged piece, but an embryonic entity achieving full growth only during execution.¹³ A Negro story, they further argued, was a bare motif or theme progressively filled out with circumstantial detail;¹⁴ and a dance (the juba, jazz or cake-walk) was but a startingpoint to which were later added various rhythms and steps.¹⁵ In the complementary variational process mentioned above. additions or changes are reported in the individual work of art. Thus G.M. Laws observed, in relation to the ballad, that after composition it would undergo successive alterations, as it moved from narrator to narrator and from one locality to another.¹⁶ Professor White, who also drew attention to this phenomenon, has noted that "few songs had a fixed beginning and almost none had a definite end."¹⁷

On the other hand, some writers have argued that improvisation and variation were largely foreign to the white work of art. They felt that, contrary to Negro folklore, white artistic productions did not make much allowance for fill-in material or for changes during the executional stage. Hence the assumption that white art was more formal and less spontaneous than black art.¹⁸ No wonder,

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then, that this assumption was used to buttress the belief in a distinct Negro artistic faculty. Whites, however, who refused to concede to the Negro any artistic, let alone, intellectual, advantage, rejected outright this seemingly preposterous idea of a special faculty. For them, the twin processes supposedly associated with the latter were but black forms of imitation of Euro-American models. In this respect, the ballad and the spiritual were considered notable examples.¹⁹ Writing about the rejection of a special Negro artistic faculty, Newman I. White further noted that the imitation theory had been generalized among those whites whom he questioned.²⁰ These, then, are the three considerations (abundance and diversity of output, universal involvement and **aesthetic** endowment) underscoring the belief in a deep cultural need for emotional articulation through the folk arts.

In the ensuing analysis, I will continue to examine the folk arts, the equivalent in black American culture of what have been termed "value carriers" or the second component of value. This part of the present study of Negro folk arts will review their origin and development in the long period preceding the Harlem Renaissance. The supporters of the hereditary theory in matters of Negro primitive culture (pp. 50-51, 67-71) have traced the above-mentioned need to Africa.

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There, they argue, singing, dancing and story-telling were a deep-rooted practice long before the onset of American slavery.²¹ The origin of this practice is also attributed by others to the mercantilism that the latter form of exploitation provoked. During the Middle Passage -- the sea-journey from the African mainland to the New World -slavers apparently resorted to the above practice in a continued effort to stem the tides of despondency and revolt among their unruly human cargo.²² White plantation masters, too, had frequent recourse to this practice, their motives being, to all intents and purposes, similar to those which inspired the cwners of slave-ships.²³ In this respect, making the slaves "happy" through music, song and dance was, reportedly, an effective way to elicit their goodwill and thus increase production.²⁴ However, voluntary indulgence by slaves, and not compulsion by their masters, seems to have predominated in folklore activities on the plantations, as will become evident. By the end of the Civil War, which hastened the end of the slave era in the United States, this alleged practice of impulsive emotional release (initiated by slave captain, plantation master and slave) through folklore had no doubt grown into a firm cultural habit.

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Helping its growth during the three hundred or so years preceding the Harlem Renaissance was the rural insularity of black life, fostered by the American caste system. As I pointed out in the introductory chapter, the latter instituted a widespread pattern of socio-economic segregation, which tended to alienate white and black life from each other, thus forcing the Negro group to fall back upon its own resources for cultural sustenance. Later, in the postbellum Reconstruction period (1865-90), such anti-Negro legislation as the Black Codes (they sought to curtail and, in some States, repress the freedman's newly-found civil liberties) appear to have strengthened this tradition of emotional artistic expression. But, threatening its dynamism and, in some cases, undermining it altogether, were the successive waves of rural emigration from the end of the nineteenth century (bages I-3). In the new milieu -- the industrial centres of the North and South -- Negro life found itself in relatively closer proximity to white cultural contacts than was possible in the southern hinterland. This was due, in part, to the proliferation of service jobs and to the relatively greater opportunities for Negroes in the white-controlled areas. Hence, the greater influence

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that such contacts increasingly exerted on the new urban dwellers. In the early twentieth century, this influence was accelerated by the growing use of the radio and gramophone, which then were already making forays even in distant Negro rural life. Besides, the greater access to the public school system, transmitting ideas other than those of the black subculture, only served to augment the "adverse" effects of white American influence on the Negro oral tradition. (In the second and third parts of the present inquiry into the Harlem Renaissance, I shall elaborate on this influence).

Black writers in general attributed to this oral tradition a survival value. These writers believed that folk-art indulgence among the largely illiterate slaves and freedmen had been a unique cultural force, which had enabled them and their progeny to successfully withstand the debilitating effects of racism in the years prior to the Harlem Renaissance. Arna Bontemps, for example, believes that this indulgence "satisfied ... the cravings of the spirit in the oppressed and deprived;"²⁵ while Gunnar Myrdal and Margaret Butcher, looking back at the oral tradition from a more distant vantage point, respectively argue that it fostered "internal group cohesion"²⁶

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and "evolved unique ... ways for making life livable."²⁷ This conception of Negro survival through folk-art clearly contrasts with its white counterpart. In the last chapter, I mentioned how the average white supremacist conceived black survival in America exclusively in biological or economic terms.

The reported failure of whites to appreciate the survival value of the Negro oral tradition of folk-art indulgence has aroused much displeasure among black writers. Richard Wright's view that there "existed a meaning in Negro life that whites do not see and do not want to see"28 articulates the widespread feeling of discontent. Helping to foster and perpetuate this alleged attitude were the American religious and economic institutions. It is well-known that the Protestant Churches placed an anathema on secular forms of enjoyment throughout the Colonial and Golden Age periods. Thus Gunnar Myrdal notes that " ... the puritanical spirit ... exerted a powerful influence on ... the arts in America."²⁹ This influence, as everyone knows, is very well documented in Nathaniel Hawthorne's fiction, in particular; and short stories like "The Maypole of Merry Mount" and "Young Goodman Brown" are good examples. This rejection of entertainment by the Churches

has been, of course, greater for Negroes than for whites. because of the former's inferior status in American society. Therefore, the lack of sympathy for and understanding of the Negro oral tradition were all the more profound. Moreover, as I mentioned above, the institution of slavery also contributed, ironically, to this state of affairs. It is true that the plantation master attributed an enjoyment value to Negro folk art; but, as hinted earlier, he did so out of a desire for exploitation and entertainment, which his own culture tended to deny. Indeed, during the long period of slavery as well as after it, black minstrelsy was the main source of pleasure and merriment for plantation whites. However, like the clergyman, the average master is said to have been ignorant of the avowedly deeper significance or meaning of the songs, music, tales and tunes, which usually accompanied the daily rounds of plantation life.

In the ensuing part of our study of Afro-american identity, I will probe the survival value of the Negro folk tradition which, as mentioned above, has been staunchly upheld by blacks and rejected by most whites. The oral arts which make up this tradition perform various functions. It is through them that this value or sustaining quality is articulated. As a result, any analysis of the latter must

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necessarily involve a study of those functions. Moreover, as regards functions, it is important to note the following considerations. First, they are concerned with the articulation of various emotions. Secondly, their typicality is largely determined by their release or nonrelease of these emotions as well as by the particular need or desire that seeks fulfillment. Thirdly, functions usually arise from the interplay of several folk-arts and are. therefore, not the result of any one of these in particular. Thus a dance (like jazz) and a specific tale item may contribute to the same type of function, although belonging to different genres. I think Morroe Berger is emphasizing this, when he says that jazz is an art-form containing several values outside the realm of art.³⁰ These artistic functions, which I am about to examine, constitute what has initially been termed the value content or the third component of value.

Furthermore, the survival value of Negro folk-arts derives from the psychoanalytic nature of these functions. Richard Wright's understanding of this fact prompted him to suggest that "the new values of life and experience" of Negroes should be analyzed with the aid of Freudian concepts.³¹ Similarly, Melville J. Herskovits suggests: ... certain aspects of the psychology of primi- I2**5** -

tive Negro cultural behaviour ... may be the better understood when some of the broader concepts of psychoanalysis are applied to their interpretation.³²

Moreover, as Negro artistic functions are fundamentally concerned with the release or non-release of emotions, they enact various levels of sublimation. By sublimation is meant the vicarious canalization of thwarted desires and drives that are biologically or socially acquired.

In the Negro folk tradition, one level of sublimation of thwarted desires and drives is carried out by what may be called the expressive function. In it emotional release is conducted through vocal (verbalization or instrumentation) and physical means (motor or muscular behavior). Articulating emotions mainly through voice were the Spirituals, the universally acclaimed religious songs. W.E.B. DuBois describes them as "the rhythmic cry of the slave;"³³ Benjamin Brawley, as an expression of "prayer, hope and yearning;"³⁴ and, Newman I. White, as "a record of the feelings of the race under slavery."³⁵ Negro emotions also found expression through a combination of the above-mentioned means -- voice, instrument and body. A good example of emotional release incorporating mainly voice and instrument are the blues, the secular counterpart of the Spirituals. Their motifs of unrequited love, sorrow and faith were sung in everchanging haunts (railroad, street-corners, honky-tonks) by down-trodden, itinerant songsters. That these sad Negro lyrics also constitute an emotional record for the race is attested by a nameless commentator of early black life and, more recently, by Ralph Ellison. The first sees in them a "curious story of disillusionment [wherein] stark, full passions crowd themselves in uncomplex expression;"³⁶ whereas the second felt that they are "an autobiographical chronicle expressed lyrically."³⁷

Unlike the above two artistic mediums of Negro folk-art (the Spirituals and blues), the Gospel Songs and, to a larger extent, the Evangelical Shout, use a combination of voice, song and body movement extensively in the process of emotional release. This release is, basically, a ritualistic demonstration involving such diverse folk elements as the call-and-response,³⁸ sensuous dancing and possession -- a primitive form of religious ecstasy and exaltation, which may be likened to a trance. The Evangelical Shout was, like the Spiritual, part and parcel of Protestant worship for the Baptists as well as the Methodists in the early days of slavery. As for the Gospel Songs, they tended to supplant the Spirituals in the cities from early pre-Renaissance times. Of these modern counterparts of the sorrow songs Eileen Southern writes:

> When the black people began pouring into the nation's cities ..., they took their ... spirituals with them, but found the ruralborn music to be unsatisfactory in urban settings and unresponsive to their needs. Consequently, the church singers created a more expressive music to which they applied the term gospel music.³⁹

Another artistic medium of emotional release incorporating instrument and body movement is jazz, that strange mixture of rag music and blues song,⁴⁰ which achieved wide popularity within and without the race prior to the I920s. Its characteristic impulsive beat or rhythm is described by V.F. Calverton as a "vicarious outlet for the negroes' crazed emotions"⁴¹ and, by J.A. Rogers, as a "unique conduit for the expression of the gayer feelings."⁴² Several other dances, including the juba, also employed voice and (mainly) body movements. Thomas Tatley, who has described it at length, notes that the dancers would perform within a large circle, substituting the drum with interjectory hand-clapping and foot-tapping.43

This type of function, which consists in the expulsion of repressed emotions through the above means is, to some writers of Negro folk-life, inherently purgative. This is what writers like Frantz Fanon and Margaret Butcher suggest in their use of the term "catharsis" to describe that psychological process.⁴⁴ During catharsis, emotions that have been pushed down into the unconscious are, as in the Negro expressive function under study, forced out, thus removing or preventing the twin evils of repression -- anxiety and neurosis.⁴⁵ This alleged cathartic effect is uphelp by Phillip A. Bruce, a nineteenth-century supremacist. Such a "concession" on Bruce's part is surprising, in view of his persistent denigration of Negro character in the heyday of racial debate.⁴⁶

A second function, the mnemonic, contrasts with the expressive in that it obliterates, rather than recalls, painful feelings or unfulfilled desires. The need to forget on the part of the pre-Renaissance folk -- described by W.E.B. DuBois as prison-house residents⁴⁷ and by Richard Wright as "that vast, tragic school that swims in the depths against the current"⁴⁸ -- was reportedly very strong. This situation, of course, was due to the traditional socioeconomic restrictions (to be further detailed in the second part of this inquiry) imposed upon black life by the white caste system. In view of such restrictions, it is no wonder that folk-art indulgence provided a continuous means of withdrawal and escape -- a kind of Heystian retreat. An old British traveler to Maryland, commenting on this coping out behavior of black Americans, writes that through dancing, music and singing "they forgot or were not sensible of their miserable condition."⁴⁹ Another writer similarly reports that at night southern Negroes would, by such artistic means, cast off all care in conscious abandon.⁵⁰

In the matter of withdrawal and escape through folkart, jazz is the most frequently cited medium, with several writers attributing to it an exceptionally mnemonic effect, as of drug or alcohol.⁵¹ However, one writer felt that jazz was far better a means of escape, because it could achieve "temporary forgetfulness ... infinitely less harmful" than the above two stimulants.⁵² This predilection for art as a medium for oblivion recalls another by John Keats:

> O, for a draught of vintage! That I might drink, and leave the world unseen, And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

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Away! away! for I will fly to thee, Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards, But on the viewless wings of Poesy ...⁵³

The above remarks associating jazz with alcohol and drugs find an echo in Freud's contention that "one of the chief functions of art is to serve as 'narcotic.' "⁵⁴

The "narcotic" effect of Negro folk-art, which is most evident in jazz and which procures temporary flights from unpleasant reality or brings about the obliteration of a too burdened memory is, in many respects, a form of racial suppression. Suppression can be described as

> ... a controlled reaction in which the individual deliberately turns to other thoughts. This more deliberate mechanism is less dangerous to mental health than repression, for the individual knows what he is doing. Repression, however, is an unconscious removal of thoughts, and the individual may not be aware that he is "covering something up" that is still causing tensions and anxieties.⁵⁵

In the Renaissance period in particular, many a Negro supplemented his own benign form of racial suppression through art with alcoholism. Chief among the factors contributing to this practice were the short-lived economic - BI -

prosperity and licence of the period of which the literary works of Claude McKay (<u>A Long Way from Home</u>), Langston Hughes (<u>The Big Sea</u>), Ernest Hemingway (<u>The Sun Also Rises</u>) and Scott Fitzgerald (<u>The Great Gatsby</u>) provide fascinating reflections. The hedonism arising from the combined indulgence in art and alcoholism and sex brought about cultural debasement and moral decline, both of which provide the basis for fictional drama in the mixed and apologist novels (pp. 18-19). This question, of course, will be fully examined in the third and last part of this inquiry into lower-class life. Below, I will continue to explore the problem of the Negro's psychological survival in America through two more analyses about the functions underlying his folk-art.

Suppression was also achieved through the substitutive function, so-called because it supplants one emotion or feeling for another that is deemed anti-social. During the three or so centuries that preceded the Renaissance, Negroes. could not express their resentment openly without incurring the plantation master's wrath or the white community's in general. Richard Wright reports that the occasional free expression of this feeling "would carry penalties varying from mild censure to death."⁵⁶ Such punishments, for example, followed the crackdown on the Black Caribs revolt in the West Indies⁵⁷ as well as the Turner and Vesey uprisings in the United States during the first half of the previous century.⁵⁸ Further proof of the dangers inherent in overt resentment on the part of "unruly" Negroes are the animal stereotyping and lynchings, which marked the history of black-white relations in the second half of that century.⁵⁹ Thus, in order to avoid white retaliation and as a means of self-protection, Negroes adopted an accommodating pattern of behavior. About it, Howard W. Odum makes this succinct remark: "the negro has two distinct social selves: the one he reveals to his own people, the other he assumes among whites, the assumption becoming natural."⁶⁰

One form of black posturing was what Richard Wright has dubbed "outward submissiveness"^{6I} -- a mixture of largely feigned meekness and subservience. Plantation drama, in which the Negro played the part of an ingratiating fool, helped generate and crystalize such feelings. In such drama, the question-and-answer riddles quite consciously sought to set the Negro at an intellectual disadvantage, thus reinforcing his sheep-like image. Also contributing to this image of the folk Negro were some of the Spirituals. These religious songs did not only serve as outlets for pent-up emotions. They were also used by Protestant Churches as Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. DuBois have noted,⁶² to transmit their own Christian brand of meekness and obedience. And, since non-religious Negroes were, apparently, more intractable than staunch believers, many a white master would encourage the singing of such songs. Thus, on the one hand, the Negroes willingly imposed the sheepish image upon themselves, out of social necessity. On the other hand, the image was forced upon them by the plantation and Church authorities, for reasons arising from their respective functions and needs.

Another form of black posturing was what may be called cheeriness. As physician and supremacist Robert B. Bean has remarked,⁶³ an abnormal smile and a broad grin were its trademark and common stock in trade. But by far its most celebrated manifestation was a multifarious kind of laughter.⁶⁴ It has been described by Gunnar Myrdal as a "high-pitched cackle"⁶⁵ and by S.P. Fullinwider as a kind of raucousness.⁶⁶ Margaret Butcher, drawing attention to its deceptive nature, further describes it as a "protective mimicry, more contrived and artificial than natural and spontaneous."⁶⁷ As among the folk people of the European Renaissance era,⁶⁸ Negro early life was constantly immersed

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in laughter, part of which arose out of day-to-day folkart involvement. William Schechter, for example, notes that Joel C. Harris' black tales, which pit Brer Rabbit against his seemingly abler opponents (the bear, fox and wolf), were a continuous source of laughter⁶⁹ as were the slave satires underlying the numerous riddles of plantation life.⁷⁰ Laughter also arose in the normal course of singing, dancing and story-telling, as this observation notes:

> Within his cabin, and cheered by good company and a bright fire-light, the negro slave resumed his gayety, and sang and danced and laughed His day's work and his appetite appeased, he abandoned himself to mirth and his old laugh renewed.⁷¹

These two forms of black posturing -- outward submissiveness and cheeriness -- constitute the essence of Negro humor. In defining it, some writers have tried to demonstrate how different it is from white humor. Thus S.P. Fullinwider quite rightly argues that black humor is essentially a mask; whereas white humor he sees as arising from the irony of a given situation.⁷² As for Sterling Brown, he sees in the mask a much more pervasive reality among blacks that irony among whites.⁷³ This apparently greater indulgence in humor on the part of folk Negroes may have been due to the higher incidence of resentment among them, resulting, no doubt, from the relatively heavier burden of social restrictions. This relationship between humor and resentment is corroborated by psychoanalysis, which has long discovered a link between the former and aggression.⁷⁴ Cued by this, Negro writers have discovered in turn a similar link in Negro folklore.⁷⁵

In itself, aggression is a self-destructive emotion.⁷⁶ This is why psychologists have associated it with the Death instinct.⁷⁷ The Negro of pre-Renaissance times was reportedly able to avoid the self-damage accruing from this emotion by driving it outwards under the cover of his folk-art. The latter thus enabled him to come to terms with his aggressor -- the white racist or supremacist -and thus was effected his psychological self-preservation. That the old Negro could accede to this third form of sublimation is abundantly demonstrated by the nature of his folk-art, some of which carry diverse revengeful motifs. Transmitting them were such folk-art elements as footstomping, the shouting interlude of the blues type of song and their counterpart, the 'cry-and-holler' of workaday songs. The ejaculatory or exclamatory nature of these items rendered them appropriate for the transmission of the violent feelings accompanying aggression. Similarly, articulating motifs of revenge were the energetic beat as well as the rhythmic shuffling of feet that are so vital a part of jazz. Hence DuBois dubs jazz rhythms "riotous"⁷⁸ and Hughes sees in its 'tom-tom' cadence a vicarious form of "revolt."⁷⁹

Furthermore, motifs of revenge were also articulated verbally through the singing of Spirituals and the telling of animal tales. In these, the white man was represented as potential or de facto victim. Miles M. Fisher notes that some of these Negro religious songs contained a subsidiary and undercover statement or message, inviting slaves to rebellion and envisaging flight from the plantations as punishment for the potentially helpless master.⁸⁰ The Spiritual, "Steal Away," lends itself to such an interpretation. Also, the desire to see their oppressors punished was rendered through the slaves' and freedmen's profession of faith in heaven and hell. In the Spirituals, of course, these two related entities of Christian faith were ever-recurring symbols of retributive justice. The former the Negroes interpreted as a guarantee of personal salvation for themselves -- after the travails of earthly life -- and the latter they held up as a negative reward for their enemies.

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Of course, the punitive desire carried through by this second symbol (hell) was invariably couched in irony and double-entendre, as in the following lines of a freedom Spiritual:

> Before I stay in hell one day, Heaven shall-a be my home; I sing and pray my soul away, Heaven shall-a be my home ...⁸¹

In the above excerpt, the racial persona clearly expresses his assurance in his future ascension into the heavenly kingdom which, however, he implicitly denies to others by dissociating himself with "hell." The excerpt that follows seems to render even more dramatically the punitive desire underlying the hell symbol:

> Remember me, remember me, O Lord, remember me! I am a soldier of the cross, A foll'wer of the Lamb.⁸²

Here, the racial persona seems much less certain of a heavenly abode. Therefore, he reminds his General, the Lamb of God, in the spirit of Luke I2, 8-II and Mathew I6, 24-28, that he is a fighter in His army and thus entitled to a reward. Implicit in this plea is the idea of punishment to be meted out to those of the other army -- the non-black perpetrators of the slave system, who were defiling the basic commandment of human brotherhood.

Lastly, no less effective a verbal medium for the channelling of Negro aggression were the animal tales. That the rendering of these narratives was harmless to the slaves is attested by generations of plantation maids and servants, who used them to entertain countless white households.83 These, of course, never doubted their apparent innocence nor suspected their underlying harmful intent. Writing about the most reputed of these tales, the Uncle Remus cycle (edited by the well-known southern white author, Joel C. Harris), Bernard Wolfe argues that they constituted the "half-suppressed revenge of a resentful minority."84 Partly incarnating and executing this emotion is the notorious animal hero, Brer Rabbit. A fine example of this is his winning away of some ladies from the seemingly more formidable Brer Fox, whom he further humiliates by turning him into a saddle-horse.⁸⁵ Reviewing such exploits by the Rabbit in Afro-american folklore, Bill R. Hampton asserts that this animal "was particularly important to the slave, because he was unable to release his aggression openly and needed a psychic symbol of his resentment against

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the white man."⁸⁶ Another symbol of aggression is the Spider, the hero of the West Indian Anancy cycle of folk tales. His peculiarly metamorphic versatility, which included human as well as supernatural guises, rendered him a potentially more effective avenger than the Rabbit. I will further examine these tales in the following fourth and last analysis of Negro artistic functions. In the preceding analysis, I have tried to circumscribe the substitutive function, showing how the overt artistic behavior of the Negro was to a great extent a façade whereby he sublimated his violent feelings against the white community.

Life in America during the slave and Reconstruction periods not only fostered black aggressiveness, but also attempted to inculcate upon the Negro a feeling of inferiority vis-a-vis his white counterpart.⁸⁷ It is not easy to assess the extent to which this attempt succeeded. The difficulty is compounded, of course, by the Negro's humoristic or deceptive behavior described precedingly. However, that a number of slaves and freedmen may have felt themselves inferior to whites generally, as Idus A. Newby claims,⁸⁸ is highly probably, in view of their traditional deprivation and exploitation, and their overwhelming socio-economic lag.⁸⁹

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Generally, a feeling of inferiority is accompanied by counter efforts aimed at overcoming it, through involvement in alternative activities or goals.90 Throughout his history, the black American has tried to overcome such a feeling in diverse ways. Professional sports is an outstanding example. The successful careers of Negro jockeys like Isaac Murphy in the last century are examples of the Negroes' efforts to cope with the debilitating stigma of inferiority.91 And, in our own day, the exploits of the boxer, Muhummad Ali, and of the Harlem Globe Trotters, in basketball, are not without the latter subsidiary motivation. But, in pre-Renaissance times, the folk-arts have been the Negroes' principal recourse for coming to terms with this acquired or imposed feeling of inadequacy. They have resorted to them not only in order to force out, forget and hide their feelings, but also to retrieve some measure of their lost or lowered selfesteem. Commenting on this last function of black folklore, Arthur A. Schomburg notes that "a group tradition had to supply compensation for persecution and lost pride of race."92 Compensation, which replaces an inferiority feeling by a superiority one, is a natural process involving intense striving, as the individual tries to offset his real or imagined liabilities.⁹³ I will now look into a few manifestations of this process in the folk-arts under study.

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One of its manifestations is the act of creation itself. As in sports, indulgence in improvisation and variation -- activities inherent in artistic creation (pp. II6-I7) -- enabled black folk artists to excel in entertainment, a social field largely ignored by whites in the early years.94 The Negro group's prominence in art was interpreted by at least some blacks as evidence of a superior artistic skill⁹⁵ -a feeling which the constant exposure to both black and white pre-Renaissance audiences only served to activate. As a result, playing and acting were much sought, as they permitted talented Negroes to direct the attention of non-blacks in particular -- their accusers of inferiority -- to an area wherein they presumably excelled. In this way was effected psychic rehabilitation -- the reduction of the tensions of frustration accruing from the inferiority feeling and its replacement by a reactionary feeling of self-pride. This cultural process seems to have been a fact of racial life among lower-class Negroes long before the intelligentsia began to sing the praises of the emotional as a counter move against its vilification by white writers and supremacists.

There are numerous recorded examples in black folk-life of individuals drawing or trying to draw attention to their artistic abilities in compensation for their underdog position

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in economy-related areas. This attitude, which originated in plantation drama, was to continue through the post-bellum years in the mushrooming of Negro bands and clubs, in Europe as well as America (p.6). Noel C. Harris' meeting with a number of competing Negro raconteurs at a railroad station⁹⁶ is a classic example of this vying for white attention. Moreover, according to Richard M. Dorson, seeking attention as a compensatory measure found eloquent expression in dramatic action:

> Negro storytellers not only fully utilize their oral resources but also gesticulate and even act out parts of exciting narratives. These histrionics build up to a small performance, the tale verging on drama or farce.⁹⁷

It has been reported that this need for attention also manifested itself in language. Several writers have noted the colorful and inflated idiom of the lower-classes in conversation as well as narration.⁹⁸ One of them sees in this verbal peculiarity a conscious effort to outdo the whites in speech.⁹⁹

This opinion is borne out by the tales themselves which, more than any other Negro genre, dramatizes the assertive function underlying Negro art. Thus, in addition to being a medium of vicarious revenge, the trickster animal tales display a verbal cleverness, with the bigger animals, like the bear and the wolf (the white protagonists), being shown to disadvantage, while their black counterparts, the Rabbit and Spider, escape punishment through their sharp wits. The language motif of such tales, therefore, also helped to promote a feeling of superiority. This feeling was also fostered by cleverness of action involving the same animals. The winning of the ladies from Brer Fox (p. 138) is an example of such action. Another is the widely known Tar-baby story, of which there are several versions in Negro folk-lore. Common to most renderings of this story are these elements: a sculptured tar-baby with which a farmer hopes to catch the robber of his black-eyed peas; the subsequent catching of the culprit, Brer Rabbit, and his final escape when he thrusts his tarry forepaws into the old man's eyes. The narrating of such successful guile and ingenuity acted like another ego-booster and was, therefore, an additional source of compensation.

It is, in part, to the artistic functions just described that Marlem Renaissance writers turned in their attempt to elaborate a cultural ideal. In the next chapter, the third and last in this initial part of our inquiry into lower-class life, the fictional formulation of this attempt will be examined.

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NOTES TO PART ONE/CHAPTER TWO

^I John Laird, <u>The Idea of Value</u> (New York: Angustus M. Kelley, Publishers, 1969), p. 173.

² Risieri Frondizi, <u>What is Value</u> (Lasalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishers, Co., 1971), pp. 7, 31.

³ Carter G. Woodson, <u>The African Background Outlined</u> (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1971), p. 182.

⁴ See Benjamin Brawley, "Science and Invention," <u>Images of the Negro in America</u>, D.T. Turner and J.M. Bright, eds. (Boston: Heath and Company, 1965), p. 52; Unsigned article, "Songs of Blacks," <u>Dwight's Journal of Musi</u>c, IX, 7 (Nov. 15, 1865), 52; Margaret Butcher, <u>The Negro in Ameri</u> <u>can Culture</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 24.

⁵ Claude McKay, "A Negro to His Critics," <u>Books</u> 8, No. 26 (March, 1932), I2.

⁶ Quoted in <u>Images of the Negro in America</u>, op. cit., p. 80.

⁷ Martha W. Beckwith, <u>Black Roadways: A Study of</u> <u>Jamaican Folklife</u> (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1929), p. 199.

⁸ Howard W. Odum, "Folk-Song and Folk-Poetry," <u>The Journal of American Folk-Lor</u>e, XXIV (July-Sept., 1911), 255.

⁹ Arthur A. Schomburg, "Economic Contributions by the Negro to America," <u>Papers of the American Negro</u> <u>Academy</u>, 19 (Dec., 1915), 59.

^{IO} See Richard M. Dorson, <u>American Negro Folk-tales</u> (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1956), p. 55.

II Alexander Tillinghast, "The Negro in Africa and America," <u>American Economic Associations Publications</u>, 3, 3rd Series (May, 1902), 164.

¹² See Benjamin Brawley, "Science and Invention," op. cit., p. 52; N.N. Puckett, <u>Folk Beliefs of the Southern</u> <u>Negro</u> (New York: Negro University Press, 1968), p. 29; Claude McKay, <u>A Long Way From Home</u> (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), p. 39; James W. Johnson, <u>Black Manhattan</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), p. 278; W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Gift of Black Folk</u> (Boston: The Stratford Company, Publishers, 1968), p. 276.

¹³ See Rudy Blesh, <u>Shining Trumpets: A History of</u> <u>Jazz</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf., 1946), pp. 195, 249; Margaret J. Butcher, op. cit., pp. 28, 44-45, 62.

¹⁴ See Richard M. Dorson, op. cit., p. 56.

¹⁵ See Eileen Southern, <u>The Music of Black Americans</u>: <u>A History</u> (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1971), p. 314.

¹⁶ G.M. Laws, Jr., <u>Native American Balladry</u>, rev. ed. (Kutztown: Publishing Co., Inc., 1964), p. 84. I7 Ibid.

¹⁸ See, for example, Richard M. Dorson, op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁹ See Newman I. White, <u>American Negro Folk-Songs</u> (Hatboro: Folklore Associates, Inc., 1965), p. 19.

20 Ibid.

^{2I} See Gunnar Myrdal, <u>An American Dilemma</u> (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1962), p. 930; Bruce Jackson, <u>The Negro</u> <u>and His Folklore</u> (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 327.

²² Melville J. Herskovits, <u>The Myth of the Negro Past</u> (New York: Harper and Rowe, Publishers, 1941), pp. 86-87.

²³ See E. Franklin Frazier, <u>The Negro in the United</u> <u>States</u> (New York: The Mcmillan Co., 1949), p. 8; St. Claire Drake and Horace R. Clayton, <u>Black Metropolis</u> (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), p. 53; Margaret J. Butcher, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

24 See Newman I. White, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

²⁵ Arna Bontemps, <u>Great Slave Narratives</u> (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1969), p. xvi.

26 Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 702.

²⁷ Margaret J. Butcher, op. cit., p. 35.

²⁸ See St. Claire Drake and Horace R. Clayton, "Introduction," op. cit., pp. xxvii-xxviii.

²⁹ Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 993.

³⁰ Morroe Berger, "Jazz: Resistance to the Diffusion of a Culture-Pattern," <u>Journal of Negro History</u>, 32 (1947), 493.

^{3I} Quoted in St. Claire Drake and Horace R. Clayton, op. cit., pp. xxx-xxxi.

³² Melville J. Herskovits, "Freudian Mechanisms in Primitve Negro Psychology," <u>Essays Presented to C.G. Selig-</u> <u>man</u>, E.E. Evans-Pritchard et al., ed. (London: Degan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1934), p. 76.

³³ W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Souls of Black Folk</u> (New York: Allograph Press Corporation, 1903), p. 256.

³⁴ Quoted in D.T. Turner and J.M. Bright, eds. op. cit., p. 53.

³⁵ Newman I. White, op. cit., p. 14.

³⁶ Quoted by Arna Bontemps, in D.T. Turner and J.M. Bright, op. cit., p. 84.

37 Ibid.

³⁸ For a description, see Marshall W. Stearns, <u>The Story of Jazz</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 10, 99.

39 Eileen Southern, op. cit., p. 402.

40 Ibid., p. 375.

⁴¹ V.F. Calverton, "The Negroes' New Belligerent Attitude," Current History, xxx (Sept., 1929), 1084-85.

42 J.A. Rogers, "Jazz at Home," <u>The New Negro</u>, Alain Locke, ed. (Albert and Charles, Boni, Inc., 1925), p. 220.

43 See Margaret J. Butcher, og. cit., p. 46.

44 <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 40; Frantz Fanon, <u>Peau Noire, Masoue</u> <u>Blanc</u> (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1971), p. 120.

4⁵ See J.-S.-Anselme Bois, <u>Psychologie Pour Tous</u> (Montréal: Les Editions de l'Institut Psychologie, 1945), pp. 214-15; Vernon J. Norby and Calvin S. Hall, <u>A Guide</u> to <u>Psychologists and Their Concepts</u> (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman & Co., 1974), p. 49.

⁴⁶ See Frederick L. Hoffman, <u>Race Traits and Tend-</u> <u>encies of the American Negro</u> (New York: The McMillan Company, 1896), pp. 142-43. Hoffman himself arrives at an opposite conclusion. See p. 121. 47 W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Souls of Black Folk</u>, op. cit., p. 3.

48 Richard Wright, <u>Twelve Million Blacks</u> (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), p. 5.

49 Miles M. Fisher, <u>Negro Slave Songs in the United</u> States (New York: Russel and Russel, 1958), p. II.

⁵⁰ Bruce Jackson, <u>The Negro and His Folklore</u>, op. cit., p. II6.

^{5I} See Margaret Butcher, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

⁵² J.A. Rogers, op. cit., p. 223.

⁵³ John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," <u>John Keats</u>: <u>Selected Poetry and Letters</u>, Richard H. Fogle, ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), pp. 244-45.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Lionel Trilling, <u>Freud and the Crisis</u> of Our Culture (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955), p. 40.

⁵⁵ George Kaluger and Charles M. Unkovic, <u>Psychology</u> <u>and Sociology</u> (London: The C.V. Mosby Co., 1969), pp. 203-04.

⁵⁶ Quoted in St. Claire Drake and Horace R. Clayton, op. cit., p. xxx.

57 See Melville J. Herskovits, op. cit., p. 93.

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⁵⁸ See Miles M. Fisher, op. cit., p. 184; E. Franklin Frazier, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

⁵⁹ Claude H. Nolan, <u>The Negro's Image in the South</u>: <u>The Anatomy of Racism</u> (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, I967), pp. 3-IO; Thomas Gossett, <u>Race: The History</u> <u>of an Idea in America</u> (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, I975), pp. 49, 272; George M. Frederickson, <u>The Black Image in the White Mind</u> (New York: Harper and Rowe, Publishers, I971), pp. 253-80.

⁶⁰ Howard W. Odum, <u>Social and Mental Traits of the</u> <u>Negro</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910), p. 261.

^{6I} Richard Wright, op. cit., p. xxx.

62 Carter J. Woodson, <u>The History of the Negro</u> <u>Church</u> (Washington: The Associated Publishers, 1921), p. 23; W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Souls of Black Folk</u>, op. cit., p. 199.

63 See Idus A. Newby, <u>Jim Crow's Defence: Anti-Negro</u> <u>Thought in America</u> (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), p. 43.

⁶⁴ For the various uses of Negro laughter, see James W. Johnson, <u>Along This Way: Autobiography</u> (New York: The Viking Press, 1933), p. 120; William Schechter, <u>The</u> <u>History of Negro Humor in America</u> (London: Fleet Press Corp., 1970), pp. 179-204. 65 Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 960.

⁶⁶ S.P. Fullinwider, <u>The Mind and Mood of Black</u> <u>America</u> (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1969), p. 208.

⁶⁷ Margaret Butcher, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

⁶⁸ See Mikhail Bakhtine, <u>L'oeuvre de François Rabelais</u> <u>et la Culture Populaire au Moyen Age sous la Renaissance</u>, trans. Andrée Robel (Editions Gallimard, 1970), pp. 69 ff.

69 William Schechter, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

70 Ibid.

^{7I} Unsigned article, "Slave Songs of the United States," Bruce Jackson, op. cit., p. II6.

72 S.P. Fullinwider, op. cit., p. 2II.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., p. 208.

⁷⁵ Melville J. Herskovits, "Freudian Mechanisms in Primitive Negro Psychology," op. cit., p. 77.

⁷⁶ See, for example, J.A.C. Brown, <u>Freud and the Post</u>-Freudians (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1966), p. 27.

77 Ibid.

78 W.E.B. DuBois, The Gift of Black Folk, op. cit.,

p. 28I.

79 Langston Hughes, op. cit., p. 694.

⁸⁰ See Miles M. Fisher, op. cit., pp. 29, 66-67.

81 Ibid., p. 37.

82 Ibid., p. 16.

⁸³ Arthur A. Schomburg, op. cit., p. 59.

⁸⁴ Bernard Wolfe, "Uncle Remus and the Malevolent Rabbit," <u>Commentary: A Jewish Review</u>, 8 (July, 1949), 31.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁶ Bill R. Hampton, "On Identification and Negro Tricksters," <u>Southern Folklore Quarterly</u>, 3I, No. I (March, 1967), 58.

⁸⁷ The controversy over Negro inferiority has been reviewed in the previous chapter. It is worthwhile noting that a feeling of inferiority is not a complex of inferiority, a psychological condition much more serious and pathological in its effects. In this respect, see J.-S.-Anselme Bois, op. cit., p. 224.

⁸⁸ Idus A. Newby, op. cit., p. 15.
⁸⁹ See Part II of this inquiry.

⁹⁰ George Kaluger and Charles M. Unkovic, op. cit., p. 205.

⁹¹ James W. Johnson, <u>Black Manhattan</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf., 1930), pp. 60-61.

⁹² Arthur A. Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," The New Negro, op. cit., p. 231.

⁹³ See J.A.C. Brown, op. cit., p. 38; V.J. Norby and C.S. Hall, op. cit., p. 9.

94 See Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 993.

95 See Idus A. Newby, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

96 See Richard M. Dorson, op. cit., p. 66.

97 Ibid., pp. 51-52.

98 Carter G. Woodson, <u>The African Background Outlined</u> (New York: Negro University Press, 1971), p. 171; Benjamin Brawley, "Science and Invention," op. cit., p. 52; Robert B. Bean, "The Negro Brain," <u>The Century</u>, 72 (May-Oct., 1906), 780.

⁹⁹ N.N. Puckett, op. cit., p. 28.

PART ONE: EMPHASIZING THE ORAL TRADITION

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Chapter 3: The Soul Concept

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Having reviewed the psychoanalytic functions of the Afro-american folk tradition, I will now analyze their treatment in Harlem Renaissance fiction. This dual approach -- historical and then fictional -- will be pursued in the two remaining sections of this inquiry.

In their treatment of the pervasive functional motif, the Harlem School writers' aim, for the most part, has been to apprise their people of the vital importance of the folk tradition in racial life as well as of the necessity to make that tradition the corner-stone of any program of cultural advancement. In <u>Banjo</u>, Claude McKay, a forerunner of the Renaissance,^I states this aim quite clearly:

> It's the common people, you know, who furnish the bone and sinew and salt of any race or nation If this renaissance we're talking about is going to be more than a sporadic and scabby thing, we'll have to get down to our racial roots to create it.

> Getting down to our native roots and building

up from our own people ... is not savagery. It is culture. (200).

These writers' exhortation was directed more toward the educated middle-class than the lower-class. Of course. there was no need to inform the lower-class of the importance of these operations arising from the folk-art tradition. As I indicated in the last chapter, the folk Negroes, who constituted the most abiding element of the lower-class (p. 17), had kept the functional tradition alive from the dawn of slavery. In the main, the Harlem School writers' plea was directed at the crust of elder writers and race leaders. For, as this inquiry will increasingly show, it was the Negro intellectual who had traditionally shouldered the over-all responsibility of racial advancement. Moreover, the fundamentally folk outlook adopted by Harlem novelists in matters regarding the latter is not at all surprising in view of their deeply-rooted lowerclass sympathies. I have noted two instances of this: the debate over a suitable subject-matter for Negro fiction (pp. I9-22) and the intellectual response of these younger writers to the continuing Negro problem (pp. 26-28).

The above folk argument is embodied in the Harlem School novelists' representation of functions. I will, therefore, examine these in three related discussions.

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The first will show how functions are part and parcel of a widespread pattern of search within the entire Renaissance novel. The second will view functions in terms of a collective psyche or group soul, while the third will consider the promotion of that soul. Together, the three discussions will provide a better understanding of the cultural significance of the folk theme in the Renaissance novel.

(I) The pattern of search that spreads across the Renaissance novel in general is made up of at least three important types of search besides the functional. (By functional search is meant the pursuit of folk-art experiences on the part of characters behaving like artists or spectators). One of these types of search, the hedonistic, is concerned with the pursuit of sensual pleasures -- mainly sex, eating and drinking. The religious type of search encompasses conjuring and Christianity. The third may be conveniently termed materialistic, as it incorporates the pursuit of middle class status (white or black) through education and property accumulation.

The Renaissance novel depicts these four types of search as alternate avenues to personal or collective selffulfillment, with the latter generally being referred to as "happiness." Happiness in the novel may thus be defined as the pursuit of life, or the freedom to pursue it, along the various avenues just outlined. In the eyes of many a protagonist, most of these pathways to happiness complement one another. But the aftermath of their multiple involvement does not bear out this view. The present analysis will point out the untoward effects, contradiction and conflict arising from this involvement.

A preliminary survey of the three forms of search just defined is necessary, in view of their bearing on the functions that underlie folk-art indulgence. As was mentioned above, the hedonistic search is, in part, a search for sexual gratification. In novels like <u>Banjo</u>, <u>God Sends Sunday</u> and <u>Home to Harlem</u>, the latter takes the form of a pressing need for female companionship. In the first novel, Latnah, the attractive mulatto, is coveted by some of her Marseille compatriots. The following excerpt, which records a dispute between two of them (Jake and Malty), portrays her as an object of prey:

> Wh'as matter you messing around mah woman? Go chase you'self. I knowed her long before you did, when she was running after me. You're a dawggone liar! And youse another! Ef it's a fight youse looking for, come on outside. (36)

The sex motif is even more pronounced in Arna Bontemps' <u>God Sends Sunday</u>. In it, a celebrated jockey (Little Augie) yearns for a mistress whose beauty would match his fortune and meteoric professional success. That prize he finally discovers in Florence Dessan, a yellow New Orleans girl. After his initial attempts to win her had failed, he began looking for another girl comparable to Miss Dessan in attractiveness. For a time, he thought he had found her in Della Green. But, journeying back to New Orleans, he rediscovers his first love:

> I jes' come back ... How you lak St. Louis? There ain't nuthing there for me. No peace. So you come back on account o' dat? De season is done finish ... I'm gonna be heah a long time, an' I wants yo' company, yella gal. Augie's heart leapt as he watched her. His dream seemed so near he could almost put his hands on it. (98-99)

The sex motif, which figures abundantly in <u>Banjo</u> and <u>God Sends Sunday</u>, also permeates <u>Home to Harlem</u>. This novel begins by showing us Jake cutting short his military assignment in Europe. After this farewell-to-arms of sorts, the reader sees Jake verbalizing his much anticipated reunion with home: Nip me all you wanta, Mister Louse ... Roll on, Mister Ship, and stinks all the way as you rolls. Jest take me 'long to Harlem is all I pray. I'm crazy to see again the brown-skin chippies 'long Lenox Avenue. Oh boy! (3)

Uppermost in Jake's mind was Felice, a cabaret singer, whom he had known for a short time before his trip to Europe. The high and low search for her through the slummy streets and entertainment haunts of Harlem cuts across the entire novel. The reader is first confronted with Jake's initial high spirits and hopes for an early reunion with Felice (35-40). Then he sees these turn awry, when the search for her drags on with seemingly no end in sight (41-103). Later, he views a despairing Jake unexpectedly catching up with the object of his feverish quest (299). And, finally, he witnesses their celebrated reunion, with the two making amorous plans and showering each other with expressions of deep attachment (300-340). The need to seek out a person of the opposite sex (in whom the protagonist pins his hope for happiness) also constitutes a strong urge in novels like One Way to Heaven, Walls of Jericho and The Blacker the Berry.

Also permeating these and other novels of the

Harlem School are excessive eating and drinking, the two remaining components of the hedonistic triangle of Pursuit. The pursuit of drinking as an ideal is a constant motif in Wallace Thurman's two novels -- The Blacker the Berry and Infants of the Spring. In these works, drinking as a way of life gives rise to an exclusive group of pleasure-seekers that tend to duplicate the irresponsibility of the "us" fraternity in Hemingway's novels. Like some of Hemingway's men and women, the members of this selective group are continually "seeking out" (202) their favorite hide-outs and "looking for liquor" (158). In. Thurman's other novel, The Infants of the Spring, the group of fellow revellers is an ill-assorted lot of pseudo-artists and intellectuals inspired by Fourierist enthusiasm. The writer, to dramatize the extent to which alcoholic indulgence is indispensable to the company, engages its members in a mock Christian ritual, wherein the dire need for gin takes on the urgency of divine manna (IO2).

The hedonistic search for happiness through eating and drinking is also prominent in Claude McKay's novels. But, in them, the pursuit of these two activities amounts to a form of epicurism. In <u>Home to Harlem</u> and <u>Banjo</u>, for example, characters are persistently discussing the merits of this or that food or drink as well as acting like seasoned gourmets. Jake, more than any other, exemplifies this behavior in Home to Harlem. His numerous nutritional chats include a discussion on the relative virtues of soda and ginger-ale for scotch (II); and he once vowed that he would never savor his martini cocktails unless they were "studded with cherries" (IO). Nor would he fare on Maryland fried chicken if it were not accompanied by "candied sweet potatoes" (IO). In Banjo, moreover, epicurism or the search for happiness through the pleasures of the palate is dramatized by the "beach boys," a bunch of black vagrants. Their movements in and out of the low restaurants of Marseille are dominated by the connoisseur attitude that is the stock-in-trade of their counterparts in Home to Harlem. Bugsy, one of the lot, dramatizes this attitude in his proud rejection of vin rouge ordinaire (7) and in his predilection for gras double and pieds pacuet Marseillaise (62). The bearing of the hedonistic pursuit of happiness on the functional, our subject-matter, will become evident later in this chapter.

Parallel to this rampant hedonism in the Harlem School novel is the religious search for happiness. I have already mentioned how this second type of search involves the pursuit of Christian ideals (hope, charity, meekness ...) as well as indulgence in folk superstition or conjuring. These two forms of religious activity become additional avenues of well-being in a number of novels. These avenues are either independent of each other or complementary. Foremost among the novels that dramatize the independent kind of religious search is Not Without Laughter. In it Aunt Hager, a powerful religious figure with rock-like convictions, pursues the Protestant way of life unswervingly and in vain attempts to impose it on her youngest children (Harriet and Sandy). Protestant ideals are pursued with no less a fervor in Banana Bottom by Rev. Malcolm Craig and his wife, Priscilla. But these two champions of the "Free Church" (95) achieve a relatively greater success with Bita Plant and Harold Newton, adopted children who remain steadfast religious enthusiasts up to their mid-twenties.

Banana Bottom also depicts the complementary form of the religious search for happiness through characters like Belle Black and Yoni Legge. These females, unlike the characters just mentioned, lead complex lives that alternate between Christian and conjuring ideals, sometimes directing their steps to the community church and, sometimes, to the obeahman's cave, in a persistent effort to find solutions to material problems. Also exemplifying this duality are the day-to-day activities of Aunt Mandy, Mattie Johnson (<u>One Way to Heaven</u>) and of Mrs. Araminthra Snead (<u>The Conjure-Man Dies</u>). In the following passage, the revelations of the latter protagonist under questioning clearly brings out this duality:

> I don't do no work at all - not for wages. I'm a church-worker though.

A church-worker? You spend a good deal of time in church then? Can't nobody spend too much time in church. Though I declare I been wonderin' lately if there ain't some things the devel can 'tend to better'n the Lord.

How does it happen that a devoted churchworker like you, Mrs. Snead, comes to seek the advice of a man like Frimbo, a master of the powers of darkness?

If one medicine don' help, maybe another will. O I made up my mind. Everybody know 'bout this man Frimbo - say he can conjure on down. And I figure I been takin' it to the Lord in prayer long enough. Now I'm goin' take it to the devil.

So you came here? Yes.

This search for well-being along religious lines usually conflicts with the functional, the pursuit of folk-art ex-

periences that are psychologically rewarding. The historical basis of this conflict as well as its fictional dramatization is, in part, the subject of the next section of the inquiry into lower-class life.

The materialistic search, as noted initially, provides another important link in the pattern of search that permeates the Harlem Renaissance novel. To recapitulate, this search involves the pursuit of middle-class goals -education, social recognition and property -- that are assumed to generate happiness. Like the hedonistic and religious forms of search, the materialistic is not without having some relationship with the functional, as will be pointed out shortly. For the black-colored protagonist. the pursuit of the above goals involves the rupturing of family or social ties with the black lower-class. This situation is well dramatized by the lives of Arkins Silas (Not Without Laughter) and of Emma Lou (The Blacker the Berry). These novels provide the two finest examples of this materialistic form of search in the Harlem School novel. Mrs. Silas' yearning for life on a higher racial plane led her to despise her poor house-hold for the company of "high-toned colored folks" (24). Similarly, Miss Lou, in her striving for black middle-class respectability --

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first at the University of Southern California and then among the well-to-do set of black Harlem -- was constrained to sacrifice her female and male companions (Hazel, John) of lower-class origin. She loved them dearly, but felt, nevertheless, that they were below her station.

The pursuit of middle-class goals by the blackcolored protagonist within her own racial group is also an important motif in the apologist novel (pp. I8-I9). For example, <u>There Is Confusion</u> portrays a family in which its members play the part of dogged middle-class aspirants. The father, Joel Marshall, conquers middle-class respectability after having relentlessly sought it from his boyhood days as a slave. As for his daughter, Joanna, she is an "utter snob" (93) who, like Raymond Taylor in <u>The</u> <u>Infants of the Spring</u>, craves after white "musical distinction" (53). And Maggie Ellersky, a hanger-on of the Marshall family, seeks a marriage of convenience with the latter's brother that would bring her "comfort, respectability and love" (II8).

The apologist novel, however, is better known for its dramatization of the other form of the materialistic search -- the unrestricted pursuit of white middleclass material advantages by the fair-skinned or near-

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white Negro protagonist posing as white. Just as the previous form of the materialistic search by the blackcolored protagonist involves a rejection of lower-class mores, so that pursued by the near-white character carries with it an abrupt severing of ties with Negro life as a whole, the latter having been judged too dull and restrictive. This phenomenon (involving the abandonment of one racial group for another with seemingly better prospects for happiness) is generally known as <u>passing</u> or crossing the color-line (p. 30).

Exemplifying this second type of materialistic search in the apologist novel is Vera Manning, a minor character of Jessie Fauset's <u>There Is Confusion</u>. A more dramatized case in this novel is that of Angela Murray, who sought through the avenue of art a means of conquering "pleasure, gaiety and freedom" (I3) that she felt were absent from her own group life. <u>Flight</u>, another apologist novel, also dramatizes that outward search for happiness beyond racial boundaries through Mimi, a young unwedded mother. Her marriage with Jimmy Forester, a whiteman with "smug little prejudices" (289), represents her final attempt to obtain material ease and wealth in the white world. Passing by Nella Larsen is a similar work depicting the

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attempt by a white Negro girl (Clare Kendry) to conquer the happiness of the white middle-class. As in the previous example, the white husband is a man of means with strong Negro antipathies.

Harlem Renaissance novels like the preceding usually portray the materialistic search within and beyond racial limits as a misguided adventure culminating in disillusionment. In both forms of search, the striver after the middle-class way of life soon discovers that this life is not so self-fulfilling or productive of happiness as was hitherto thought. In the case of the fairskinned Negro protagonist, such a disillusionment is made more painful by what Nella Larsen dubs the "dark secret" (PSG. 133) -- the need to hide and the actual hiding of one's true origins or racial identity under cover of a near-white exterior or behavior. Besides, disillusionment together with this need for secrecy oftentimes result in a kindling or rekindling of interest in Negro life. The new interest not infrequently takes the form of a discovery or rediscovery of black middle-class life for the fair-skinned striver (Flight) and black lower-class life (Banana Bottom) for the dark-skinned. A non-striver

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in <u>Passing</u> expresses this phenomenon thus: "They always come back. I've seen it happen time after time" (96).

Important to our study is the new interest in lower-class life on the part of the disenchanted striver. It is this interest which establishes the link between the materialistic search and the functional that I mentioned initially (pp. 155-56). I will make a detailed analysis of this link in the third and final section of our inquiry into lower-class life.

The extensive pattern of search within the Harlem Renaissance novel that we have just uncovered has at least three effects. I would like to examine these effects, which are complementary to the present study, before embarking upon the second of our three discussions -- the representation of functions as a collective soul.

The multifarious search for happiness along the avenues described above results in the portrayal of characters like wild and, sometimes, voracious animals in pursuit of game or prey. The "beach boys" of Marseille are an example of this form of characterization. They inhabit a sea-port that is a "great fish town" (BJO, 85) and their pan-handling existence is compared to the predatory actions of a swarm of hungry sea-gulls (BJO, 30). Besides, en-

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dowing strivers after happiness with a keen perception and an acute hearing reinforces their animal characterization. In the folk and mixed novels (pp. I7-I8), where such a characterization is rife, this sensual capability constitutes more an offensive than a defensive mechanism. This situation may be based on the assumption that hungry, wild animals, such as the preceding characters seem to be, are more intent on attacking than they are wary of attack! This situation, moreover, is reversed in the apologist novel. In this type of Renaissance fiction, good ears and eyes are primarily a weapon of defense in the feline arsenal of fair-skinned strivers bent on avoiding detection.

The above effect that the conversion of characters into beasts creates is very amoral in nature, ethicallyminded aesthetes would say. The charge of primitivism that is often levelled at the Harlem Renaissance² partly refers to this apparently moral vacuum in the fiction of the era. There will be numerous occasions in our present discussions to assess this charge.

The second effect stemming from the widespread pattern of search in these novels seems to have moral implications also. The pursuit of happiness through diverse avenues creates a split-personality type of charac-

ter. Individuals within this type exhibit actions that are both contradictory and destructive. The contradiction arises from the pursuit of dissimilar goals or ideals that are incompatible with one another. These ideals become destructive, when the dispersion they create drains protagonists of their physical and mental energies. One of the finest examples of the split-personality type of character is Little Augie, the upstart jockey, who pursued hedonistic, functional and materialistic goals at the same time, only to be crushed under the combined weight of their pressing demands. I have already given instances of his hedonistic pursuits (p. 158). As for the materialistic ones, they center around horse-racing, from which he extracted -through persistent toil and emulation -- the large sums necessary to sustain a way of life dominated by bacchanalia and public self-exposure. Prominent in his functional pursuits was his egoistic indulgence in folk music and song. For a time, these seemed to relieve his intermittent bouts of dejection brought on by his many pursuits. Another fine example of the solit-personality type of character involves the protagonist whose hedonistic or functional activities have been severely curtailed by the subsequent pursuit of Christian objectives. After the results obtained from

the latter pursuit are judged unsatisfactory, there usually

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follows a paralyzing sense of betrayal and conjuring then becomes a complementary recourse. I have already mentioned the principal characters in the Harlem Renaissance novel who lead such double lives as well as given an example of the rationalization underlying such lives. (p. 163).

The third effect stemming from the extensive pattern of search relates to the aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance novel rather than to the moral fibre of some of its characters. The pursuit of several objectives at the same time tends to impart a high degree of mobility to the action. This mobile action in turn creates a fictional landscape dotted with starting-off and terminal points as of a vast station or outpost. Hence the frequent departures and arrivals, sojourning and rendez-vousing that mark the plot of the novel. No wonder, then, that protagonists within such a kaleidoscopic setting behave like tourists or holidaymakers -- forever "caught by some romantic rhythm, color, or face" (HTH, 4I). Moreover, the word "home," which has a persistent echo in every novel, partly catches the nostalgia and restlessness underlying such wanderings. The fluid effect that these create make the Harlem novel resemble

the eighteenth century English travel narrative. I have in mind works like <u>Moll Flanders and Tom Jones</u>.

The previous discussion was intended to point out the prominence of the functional search -- the pursuit of well-being through folk-art experiences -- in the multiple pattern of search criss-crossing the Harlem Renaissance novel. The involvement of this search with other searches in the novel as well as the attraction it exercises upon them serves to underscore the young Harlem novelist's contention that the above experiences are important culturelly and should therefore be a prime consideration in social efforts to uplift the race. Also dramatizing this contention in the novel is the representation of folk-art experiences or functions as a group soul.

In <u>Modern Man in Search of a Soul</u>, C.G. Jung argues that today the idea of soul has been largely replaced by the idea of personality.³ If this observation is true to modern psychology in general, as this writer maintains, it is certainly not so to black American sociology. For the lay concept of soul,⁴ which apparently made its first formalized appearance during the early decades of this century, was revitalized in the Soul Movement of the sixties⁵ and

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has since then persisted.6

The Renaissance and latter-day concepts of soul share a number of common characteristics. For example, they both crystallize lower-class urban experience into a kind of mystique⁷ and help foster an acute sense of the racial self that not infrequently borders on ethnocentrism, as LeRoi Jones notes::

> White is then not 'right,' as the old blues had it, but a liability, since the culture of White precludes the possession of the soul.⁸

Crystallization is partly achieved through the soul and non-soul labelling of behavior, folk-art and commercial items, in such catchword phrases as "soul brother," "soul food," "soul music," "he has no soul."⁹

However, the recent concept of soul is different from its Renaissance counterpart in some respects. The modern-day concept, for instance, is entirely of lowerclass coinage, ^{IO} whereas its predecessor is a child of elder middle-class writers reacting against the vilification of the Negro character and of their peers bent on emblazoning the folk inheritance (pp. 70-72). This difference is evident in their view of the Negro soul as a kind of Oversoul -- a racially inspirational and motivating force with which the individual black soul may communicate. This Emersonian idea, ^{II} fundamental to the Renaissance concept of soul but only incidental in the modern, is widespread in racial writings of the Harlem era.^{I2} What is more, these writings represent functions or folk-art experiences as the operations of that Over-soul. Such a view of functions is implicit in this remark:

But at night, like the firely, the negro recreated and refreshed in song his soul.¹³

It is also borne out in such curt phrases or statements as "singing soul," "soul-stirring experiences,"^{I4} "the music of black artists is the soul of the race."^{I5} It is this soul view of functions that Harlem School novelists adopted in their attempt to emblazon the folk inheritance. In the ensuing part of this discussion, I will be concerned with the multiple fictional embodiments of this view.

Harlem School novelists resorted to analogies and symbols to represent the Negro artistic soul as well as its operations. The soul is in part conceived as Spirit. Especially in Jean Toomer and Claude McKay, the term, Spirit, connotes age and immemoriality. McKay thus - 175 -

dubs it "ancient" (BNB, I30) and Toomer associates it with a brooding old patriarch (CNE, 217). Associating the racial soul with the past is, of course, a way of eliciting respect for the oral tradition.

Sometimes, the Spirit behaves like a supernatural being of biblical lore that can be conjured up as well as inhabit the body during folk-art execution (WOJ, IO2). But it may also become inactive through artistic neglect and, as a result, be mourned (BNB, 250, 268). The idea of mourning strikes a romantic note. Like the poet lamenting the spoliation of Nature by modern industry, the Harlem novelist experiences solicitude for the alleged deteriorating quality of folk-life. The following observations by Toomer and McKay actualize this solicitude::

> With Negroes also the trend was towards the small town and towards the city -- and industry and commerce and the machines. The folkspirit was walking in to die on the modern desert. That spirit ... so beautiful Its death ... so tragic.¹⁶

Yet even the dictatorships were making concessions to the strong awakened group spirit of the peoples Regional groups such as that in Brittany and in the Basque country were reviving their ancient culture But there is very little group spirit among Negroes. The American Negro group is the most advanced in the world ... But it sadly lacks a group soul.¹⁷

Sometimes, the Spirit in which the racial soul is embodied connotes breath of air or wind, as in this description of southern singing:

> The choir, together with the entire congregation, sings an old spiritual A canebrake, murmuring the tale to its neighborroad ... (CNE, 178)

Dear Jesus, do not chain me to myself and set these hills and valleys heaving with folksongs so close to me ... (CNE, I6I)

A false dusk has come early. The country-side is ashen, chill. The choir, dipping into a long silence, sings ... and canebrakes whisper. (CNE, 180)

In the above, Negro song vibrations become the breath of life that animates the Georgian landscape. This romantic communion between singer and environment is intended to mirror the psychological benefits accruing from the operations of the racial soul or from indulgence in folk-art.

The operations or functions underlying the Negro oral tradition find an additional embodiment in the heart symbol. In several fictional situations, folk-art execution is likened to the persistent beatings of this vital organ. Such a comparison is most evident in the frequent association of Negro musical rhythms with the work "throbbing" (BJO, 29; NWL, 94) and with variations of the word "pulse" (NWL, 93, 95).

Also, in his dynamic view of the group soul, the Harlem School novelist incorporates the old conception of the soul as energy source.¹⁸ Music and dance executions are thus described in terms of burning wood (BNB, 7I; CNE, I92), electrical power (BJO, IO8) or steam (GSS, I59). Endowed with such properties, these art-forms are shown to communicate light and heat to their immediate environment, as does Democritus' soul in the animal body.¹⁹ So individuals who haunt the artistic environment, like Alva and Jake, are described in fiery terms (BTE, 208; HTH, IO). These descriptions are no doubt intended to set off the folk temperament (the peculiarly racial expansiveness, in part derived from the oral arts) as a cultural ideal.

Finally, the racial soul that appears under the preceding guises (Spirit, heart, energy) in music, song and dance takes the form of an organic "mold" (CNE, 224) in oral narration -- an extension of meaning that I have dis-

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covered only in Toomer. Incarnating this last embodiment of the soul is Father John, the blind old seer, whom I have mentioned in connection with the Spirit (p. 176). It is suggested that this "mold" will thrive only if fed with the proper verbal nutrients (CNE, 224). Carrie K., the girl who caters to the old man's nutritional needs, seems to enact this suggestion:

> Someone is coming down the stairs. Carrie, bringing food for the old man. She is lovely in her fresh energy of the morning, in the calm untested confidence and nascent maternity which rise from the purpose of her present mission. (CNE, 233)

Just as Father John is kept alive and well with food supplied by her, so will the "mold" by the oral narrative art. Moreover, Father John's association with his namesake, John the Baptist (CNE, 2II), reinforces the idea of the Negro soul as an identity sustained with words. For it is wellknown that the biblical narratives of this prophet gave hope and sustinence to Old Testament Jews in the pre-dawn of Christianity.²⁰

In this third discussion, I will continue to explore the means the Harlem School novelist takes to dramatize his view of the important role that functions or folk-art experiences should play in Negro life or in what Alain Locke calls "the new phase of group development."^{2I} In the two foregoing discussions, it was pointed out that these means include giving a major role to the functional search and viewing functions themselves as the operations of a group soul. A third element of the Marlem novelist's cultural persuasion are efforts within the novels to develop that soul.

I have already mentioned how <u>The New Negro</u>, the compendium of essays on Afro-american culture edited by Locke, was well-known to the younger writers of the era.(p. 5).²² This anthology suggests that several non-fictional writers of the Renaissance anticipated the Harlem School writers' concern for the Negro soul. One of them is Alain Locke himself. In his prologue to the above work, he makes the following observation: "Negro life is not only establishing new contacts and founding new centers, it is finding a new soul."²³ William Braithwaite believes that Locke's joy over "this acquisition of a new and developing soul" is the result of his familiarity with Lowes Dickinson who, in his Ingersol Lectures at Harvard, insisted on the difference in soul growth among the races.²⁴ Albert C. Barnes,

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another contributor to <u>The New Negro</u>,²⁵ also expresses interest in the development of the racial soul:

> Many living negroes -- Bu Bois, Cotter, Grimke, Hayes, Braithwaite, Burleigh, the Johnsons, McKay, Dett, Locke and many others -- know the Negro soul and are leading it to richer fields by their own ideas of culture and art.²⁶

It was this intellectual interest in the welfare of the group soul as well as the belief on the part of Harlem School novelists that it was not as thriving as elder non-fictional writers of the Renaissance would have us believe (p. 175) that made its promotion such a fundamental issue in the novels.

The task of promoting the racial soul is made incumbent on the artist-protagonist. More than any other character, he seems to know and feel those experiences that make up the racial soul, an advantage which the novels show as arising from his lower-class background and from a rambling way of life that has carried him, troubadourlike, into the heart of many a black enclave. Moreover, as his real-life counterpart, the fictionalized folk artist carries out his promotional task in these areas through performances that involve improvisation and variation. These, as I have mentioned (pp. II6-I7), make up the essence of Negro folk-art execution and produce soothing effects through their release and non-release of racial emotions (p. I25). Furthermore, as will soon become evident, the role of promoter, which the necessity to develop the Negro soul thrusts upon the talented protagonist, tends to aggrandize or belittle his personality, while his efforts to fulfill that cultural necessity tends also to confer on Negro oral art a <u>dulce et utile</u> purpose that is far from the purist's cry of art for art sake.²⁷

The promotion of the soul by the folk artist achieves complete success only in <u>Not Without Laughter</u>. Elsewhere, in the Harlem School novel, success is either partial or entirely non-existent. I will examine this triple fact in some detail and then assess its impact on the novelist's own success as a cultural propagandist.

Uncle Dan Givens, the professional story-teller, is partly responsible for the success which efforts to promote the racial soul achieve in the above novel by Langston Hughes. We are told that this old man's "unending flow of fabulous reminiscences" (267) not only increased his longevity, but generated a kind of laughter (267) that refreshed generations of black vagrants for whom the small town of Stanton had become a familiar stop-over.

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It is, however, Jimboy's contribution to the development of the soul that receives the greatest attention. Jimboy is the folk artist with the "rich low baritone voice" (46), whose performances on summer nights at his mother-in-law's created a joyful atmosphere as of a "theatre" (31) or "show house" (52). Hughes lays great emphasis on Jimboy's extensive knowledge and skill, apparent in his rich repertoire of songs and dances (47, 53), and in his versatile instrumentation (50-51). Thus equipped, he would generate racial feelings in the black-belt neighborhood (Stanton), where he periodically sojourned:

> That's right decent, said Hager. Sing <u>Casey Jones</u>, called old man Tom Johnson. That's ma song. Aw, pick it, boy, yelled the old man. Can't nobody play like you. (52)

But Jimboy's main contribution to the development of the Negro soul is his initiation of Harriet, his talented sister-in-law, into the oral tradition:

> ... and each time that her roving brotherin-law stopped in Stanton, he would amuse himself by teaching her ... The child ... soon learned to sing the songs as well as

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Jimboy. He taught her the <u>parse me la</u>, too, and a few other movements <u>peculiar</u> to Southern Negro dancing, and sometimes together they went through the buck and wing and a few taps. It was all great fun. (50)

In this way, Jimboy taught Harriet the stock-in-trade of his purveyor's art, as if he knew that some day he would unwillingly withdraw from its practice and thus leave behind him a cultural vacuum. When that time came (he had been summoned to the European front), Harriet was more than ready to succeed him. Like her brother-in-law, she became a roving artist, performing to large audiences and generating (through her blues tunes and intricate body movements) the same revitalizing effects that he generated at Stanton:

> Her final number was a dance-song which she sang in a sparkling dress of white sequins, ending the act with a mad collection of steps and a swift sudden whirl across the whole stage as the orchestra joined Billy's piano The audience yelled, and clapped and whistled for more, stamping their feet and turning to one another with shouted comments of enjoyment. (298-99)

The attempt to promote the group soul in <u>Banjo</u> and <u>Banana Bottom</u> is not entirely successful. Unlike <u>Not</u> Without Laughter, the artist-protagonists in these two novels do not carry out their purveyor's role to the end. I will first consider the case of Banjo who, like Jimboy, is a skilled instrumentalist and instructor (8). The first part of the novel portrays him in this dual capacity, as he tries to set up an all-black orchestra that he hopes will enliven the sagging racial life of his Marseille compatriots. His efforts in this direction are finally crowned with success (216-17), and we see him and his band of players moving about in the "Ditch" (the black ghetto), "spreading joy" (I90), as he characteristically defines his artistic role. Success, however, is short-lived, because Banjo unwittingly throws away his instrument -an old banjo, his namesake, whose "sharp, noisy notes" would recall the race's "hardy existence" (49). He later obtains a second instrument; but it lacks the magic of the first and so is unable to revive the "old spontaneous ... happiness" (257). In the wake of these disappointments, the saddened band-leader takes leave of his men; and they, no longer having him as leaven, disintegrate like the company of sailors on Conrad's "Narcissus":

> Perhaps Banjo did not know how great his influence was over the beach boys. His going away with his instrument left them leaderless and they fell apart. (222)

Now that Banjo was gone and the group dispersed, the spell was broken ... (223)

As I remarked initially, Banana Bottom also exemplifies efforts to develop the racial soul that are not entirely successful. Like Banjo, Crazy Bow Adlair, the principal artist-protagonist, fails to carry out his cultural task to fruition. In this respect, his career resembles that of the ill-fated romantic poet, Chatterton. whose work was unexpectedly nipped in the bud. Like him and the foregoing protagonists, Crazy Bow possessed an exceptional talent: his playing of local instruments is compared to Paganini's and its soothing effects evoke Orphic memories (8). Like Chatterton, too, he became stricken with dementia -- the result of his early, inordinate familiarity with piano-playing (5). This disease was to put an abrupt end to his astonishing variational performances in the local church and at tea-meeting socials (9). It is true that his sudden and tragic withdrawal from the village (Banana Bottom) was in part compensated by other local entertainers: Belle Black, the singer-dancer and Nias Black, the drummer. These two, however, could not replace the uncanny feeling of awe and rapture (6) which the bewitching effects of his playing created.

An outstanding factor in the failure to carry the promotional responsibility through in these two novels is the overpowering attraction of the hedonistic ideal or pursuit. Both Banjo and Crazy Bow became its partial victims. Heavy drinking and the sex urge (BNB, I,8) made the latter's recovery more difficult, if not impossible; and liquor as well created confusion and inattention that contributed to the loss of the former's instrument (BJO, I3-I4, 3I6).

The search for happiness through hedonistic experiences also accounts for some of the failure of efforts to promote the soul in at least two other Harlem School novels: <u>Cane and God Sends Sunday</u>. The first work dramatizes the plight of Ralph Kabnis, a northern immigrant in the South, who entertains a strong desire to promote the group soul:

> I want to feed the soul -- I know what it is; the preachers don't -- but I've got to feed it. (224)

Unlike the foregoing protagonists, however, this would-be narrator and artist (223, 227) is entirely unfit for such a task. This is suggested by his immoderate drinking habit (184), which had already led to his expulsion from a southern school:

> Therefore, if I find your resignation on my desk by tomorrow morning, Mr. Kabnis, I shall

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not feel obliged to call in the sheriff. (I86) His unfitness to promote the racial soul through the narrative medium (like Uncle Dan Givens) is further suggested in his estrangement from, and ignorance of, the oral tradition. These liabilities are noticeable in his fish-out-ofwater response to facts and incidents of daily southern life, from which this tradition emerged,²⁸ and in the need he feels to be enlightened on matters he normally should know:

> He is awkward and ludicrous, like a schoolboy in his big brother's new overalls. He skirts the large blocks on the floor, and drops into a chair before the fire. (I96) Singing from the church becomes audible Couldn't stand the shouting, and that's a fact. We don't have that sort of thing up North someone should see to it that

Further suggesting Kabnis' unfitness is his boyish irreverence toward Father John, the black Tiresias and human embodiment -- both as Spirit and as "mold" -- of that soul he so ardently wishes to serve:

they are stopped. (175)

(He looks and re-sees the old man.). Eh, you? To hell with you. What do I care whether you see or hear? You know what hell is because you've been there Your soul. Ha. Nigger soul. (232)

Thus Ralph Kabnis has failed to emerge as a folk artist in <u>Cane</u>. His actions, nonetheless, demonstrate how aberrant it is to try to uplift a group in the absence of a fundamental grasp of its culture and traditions.

Little Augie of <u>God Sends Sunday</u> is another <u>artist</u> <u>manqué</u> type of character.²⁹[.] Unlike Ralph Kabnis and like the protagonists examined before him, he possesses considerable musical skill together with a great knowledge of, and sympathy for, the oral tradition, as this passage indicates:

> ... There were many voices, an assortment of nigger blues. Above them all, like their united echo, Augie heard a coarse voice crying, making a new song:

I hate to see de evenin' sun go down, Lawd, I hate to see de evenin' sun go down, 'Cause de man I love done lef' dis town.

Augie thought it was the best song he had ever heard. Tha's a ole boogie-house song ... It's de most puttiest song that ever I heard ... I gonna go home an' play it on ma 'cordion.

But he did not leave at once; another verse had begun:

Feelin' tomorrow lak I feel today, Feelin' tomorrow jes' lak I feel today, Gonna pack up ma trunk an' make

ma get-away.

When he finally returned to his room in the old Phoenix Hotel, Augie limbered up his instrument and repeated the tune from memory. Hearing the music, Bad-foot, who was lying across the bed asleep in his clothes, awoke and blinked. A couple of idle boys came in from adjoining rooms and listened. (50-51)

Yet, in spite of his qualifications, Little Augie failed to emerge as a major folk artist of Jimboy's or Banjo's calibre. And, what is more to be deplored, his artistic contribution fell below that of minor artists like Nias Black, his inseparable instrument catering more to his dogged self-indulgence than to the promotion of the racial soul. Performances such as the one above (they remind us of Jimboy's in Stanton!) are rare in this character's life. Predominating it are those wherein he uses his accordion for selfish purposes:

> That evening after dark Augie finished his bottle of whiskey. Then, when the other folks had gone to bed, he slipped out beneath the charcoal shadows with his accordion. Sitting beside a tree, he began improvising softly on the instrument, touching occasionally fragments of familiar melodies and coloring them gayly with his own bright emotions. (I26)

These purposes, in the end, triggered a series of losses -- jockey stardom, beautiful mistress, home refuge -- that transformed him into a <u>l'homme épuisé</u>³⁰ with Biggerlike violence and despair.³¹ A fit nemesis, one might say, for a life of constant betrayal.

The unsatisfactory promotion of the black soul that the foregoing analysis has laid bare is mainly due, as was suggested, to the pervasive influence of the hedonistic search for happiness. As we have seen, promotion has been satisfactorily carried out only in <u>Not Without Laughter</u>, where Hughes seems to have succeeded in preventing that influence from seriously undermining the protagonist's will or steadfastness. This writer's success is evident in a number of situations, like the following, wherein Jimboy successfully withstands the hedonistic temptation:

> "Come on, sing it with us, Annjee," he said. "I don't know it," Annjee replied, with a lump in her throat, and her eyes on the silhouette of his long muscular, animal-hard body. She loved Jimboy too much, that's what was the matter with her. She knew there was nothing between him and her young sister except the love of music, yet he might have dropped the guitar and left Harriet in the yard for a while to come to eat

the nice cold slice of ham she had brought him. She hadn't seen him all day long. When she went to work this morning, he was still in bed -- and now the blues claimed him. (5) "Good-evenin', you-all," said Annjee. I brought you a nice piece o' steak, Jimboysugar, and some biscuits to go with it. Come on in and eat while I get dressed to go to the drill practice."

"We don't want no steak now," Jimboy answered without moving. "Aunt Hager and me had fresh fish for supper and egg-corn-bread and we're full. We don't need nothin' more." (66)

Such instances of moderation are lacking in the lives of other protagonists, as I have suggested. Unlike Jimboy, their performances, are frequently disrupted by intermittent bouts of drinking or by sex-provoked quarrels:

> A crash cut through the music. A table went jazzing into the drum. The cabaret singer lay sprawling on the floor. A raging putt-skinned mulatress stamped on her ribs and spat in her face! "That'll teach you to leave mah man be every time." (HTH,33)

There is no doubt a causal relationship between the above unsatisfactory record of the fictional artists and efforts by their creators, the Harlem School novelists, to articulate the cultural necessity for artistic expression. The fictional artists' poor showing generally in trying to promote the group soul can be interpreted as an indictment of such efforts. Had these novelists created protagonists of Jimboy's effectiveness (p. 182), a more successful portrayal of the promotional ideal -- the development of the alleged racial scul through artistic marketing -could have been achieved. But the Harlem School group of writers was, for the most part, temperamentally incapable of doing so. The cause of its failure seems identical to that which militated against the Augies and the Banjoes of the preceeding study. It is widely known that the life of most of these writers (children of the Jazz Age, whose immoderate life-style is reminiscent of that of eighteenthcentury England) was marked by the same hedonistic liability that crippled the career of the foregoing fictional artists. The following self-criticism tends to bear this judgement out:

> About the future of Negro Literature Thurman was very pessimistic. He thought the Negro vogue had made us all too conscious of ourselves, had flattered and spoiled us, and had provided too many easy opportunities for some of us to drink gin and more gin, on which he thought we would always be drunk. With his bitter sense of humor, he called the Harlem literati, the "niggerati."³³

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Hughes' observations elsewhere³⁴ show that he did agree with Thurman's assessment of the Harlem School writers. The hedonistic liability, moreover, made it impossible for these writers to separate the treatment of the functional ideal -the main area of interest -- from the hedonistic or to exclude it altogether. In the final analysis, it all amounts to the novelist's inability to separate his art from his own personal life or from those aspects of it that are likely to affect this art adversely. NOTES TO PART ONE/CHAPTER THREE

^I See Claude McKay, <u>A Long Way from Home</u> (New York: Lee Furman, Inc., 1937), p. 321.

² See, for example, Robert A. Bone, "The Background of the Negro Renaissance," <u>The Negro in America</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 53-61; Gilbert Osofsky, <u>Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto</u> (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1966), pp. 184-85.

³ C.G. Jung, <u>Modern Man in Search of a Soul</u> (London: K.Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1940), p. 61.

⁴ Ulf Hannerz rightly retraces this concept to the religious black experience in America. See his article, "The Rhetoric of Soul: Identification in Negro Society," <u>Race</u>, IX, 4 (1968), 483.

⁵ See the editor's note to Ulf Hannerz' article. Also John F. Szwed, "Musical Style and Racial Conflict," <u>Phylon</u>, 27 (1966), 359.

⁶ Robert Staples, <u>Introduction to Black Sociology</u> (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976), pp. 57 ff.; Ulf Hannerz, "The Significance of Soul," <u>Soul</u>, Lee Rainwater ed. (Chicago: Aldine Publ. Co., 1970), pp. 15-30; references to Joan Armatrading and to Nina Simone, <u>The</u> <u>Montreal Gazette</u>, June 15, 1978, p. 53 and July 21, 1980, p. 27.

⁷ Ulf Hannerz, op. cit., 483-84; Bernard W. Bell, "Folk Art and the Harlem Renaissance," The Folk Roots

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of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry (Michigan: Broadside Press, 1974), p. 30.

⁸ LeRoi Jones, <u>Blues People</u> (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1963), p. 219.

⁹ Viola Glenn, "The Eating Habits of Harlem," <u>Opportunity</u>, I3 (March, 1935), 82-85; Ulf Hannerz, op. cit.; Lee Rainwater, <u>Behind Ghetto Walls</u> (Chicago: Aldine Publ. Co., 1970), p. 379; J.A. Rogers, "Jazz at Home," in Alain Locke, <u>The New Negro</u> (New York: Alfred and Charles Boni, 1925), p. 219.

^{IO} Ulf Hannerz, op. cit., 482.

II See, for example, Bartholow V. Crawford et al., American Literature: College Outline Series (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1963), pp. 94-95.

¹² See Albert C. Barnes, "Negro Art and America," <u>Survey Graphic</u>, LIII (March, 1928), 669; William S. Braithwaite, "Alain Locke's Relationship to the the Negro in American Literature," <u>Phylon</u> 18, No 2 (1957-58), 166-67; W.E.B. DuBois, <u>Souls of Black Folk</u> (New York: Allograph Press, 1903), pp. 3-4, 251-52.

¹³ Arthur A. Schomburg, "Economic Contributions by the Negro to America," <u>Papers of the American Negro</u> <u>Academy</u> (Washington D.C., 1915), p. 59. ¹⁴ Albert C. Barnes, op. cit., 668.

15 Bernard W. Bell, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁶ Excerpt from Toomer's <u>Autobiography</u>, in S.P. Fullinwider, "Jean Toomer: Lost Generation or Negro Renaissance?" Phylon, 27 (1966), 399.

17 Claude McKay, op. cit., p. 350.

¹⁸ Antony Flew, <u>An Introduction to Western Philo-</u> <u>sophy: Ideas and Argument from Plato to Sartre</u> (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), p. 152.

19 Ibid.,

²⁰ See Luke I, 5-25.

^{2I} Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro," <u>Survey</u> <u>Graphic</u>, LIII (March, 1925), 634.

²² See, also, Claude McKay, op. cit., pp. 312-13; Langston Hughes, <u>The Big Sea</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), pp. 236, 243.

23 See Alain Locke, "Forward," The New Negro, op. cit., p. xi.

²⁴ William S. Braithwaite, "Alain Locke's Relationship to the Negro in American Literature," <u>Phylon</u>, 18, No. 2 (1957-58), 169. ²⁵ See one of his contributions, "Negro Art and America," op.cit., pp. 19-25.

²⁶ Albert C. Barnes, "Negro Art," <u>Survey Graphic</u>, LIII (March, 1925), 669.

²⁷ See René Wellek et al., "The Function of Literature," <u>Theory of Literature</u> (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1956), pp. 29-33.

²⁸ The southern regions of the United States are traditionally regarded as the heartland of the Negro oral tradition. See Todd Lieber, "Design and Movement in <u>Cane</u>," <u>CLA Journal</u>, XIII (Sept., 1967), 37-38; S.P. Fullinwider, op. cit., p. 339; Montgomery Gregory, "Review of <u>Cane</u>," <u>Opportunity</u>, I (Dec., 1923), 374.

²⁹ Like <u>Tender is the Night</u>, <u>Cane</u> is about the failure of a would-be artist. See Richard D. Lehan, <u>F. Scott</u> <u>Fitzgerald</u>: <u>The Man and His Works</u> (Forum House Publg. Co., 1969), pp. 127 ff.

³⁰ <u>Ibid</u>., p. 129.

³¹ Richard Wright's protagonist, Bigger Thomas (Native Son), offers some interesting parallels.

³² Licentiousness is an essential trait of the era that produced the Harlem School novels and the English Comedy of Manners. See Brooks Atkinson, <u>Four Great</u> <u>Comedies of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century</u> (New York: Eantam Books, Inc., 1958). 33 Langston Hughes, op. cit., p. 238.

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34 Ibid., pp. 243-49; "The Twenties: Harlen and Its Negritude," African Forum, I (1966), 18.

PART TWO: RADICALISM AND THE ORAL TRADITION Chapter I:

The Church and the Folk Ideal

The next three chapters -- the second division of this inquiry into lower-class life -- will focus on the negative aspects of the Negro oral tradition. In the main, the last three chapters dealt with the positive aspects of that tradition. We discovered that the social restrictions imposed on Negro life by white American racism aroused a largely wholesome reaction, which took the form of artistic indulgence with a spiritually sustaining effect. We also discovered that the Harlem School writer, having realized the survival as well as fundamentally racial nature of such an indulgence, proceeded to portray it in terms of a group soul, in an effort to foster a greater social acceptance of its cultural value.

Moreover, the restrictions imposed on Negro life, which created "adverse and degrading living conditions,"^I and "an inferior level of participation in American society,"² as the ensuing discussions will point out,³ had both good and bad results. For, while they allowed the Negro to effect his own spiritual salvation (by having daily recourse to the artistic medium of dance, music, song and tale), they also nurtured a profound dislike for the main components of white American culture. It is to this anti-American feeling -- condemned by Alain Locke (p. 27) and relegated to "social pathology" by Gunnar Myrdal⁴ -- that the present discussions will address themselves.

The anti-American feeling which permeates the Harlem School type of novel is three-pronged, in that it directs its venom against the religious, educational and economic institutions of the white community. This massive social rejection on the part of the young radical Renaissance novelist is not only an outgrowth of the world-wide current of dissent among contemporary writers and artists (pp. 80-85). It also has its roots in Negro history and experience. I will therefore review the latter before examining the black novelist's portrayal of that rejection. To begin with, I will discuss the religious form of that rejection. The Negro novelist's religious resentment stems largely from the traditional attitude of American Protestantism toward white racism. About this attitude one observer writes: American churches in the early twentieth century ignored both the negro and the "negro problem." Before 1930 churches rarely took official cognizance of either.⁵

Such a criticism of the American churches does not exclude the black American denominations:

> In the years following the Civil War and Reconstruction periods, the negro clergy ... accepted most of the pronouncements white men were making upon their race. They idealized American civilization and contrasted it with African savagery.⁶

This negative attitude, however, began to relax around the turn of the century, when a fringe group within the black clergy challenged the status quo.⁷

The Church's poor record in the area of Negro rights and freedom that these writers have noted stems mainly from its endorsement of the racial principle of inequality (pp. 48-49) as a divinely ordained sanction:

> The Southerner was never at home in appealing to Cartwright, Nott, and Darwin. For him] "the great God who created all races never intended the negro, the lowest," to have equal power with the highest, the white race.⁸

The latter belief also fired the American version of the burden theory that makes Negro over-all advancement contingent upon the white race⁹:

> It is not by accident that the negro is in our midst ... It is not by accident that he has learned from the whites the ambition to rise to higher life intellectual and moral. These are the outcome, not of accident, but of Divine Providence.^{IO}

These beliefs dictated the Church's racial policy toward both whites and blacks. On the one hand, this policy issued moral and religious support to the Negro's oppressors. Among them figure, of course, the slave-master bent on exploiting his band of uprooted Africans and asking himself if baptism would be a hindrance.^{II} There is also the southern politician wishing to curtail the exslaves' newly-found social rights with as clean a conscience as possible. Governor Perry's campaign against universal suffrage is a good example of this.^{I2} The clergy's support also encouraged the supremacist writer and is evident in religiously inspired racial tracts like those signed by "Ariel" and "Prospero."^{I3} Such a support, coupled with a narrow fundamentalist view of its mission, prevented the American Protestant clergy from speaking up against the brutalities of the slave and Reconstruction periods. And when it did make its voice heard, through such upstart moderates as Rev. John Brandt and Bishop Bratton, ^{I4} the intervention was so lukewarm or biased as to be tantamount to an endorsement of the status quo. This is the gist of the American Church's racial policy as it affected whites.

On the other hand, the black version of that policy emphasized meekness and submission as well as faith and hope. These Christian virtues enjoined the slave, freedman and their progeny to accept current woes (arising from their inferior status in American society) in exchange for compensation in the after-life. Such ideas, transmitted through pulpit and song (pp. I25-26, I32-33) became the appanage and testament of generations of lower-class Negroes.

The Harlem School writers' resentment toward the American clergy stems from the above racial policy. Besides, this resentment is the highwater mark of the Negro's traditional dissatisfaction with that policy. Contrary to popular belief,¹⁵ not all Negroes of the slave and Reconstruction regimes acquiesced entirely to the other-

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wordly teachings of the predominantly Baptist and Methodist sects. This is evident in numerous religious satires such as the following one reported by Sterling Brown:

> I don't want to ride in no golden chariot I don't want to wear no golden crown I want to stay down here and be Just as I am without one plea.¹⁶

At the root of the slave's and freedman's displeasure lies an awareness of the obvious discrepancy between the two sides of the churches' racial position. The following observation, reported by John Lowell, clearly brings this out:

> Frederick Douglass thought Master Thomas' religion worthless, when it did not improve his attitude toward his slaves; and his thinking was representative on that subject.¹⁷

Of course, in the above remark, it is not so much the heavenly Christian outlook that is found wanting as the inability or unwillingness to help at least soften the sociopolitical regime responsible for the Negro's plight.

The partial acceptance of the theology of hope and reward together with the nagging feeling that the American clergy in general was not contributing enough toward the improvement of the Negro's racial condition persisted among lay intellectuals in the post-Reconstruction era.¹⁸ This is one of the conclusions of Benjamin May's doctoral study into the relationship of black literature and religion. May argues that the classical Negro literature of Dunbar and his associates, while exuding "a deep, abiding faith in God,"¹⁹ also betrays a "strain of doubt and frustration"²⁰ mixed with a "growing consciousness that change should be perfected along the lines of racial and social justice."²¹

Black literature in the early years of the twentieth century, while manifesting a similar racial concern, struck a more compromising attitude. It was, in the main, the work of radical clerics within the two national black movements -- the Niagara and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Such a compromise marks <u>The Gift of Black Folk</u> and <u>The Souls of Black Folk</u>, two important works that were published at this time. In them, the foremost Negro leader espouses the "negro mission ideology" -- the belief that white America would accept the black man only after it was re-educated by him.²² In this way, the Negro would become the agent of his own social integration.

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This compromise -- the burden theory in reverse -was however abruptly shattered by the failure of World War I to fulfill its pledge:

> We trusted our religious leaders, when they proclaimed their apocalyptic visions of a new heaven and new earth, whose coming was contingent upon the military victory of the Allied Powers, and at any rate since the collapse of the Inter-Church World Movement, we are pretty convinced that they have betrayed us.²³

From this failure arose an upsurge of anti-religious feeling. The rejection of Church dogma, which it begot, carried the supporters of the above compromise in its wake. The drastic change of attitude among black intellectuals can be felt in DuBois' verbal denigrations. For example, in a I9I8 article in <u>Crisis</u>, he uses the term "pampering" in his religious attack;²⁴ and, later, refers to Protestant teaching as a "fairy-tale that is forced upon the negro's belief."²⁵ Similar anti-religious sentiment and expressions of disbelief permeate the writings of James W. Johnson, a DuBois collaborator:

> As far as I am able to peer into the inscrutable, I do not see that there is any evidence

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to refute those scientists and philosophers who hold that the universe is purposeless; that man, instead of being the special care of a Divine Providence, is dependent upon fortuity and his own wits for survival in the midst of blind and insensate forces.²⁶

This is how Negro intellectuals felt toward the Church and its other-wordly doctrine in the years prior to the Harlem Renaissance.

Young Renaissance writers of the Harlem School pushed religious dissent even further than their elders:

> Out of this situation came floods of negro literature expressing a lack of faith in God never before witnessed in the history of the negro in this country. The Negro who had been considered to be the most religious of all groups, and whose faith in God was irresistible, began to develop literature after I920 fraught with agnosticism and atheism.²⁷

Among these dissenting writers, however, religious disbelief appears most subdued in Countée Cullen and Jean Toomer. The former's attitude to Christianity may be likened to that of his lonely idealist, who is caught up in an alien world

> Between two wretched dying men, of whom One doubts, and one for pity's sake believes.²⁸

Like Cullen's, Toomer's religious attitude is characterized by lingering belief and doubt, the latter being the stronger, as his dallying with current ideologies indicate. These include the new ideas of Mathias Alexander, the psychotherapist,²⁹ and of Gurdjieff, the Russian mystic.³⁰ The religious retreat of other Harlem School writers is, of course, more pronounced. While Hughes' has been declared the most extreme,³¹ that of McKay is certainly the most aggressive. This quality, which marks the latter's journalistic writings in <u>The Liberator</u>,³² is also shared by Thurman in The Messenger.³³

Religious disbelief among Harlem School writers has left profound imprints on their works of fiction. In this second half of our first discussion of anti-Americanism in the Renaissance novel, I will focus my attention on those imprints, which mark all three pursuits of lowerclass life. These have been identified as the folk religion, hedonism and folk-art indulgence (p. 156).

We have seen how American racism created certain **psychological** needs in the black man and how these were satisfied vicariously through indulgence in folk-art (pp. II4-I5). As numerous researchers of Negro folklore have

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shown,³⁴ other needs that can be reduced to a desire for physical or material protection and revenge have also made themselves felt through the years. This second category of needs issues largely from a primitive world view whereby the individual feels himself pitted against an array of dangers and warring forces of good and evil that are physical, human or supernatural in nature.³⁵ In the case of the Negro, this view -- common to folk people the world over³⁶ -- is partly an African inheritance and partly the result of white American cultural influences.³⁷ These needs and forces, together with the world-view that sustains them, constitute the essence of religious folkbeliefs.

The black writer of the Harlem School uses his racial knowledge of these beliefs as well as his boyhood religious experience to articulate his rejection of American Protestantism. Like myth and symbol, these beliefs provide a perspective or device for rendering his feelings toward the clergy's material inadequacy. To begin with, he represents these beliefs as a fundamental reality of black life. He does so by showing the almost universal credence they gain among the lower-class. Thus statements Linking them with entire black communities are not infrequent. For example, the intimation that "Banjo, like the other beach boys, was superstitious" (BJO, 24), and the discovery by Rev. Lambert that virtually all the inhabitants of Banana Bottom were "secret ... worshippers of Obi" (BNB, I53) tend to suggest a generalized custom.

Having established these beliefs as a fact of group life, the black novelist then attempts to justify them on human, though not on ethical, grounds. The absence of moral support for these beliefs is especially evident in the frank revelations of their more gruesome aspects. A case in point is the necromancy of Frimbo -- the practitioner of causative and ominous magic -- who used to defile the bodies of the dead (CMD, 291). Another is the Three-Sisters-like incantations of Wamba (the Jamaican obeahman) that sometimes ended in mortal disaster (BNB, I50). Accompanying such cruel revelations, however, is the constant suggestion that whatever is related to man and his day-today existence deserves attention, since it usually conceals human interest or value. In McKay, this suggestion is rendered most emphatically by Squire Gensir, the English gentleman and lover of Negro folklore:

I don't mean that it is good to practice Obeah. But the peasants waste a lot of money on Christianity also. Money that might have done them more material good. One must be tolerant. When you read in your studies about the Druids, the Greek and Roman gods and demigods, and the Nordic Odin, you felt tolerant about them. Didn't you? Then why should you be so intolerant about Obi and Obeahmen? Obeah is a part of your folk-lore, like your Anancy tales and your digging jammas. And your folklore is the spiritual link between you and your ancestral origin. You ought to learn to appreciate it as I do mine. My mind is richer because I know your folklore. I am

sure you believe the fables of La Fontaine and of Aesop fine and literary (BNB, I25)

Similarly, Rudolph Fisher, though depicting Aunt Mandy (the black soothsayer) with Lucifer-like talons and claws (CMD, 56-57), nevertheless honors her kind-hearted intentions (CMD, 58). Thus, while some aspects of Negro folk beliefs might arouse a stand-offish and questioning response in these writers, others evoke their sympathy and credulity.

With the recognition of the human interest and value of Negro folk beliefs comes the anti-religious suggestion that the needs which they create are not being

satisfied by the Church on account of its traditional limitations. I have already considered one of these alleged limitations -- a heavenly-oriented ideology that placed a much greater emphasis on the soul than on the body. One of its apparent results, as I mentioned, was to render the Church incapable of dealing adequately with problems arising from the white caste system. Another limitation was the Church's dichotomous view of good and evil that excludes recourse to the supernatural agency of evil. Of course, this Christian view conflicts with the inherited African view wherein the two concepts are not poles apart. but complementary elements of a unique reality. As a result of this fundamental metaphysical difference, 38 many a black Protestant felt himself cheated or restricted in his liberties. In times of need, he was not allowed to resort to the entire pantheon of deities -- as the polytheistic system of his African ancestors dictated -- but only to the monotheistic God of good of his adopted faith.

The Harlem School writer exploits these two limitations above in the fictional version of his anti-religious criticism. He does this by depicting a feminine devotee carrying the burden of her unsatisfied needs from the "white man's religion," as the Christian sects were

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derogatively named,³⁹ to that of the folk, where the level of satisfaction is greater. To dramatize this advantage of the folk religion, various aspects of the conjuring art are portrayed: prediction (GSS, IO), prevention (CMD, 82), imposition (BNB, I38), healing (OWH, 240).

The young Renaissance novelist further articulates the Church's alleged lack of worldly concern for the Negro by making it an enemy of the folk ideal. He does this through the Christian virtues (meekness and abstinence, in particular), which are shown in opposition with the hedonism and artistic indulgence that are the main ingredients of that ideal. Meekness is resented because it tends to perpetuate the Uncle Tom or Christlike psychology of past generations of Negroes.⁴⁰ As a matter of fact, the assertive new life-style that the black writer tried to create -- through the promotional activity of the fictional artist (pp. I80-83) -- was partly intended to off-set the humiliating effects of that psychology. As for abstinence, it violates the imperative to enjoy that is the very essence of the new life-style or ideal. Christian piety, therefore, which incorporates these two objectionable virtues, is sometimes portrayed with beauty and reverence, but never with approval.

The polite rejection of these two cornerstone virtues of Christian faith is dramatized through invective and satire. In the novel by Hughes, for example, Aunt Hager becomes the butt of the former, as her entire household lashes at her religious morality, considered too limiting and repressive. Thus Sandy, the would-be aspirant to the new folk ideal, objects to his grandmother's option "to stay poor and meek waiting for heaven" (NWL, 280), since he has already made up his mind "to live first" (NWL, 230). His father, Jimboy, the finest promoter of spiritual survival through artistic regeneration (p. IS2), deplores the fact that hard-working blacks like his son's grandmother subject themselves to Sunday-school routine instead of "amusing themselves" (NWL, 75). And Harriet, his sister-in-law and pupil, comes down hard upon those blacks who are

> ... afraid to even laugh on Sundays, afraid for a girl and a boy to look at one another, or for people to go to dances. (INL, 45)

In McKay, such attacks on religious self-denial are even more vituperative, recalling the black-gowned clergymen of William Blake's <u>Garden of Love</u> poem or (as in the last example) Hawthorne's Puritan authority, in works like <u>The</u> Scarlet Letter and "Maypole of Merry Mount." A good example

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of this is the tirade of Ray, the black Heyst:

As far as I have been able to think it out the colored races are the special victims of biblical morality -- Christian morality. Especially the race to which I belong.

I don't think I loathe anything more than the morality of Christians. It is false, treacherous, hypocritical. I know that, for I myself have been a victim of it in your white world, and the conclusion I draw from it is that the world needs to get rid of false moralities. (BJO, 268)

Such anti-religious sentiment that makes Christian abstinence its target is also expressed through satire involving protagonists that are clergymen, believers and nonbelievers. Exemplifying the first form of satire is Rev. Malcolm Craig. He is ludicrously described as an "ascetic figure" with a "lean face" (BNE, 33) and a carriage that seems to deny "the natural strength of his body" (ENE, 33). Unlike McKay, Cullen embodies self-denial in Mattie Johnson, a newly-wedded beauty, whose "simon-pure religion" (OWE, 240) aroused displeasure and concern in her bon-vivant husband (OWE, 59-60). Besides, Cullen scoffs at the Church and debases it by engaging the latter in mass religious deception. One of its victims was Mattie Johnson herself: she married Sam because she had mistaken his deceit for

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piety:

But you are good ... Christ's blood has washed you free from sin. He passed over her ignorance of his spiritual health; this was one point on which he would never openly enlighten her. (OWH, 86)

Other victims of Sam's deceit include numerous congregations across the States where he chose to stop during his band-wagon existence. Rudolph Fisher also makes use of a hedonistic non-believer for satirical purposes. But, whereas Sam assumes the religious guise to mock-heroic proportions (OWH, 26-27), Shine's feigned ignorance of church ritual creates a rippling effect of high and low comedy through self-provoked gaucheries and naive rationalizations:

> While he couldn't compare it with the Lafayette Theater of course, still Joshua Jones [Shine] considered it a pretty good show. At least it would have been if the dumb-bells hadn't jumped up and down so often.

It began with music, a chorus singing far away behind the audience -- outside the church, it seemed. The singing came nearer and entered at the rear, and Shine obeyed the impulse to turn and look; but before he could determine what the trick in it was, Linda pinched his arm sharply and brought him about, puzzled and resentful, to see her shaking her bowed head with illconcealed vigor. Thereupon he noticed that everyone else stood like Linda, motionless, with lowered head, as if it wasn't proper to look; and he wondered what manner of performance this was, which one might attend, but on which one might not gaze. (WOJ, 178)

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NOTES TO PART TWO/CHAPTER ONE

^I Gunnar Myrdal, <u>An American Dilemma</u> (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1962), p. 929.

² E. Franklin Frazier, <u>The Negro Church in Ameri-</u> ca (Liverpool: University Press, 1964), p. 45.

³ I have, however, given glimpses of these handicaps. See, for example, Introduction, pp. 23-25; chapter I, pp. 54-55, 58.

⁴ Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 929.

⁵ Idus A. Newby, <u>Jim Crow's Defence: Anti-Negro</u> <u>Thought in America, I900-I930</u> (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, I968), p. 85. Negative remarks like these also figure in numerous other studies, including those by Frank S. Loescher and Hugh Brimm. In this respect, see Robert M. Miller, <u>American Protestantism and</u> <u>Social Issues, I9I9-I939</u> (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, I958), p. 298.

⁶ See S.P. Fullinwider, <u>The Mind and Mood of Black</u> <u>America: Twentieth-Century Thought</u> (Homewood: Dorson Press, 1969), p. 29. See, also, Robert E. Park, "The Conflict and Fusion of Cultures," <u>Journal of Negro History</u>, 4, No. 2 (April, 1919), 120, 123.

⁷ For a study of its militancy, see S.P. Fullinwider, <u>ibid.</u>, pp. 33-36.

⁸ Claude H. Nolen, <u>The Negro's Image in the South:</u> The Anatomy of White Racism (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), p. 17. See, also, W.Y. Atkinson, "The Atlanta Exposition," <u>North American Review</u>, CCXI (1895), 393; Thomas F. Gossett, <u>Race: The History</u> <u>of an Idea in America</u> (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), p. 180.

⁹ This theory received political and religious execution in the nineteenth-century forays into Asia and Africa, inspiring such works as Ruyard Kipling's <u>The White</u> <u>Man's Burden</u> (1897) and Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (1902). These two works respectively support and satirize the theory.

^{IO} Idus A. Newby, <u>The Development of Segregationist</u> <u>Thought</u> (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1968), pp. 108-09.

^{II} See G.R. Wilson, "Religion of the American Negro Slave," <u>Journal of Negro History</u>, VIII (1924), 45; Robert E. Park, op. cit., II9.

^{I2} See James H. Croushore and David M. Potter, eds. <u>A Union Officer in the Reconstruction</u> (New Haven: Conn., 1948), p. 192.

¹³ These two anonymous writers are among those who resorted to biblical arguments in order to relegate the Negro to a status less than human. See Claude H. Nolen, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

¹⁴ See Thomas F. Gossett, op. cit., p. 185; Idus A. Newby, <u>Jim Crow's Defence</u>, op. cit., p. 98.

¹⁵ See John Lowell, "The Social Implications of the

Negro Spiritual," Journal of Negro Education, 6 (Oct., 1939), 639.

¹⁶ Sterling Brown, <u>The Negro Poetry and Drama</u> (Washington: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1937), p. 21.

17 John Lowell, op. cit., 640.

¹⁸ The American clergy, however (both black and white), has had a satisfactory record in the area of family assistance through its numerous services and organizations. For a description of these, see George E. Hayes, "The Church and the Negro," <u>Survey Graphic</u>, LII (March, 1925), 695-708; Charles S. Johnson, "Black Workers and the City," <u>ibid</u>., 642; and F.R. Kelly, "The Harlem Literary Renaissance," <u>The North American Review</u>, 5, No.3 (May-June, 1968), 29-32.

¹⁹ Benjamin E. Mays, <u>The Development of the Idea of God</u> <u>in Contemporary Negro Literature</u> (Chicago: The University of Chicago Libraries, 1938), p. II.

20 Ibid.

^{2I} <u>Ibid.</u>, p. I₂.

²² See S.P. Fullinwider, "DuBois and the Crisis of Leadership," op. cit., p. 52.

²³ Walter Marshall Horton, <u>Theism and the Modern</u> <u>Mood</u> (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), p. I. ²⁴ Henry L. Moon, ed., "Introduction," <u>The Emerg-</u> <u>ing Thought of W.E.B. DuBois</u> (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 27.

²⁵ W.E.B. DuBois, "The Church and Religion," <u>Crisis</u>, 30 (Oct., 1933), 236.

²⁶ James W. Johnson, <u>Along This Way</u> (New York: The Viking Press, 1933), p. 431.

27 Benjamin E. Mays, op. cit., p. 22.

²⁸ Countée Cullen, "A Thorn Forever in the Breast," <u>The Black Christ</u>, lines 13-14, in <u>On _ These I Stand</u>: <u>An Anthology</u> (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1927), p. 90.

²⁹ See Gorham B. Munson, "The Significance of Jean Toomer," <u>Opportunity</u>, 3 (Sept., 1925), 263.

³⁰ See Robert A. Bone, "The Harlem School," <u>The</u> <u>Negro Novel in America</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 81.

31 See Benjamin E. Mays, op. cit., p. 17.

³² See Michael B. Stoff, "Claude McKay and the Cult of Primitivism," in Arna Bontemps, ed. <u>The Harlem Renaiss</u>ance Remembered (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1922), p. 144.

³³ Mae G. Henderson, <u>ibid</u>., "Portrait of Wallace Thurman," p. 150.

³⁴ See, for example, William Owens, "Folklore of the Southern Negroes," Lippincott's Magazine, XX (Dec., 1877).

I46; Roger Bastide, <u>African Civilizations in the</u> <u>New World</u> (New York: Harper & Rowe, Publishers, 1971), p. I48; Melville J. Herskovits, "Africans in Religious Life," <u>The Myth of the Negro Past</u> (New York: Harper & Rowe, Publishers, 1941), pp. 242 ff.

³⁵ See, for example, Stith Thompson, "Universality of the Folktale," <u>The Folktale</u> (New York: The Dryden Press, 1946), pp. 3-6.

³⁶ For a description, see Jean Harold Brunvand, <u>The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction</u> (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 1968), p. 179.

³⁷ This situation, known as religious syncretism, is lengthily discussed by Roger Bastide, op. cit., pp. 163 ff., and by M.J. Herskovits, <u>The New World Negro: Selected</u> <u>Papers in Afroamerican Studies</u> (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), pp. 321-24.

³⁸ For a discussion of the folk and Christian views of good and evil, see M.J. Herskovits, footnote 34.

39 Benjamin E. Mays, op. cit., p. 20.

⁴⁰ This psychology is characterized by submissiveness and acceptance of the white power structure. See Charles H. Nichols, "Slave Narratives and the Plantation Legend," <u>Phylon</u>, X, No. 3 (1949), 201-02; Benjamin Brawley, "The Negro Literary Renaissance," <u>Southern Workman</u>, LVI (April, 1927), 177.

PART TWO : RADICALISM AND THE ORAL TRADITION Chapter 2:

I

Organized Labor and the Folk Ideal

The rejection of Protestantism, which the foregoing discussion has examined, is only one form of anti-Americanism crisscrossing the Harlem School novel. As mentioned before, this feeling also involves a rejection of the capitalistic order. As in the case of religion, this second form of rejection can best be understood through retrospection. Therefore, as a prelude, the whole area of Negro involvement in American economic life will be reviewed. This preliminary study will focus on the Negro's business and employment record right up to the I920s.

The generally high productivity of the black worker in pre-Civil War days contrasts markedly with his diminished performance and output in the post-bellum era. Pro-slavery advocates explained the initially high productivity among blacks on the cotton and sugar-cane fields in terms of the "beast of burden theory." This theory attributes to the Negro an abnormally greater capacity for manual labor. The <u>New Orleans Crescent</u>, a newspaper of the last century, describes it thus:

In all kinds of toil they loved to excel. They were unequalled in splitting rails or lifting heavy weights ... and, indeed, in all kinds of employment where great muscular strength was required or great heat was to be endured.^I

Among other writings touching on the burden theory is Olmsted's "Journey through the Back Country," which reports that "slave owners preferred pure blacks for heavy, monotonous labor requiring only brute strength."² Thus endowed, the black worker was considered a better laborer than the Indian or whiteman³ -- an opinion which some Negro intellectuals upheld⁴ out of the need for group compensation or self-aggrandizement.⁵

As I mentioned above, contrasting with this beastof-burden output by the Negro in the early days is his reduced efficiency in later years on the farms and in the factories. This new situation was most commonly explained by whites in terms of indolence and shiftlessness (the tendency to move from one occupation or employer to another). Thus, speaking of West Indian blacks, a visitor to the Caribbean notes that "idleness is the one great curse ... and that which keeps them down."⁶ Similarly, H.W. Odum alludes to "the proverbial laziness of the Negro in freedom that later developed into shiftlessness and vagrancy."⁷ An excerpt from a black preacher's sermon tends to confirm the preceding opinion:

> You lazy, kidney-kneed men are too lazy to work. You have these poor women out in some white person's kitchen or laundry, and you go out for your meals, and then stand around the corners the rest of the day being sissies.⁸

Anti-Negro sentiment before the Renaissance attributed this apparent apathy toward work to an inborn condition. Hence, the epithets "natural" and "inherited" were frequently associated with it. To a staunch believer in universal hereditary transmissions, this negative endowment originated on the dark continent:

> [In Africa], the negro never saw people hurry up to save time ... In the day of plenty he gorged himself, and trusted to luck to escape in the day of scarcity. In short, he was the very antithesis of the strenuously energetic, ingenious, and thrifty American.⁹

The charge that this indolence is the root cause of the Negro's industrial lag and inferior economic status in American society did not pass unchallenged. In one extreme response, indolence as a sociological reality was categorically denied.^{IO} In another, it was said to be a misnomer that does not truthfully account for the black worker's post-bellum attitude. One supporter of this second response sees in the latter a form of passive resistance to the forced or hard labor of the slave era;^{II} and another ascribes it to the Negro's fundamentally spiritual outlook toward work.^{I2} In yet another response, a number of black critics admit the existence of post-bellum Negro apathy toward work, ascribing it, however, to a negative reaction to the capitalistic establishment:

> ... a static economics not unlike the Mexican hacienda, or the condition of the Polish peasant -- a situation in which the members of a group are "muffled with a vast apathy." It is unquestionably the economic system in which they [The Negroes] live ... that is responsible for their plight.¹³

A causal relationship between the above indolence and shiftlessness and occupational discrimination was also noted:

> This lack of economic opportunity ... resulted very early in a peculiar pattern

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of restless wandering ... This notorious and widespread wandering has been primarily a search for better or supplementary jobs ... Beginning with economic necessity, this pattern has become a custom which runs on its own stream.^{I4}

Denial fosters bitterness and a devil-may-care attitude which, in turn, makes him more indolent, less punctual, less careful, and generally less efficient as a functioning member of society.¹⁵

I will now examine the three aspects of occupational discrimination as they affected black Americans. The most economically negative, of course, was total job exclusion involving the non-hiring of Negroes in work of a skilled or semi-skilled nature. This phenomenon became a fact of everyday life at least as early as the I820s, when competition from the white American stock (mainly English and Scots) began to erode the Negroes' predominance in such areas.¹⁶ Besides, successive waves of white immigrants -- first from northern Europe (Germany, Ireland) and then from its eastern and southern sections (Greece, Italy) -- served only to augment that competition to crisis levels in and beyond the last quarter of the nineteenth-century.¹⁷ At the same time, general union hostility was keeping most Negroes out of work in construction, the manufacturing and shipping industries. As a result, the Negroes' numerical strength in these occupations remained near stagnant during the three decades leading up to the Renaissance.¹⁸

Complete discriminatory exclusion in employment also encompassed the professions. On completion of their studies, most Negro graduates were rejected in white establishments: Negro teachers in all-white or mixed schools and Negro doctors in hospitals.¹⁹ Moreover, the practice of black doctors and lawyers had to be restricted to their own neighborhoods, as most white patients refused to patronize Negro professionals.²⁰

The second aspect of occupational discrimination relates to the lack of, or difficulties in, advancement as well as working conditions of those Negroes who made it to the professions and skilled trades after successfully evading total job exclusion. Invariably, they suffered from white preferential treatment in work, wages and promotion, in areas like industry, teaching and the armed forces.²¹ This policy, therefore, led to lower incomes and social status for the Negro worker. The hired doctor or

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lawyer was similarly disadvantaged. By not obtaining affiliations with white hospitals or professional corporations under their control, it was difficult for them to keep abreast with new advances and techniques. Moreover, by being forced to restrict their practice to the poorest neighborhoods of their own communities, they were not able to obtain acceptable financial returns and the much-needed funds for service improvement.

The third aspect of occupational discrimination refers to the consigning of the large majority of Negroes to the so-called traditional Negro or black jobs. These are the public or personal service occupations (waiter, bellhop, porter, maid ...) filled by the army of the unskilled, the rejected professionals and the unemployed from the old crafts (masonry, carpentry) and trades. After a time, however, competition for these jobs became fierce and more and more Negroes had to give up their places to immigrants of European origin. But, after the outbreak of World War I, Negroes regained for a time their former dominance in these jobs, as thousands of white Americans of Eureopean stock were flocking back home to help in the war effort. Competition for the above-mentioned jobs became acute again, with the cessation of hostilities and the resumption of the immigration flow, which caused many a black worker to lose

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In his job. As a result of such discriminatory employment practices, the Negro element of American society, notes Herman D. Block in his recent book, was still at the bottom of the economic ladder in the era of the 1920s.²²

The economic factor in the anti-American feeling of the Harlem School novel is reinforced by discrimination in business ventures. The desire to establish an independent black economy has its origin in pre-Civil War days, when scattered groups of free Negroes attempted to carry out the exhortation of Martin Delaney, the black Benjamin Franklin, to "educate them [selves] for the store and Counting House."²³ Booker T. Washington's program of economic salvation at the turn of the century²⁴ as well as Marcus Garvey's strident and short-lived nationalism in the I920s was to drama-*25* tize that desire even more strongly. Looking back, however, at the various efforts undertaken to execute the above desire, one discovers that they have generally been far from successful.

In the remaining part of this second preliminary discussion that attempts to review the Negro's economic record, I will focus my attention on those efforts of black capitalism up to the Twenties, in order to explain how its failure to develop a strong, independent economy, capable of supplying the material needs of the black community, augmented Negro economic discontent and helped crystallize the argument against Americanism in the black novel.

For the most part, Negro business has been handicapped by both smallness and its service-oriented nature, from the Employment Agencies and the Benevolent Societies of the early nineteenth century to the relatively larger undertakings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were inspired by the Afroamerican and National Negro Business Leagues. Still, under the aegis of such umbrella organizations as the latter, a number of small businesses -- clothes factories, manufacturing plants, automobile repair shops, saw and planing mills -- had a little success. Similarly, other ventures like shop-keeping, catering, tailoring and beauty parlors were able to capitalize on the occasional monopoly of the black clientele. Examples of particularly successful Negro economic enterprises are those of the undertaker and insurance broker. Gunnar Myrdal attributes their success to the indifference of whites, who "would not want to touch the negro corpse"26 and to the popularity of insurance as a ferm of investment

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within black communities.²⁷

Such successes, however, have been the exception rather than the rule, as Gunnar Myrdal further suggests: "The proportion of negroes among all retailers was, if anything, smaller in 1930 than in 1910."²⁸ The decreasing phenomenon in Negro small business is also noticeable in the building industry, where the number of black contractors passed from 29,000 to 2,400 in the same period.²⁹ Similarly, Negro burgeoning banks, like the Washington Capital Savings Bank (1884-1904), had but a transient existence.³⁰ Thus Negro business enterprises were not only small and serviceoriented; they were also short-lived.

These handicaps were in part due to the unavailability or inadequacy of capital. Getting investment funds was one of the most acute problems of the Negro businessman. Because of their transient nature, Negro banks were usually unreliable. As for white institutions, they were loathe to lend money to Negroes, because of the high-risk nature of their credit and the imperatives of racial prejudice. As Joseph A. Pierce suggests, the latter was most often the motive for justifying a tight-lending policy.^{3I} Thus, in the absence of the necessary investment capital, Negro busi-

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ness was hampered in its need to grow and expand.

Besides, these handicaps of Negro enterprises were also caused by disloyal competition. Whereas black business in general was denied implantation in, or access to, areas beyond black residential limits on account of white-caste restrictions, businesses of other ethnic groups had almost unlimited freedom of movement within black enclaves. There they would take over the best locations, challenging and sometimes even usurping the native black monopoly. Thus Harold Cruse, who has written about the plight of the Negro small business, argues that the latter's failure sprung from its inability "to achieve control within the negro community."³² As a result, "it could not expand," he further argues, "beyond the consumer needs of the negro community that white business passed up."³³

Also contributing to the smallness, transiency and lack of dynamism of black-owned enterprises was the black consumer. His generally low purchasing power was helping to keep down the volume of Negro transaction sales, thus reducing the profit margin. Added to this was the black consumer's inadequate patronizing of Negro commercial ventures. These observations are confirmed by Joseph A. Pierce:

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When the low level of Negro purchasing power [is] taken into account, Negro-owned stores and restaurants [did] not have more than five to ten percent of the total Negro trade.³⁴

At the root of the Negro consumer's predilection for whiteowned services was his poor satisfaction with those of his own group.

Finally, contributing to the above weaknesses of Negro business was the lack of preparedness on the part of black aspirants. In most cases, the anti-Negro barriers within the white-caste system rendered specialized training and the acquiring of experience difficult, if not impracticable. Hence, the incompetence and mismanagement that often plagued Negro commercial undertakings. An example of this is the closing of several banks (the Freedmen Savings Bank in 1874 and the Negro Banks of the early 1900s) through unwise use of funds and speculative investments. Another example -- this time within the era we are examining -- is Marcus Garvey's brand of economic nationalism. In an attempt to effect black territorial and economic sovereignity, he created a string of initially successful cooperative enterprises (grocery stores, laundries, restaurants, hotels and printing plants) in several urban centres of the

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United States. Their success, however, was nipped in the bud in the mid-twenties by misuse and misappropriation of funds. These business failures prompted Ralph Bunche to say -- "of this man who had raised more money in a few years than any other Negro organization"³⁵ --

> When the curtain dropped on the Garvey theatricals, the black man of America was exactly where Garvey had found him, though a little bit sadder, perhaps a bit poorer -- if not wiser.³⁶

The foregoing misdeeds of American capitalism, like those of American Protestantism discussed initially, have been one of the great concerns of the Renaissance writer. This second concern is evident in his criticism of the economic order sustaining those misdeeds. On the one hand, he represents this order as a form of evil victimizing the black component of American society. As in Joseph Conrad ("Heart of Darkness") and Hernan Melville (<u>MobyDick</u>), he embodies this evil in whiteness. The most common expression of it, however, is a kind of animal or insensate ruthlessness. In some novels, it takes the form of a "bellowing monster" (TIC, 267) and an "all-tramping bull" (EJO, 514); a "mill" (HTH, I9I) or a voracious

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"machine" (FHT, 54).

Also exemplifying the Renaissance writer's concern for the misdeeds of American capitalism is his multiple mirroring of them. One form of mirroring reviews traditional white economic attitudes toward the black artist or professional and is rife in the apologetic type of novel. We have seen how this novel deals mainly with the materialistic search for happiness by the middle-class strivers (pp. I66-67). A novel that dramatizes negative white attitudes toward the Negro is Walter White's <u>Fire in the Flint</u>. In it he portrays the predicament of a southern black doctor whose efforts to practice medicine in his home town are marred by përsistent harassment.

Despite the middle-class novelist's exposure of the educated Negro's economic ills, he nevertheless depicts material or social goals as worthy or vital to happiness. The apologist novel which, perhaps, dramatizes this positive attitude the most is Jessie Fauset's <u>There is Confusion</u>. Miss Fauset presents ambition and love as rival passions, and makes the one triumph over the other. These conflicting passions are embodied in Joanna Marshall, a young woman with a burning desire for musical distinction and a strong attachment to Peter Eye, a would-be surgeon. Sensing

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that one of the two drives must perforce give way to the other, she (not without pain) agrees to sacrifice her love (IO3).

Moreover, the middle-class novelist's characteristic approval of the above goals makes him exalt steadfastness in professional pursuits rather than hatred for, or indifference to, American capitalism. This quality, for example, surfaces in White's novel, where Kenneth Harper, the medical practitioner, exudes dauntlessness against such odds as the Ku Klux Klan (274).

Unlike the apologetic novel just examined, the novels of the Harlem School (the folk and the mixed) show concern mainly for the economic plight of the underprivileged black worker as well as reveal a strong dislike for American capitalism. As if in retaliation for the traditional misdeeds of the latter, the protagonists of these novels usually dissociate themselves from its declared virtues -- "thrift, economic accumulation and industry"³⁷ -while asserting or brandishing the lower-class life ideal of art-derived and hedonistic pleasure.

The need to save for the morrow or look beyond the present is countered by a carpe diem attitude which

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finds expression in the multifarious 'not-caring' motif. Examples of the latter are Banjo's "careless way" (EJO, 514) that became a source of inspiration to his followers; Jake's self-admonition "to take life easy" (HTH, IO5) and Sandy's realization that "maybe the best way out is not to care" at all (NWL,22).

Besides, 'not-caring' involves the absence of the desire to make or to amass money. This is evident in Ginger's drunken tune, "Money is no object" (BJO, 39); in Banjo's refusal, even in dire need, "to hand ... out his hat for a lousy sou" (EJO, I4); and in Jake's proud assertion that he is "as happy as a prince" although he "ain't got a cent" (HTH, 8).

A notable exception to this general retreat from pecuniary concerns is Little Augie, the upstart, bon-vivant jockey. Unlike other lower-class protagonists, his life was marked, as I have indicated (p. 170), by a frantic search for money and power (GSS, 22). Arna Bontemps, (the author), as if to punish him for his involvement in monetary pursuits, makes him experience a Lucifer-like fall from adulation to abject poverty and neglect:

> As usual, after his wild remarks, Augie looked pitiful. The young folks had seemed

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a little frightened when he broke through the door, but now the little man looked as absurd as an infant, talking of fighting as real bull- sized men. A hopeless old wreck, Augie still had dreams of heroism too big for his body. (GSS, I79)

The 'not-caring' motif, through which dislike for Capitalism finds expression, also involves aversion to organized work. In this case, remunerative toil becomes something unpleasant that is resorted to only in times of necessity. Or, as W.E.B. DuBois expresses it, it is "a necessary evil ministering to the pleasures of life."³³ Thus, remunerative toil provides a congenial admixture of fun and labor for protagonists, symbolizing an ideal modus vivendi in an exploitive and biased environment. Among the activities representing such an acceptable balance are boating, longshoring and rail-roading. These are therefore the favorite occupations of the Jakes or of characters whose daily lives revolve around hedonism and (or) folkart indulgence.

One type of character who most successfully evades the "evil" which work constitutes in the eyes of the pursuers of the lower-class ideal is the folk artist. The need to develop the group soul through the promotion of racial art (pp. I80-8I) obviates the necessity of having

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occasional recourse to the "drudgery" of manual labor. No wonder, then, that the carrying and playing of an instrument by the Banjoes and Jimboys convey a triumphant sense of not being what DuBois dubs "a mechanical drafthorse"³⁹ or, as White's Mimi puts it, "a mere cog in an elaborately organized machine" (FHT, 54). The banjo or guitar is, therefore, a symbol of economic independence or of the absence of enslavement to the capitalistic order. That is why not possessing one sometimes represents a handicap, as Ray's and Banjo's tête-à-tête suggests:

> Ways a doing it, pardner. Even you' bestest friend you can't let in on envery thing you do. Whenevah time youse jim-clean, though, don't go making you'self blacker than you is working in the white man's coal. Jest tell you' pardner how you is fixed. I guess I c'n handle that coal betten'n you kain.

But you don't have to, mah boy. You've got your banjo to work for you. (BJO, I49)

Besides, losing one's instrument (p. 184) may signal a forced return to the daily routine of unpleasant labor:

Banjo told Dengel he was hunting for a job and wanted to help him. What for a job? demanded Dengel. Because I've got to work. I ain't got

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nothing left, so I jest nacherally gotta find anything that looks some'n' like that hard-boil' ugly-mug baby they calls a job. (BJO, 229)

Furthermore, the 'not-caring' motif by which dislike for capitalism is articulated in the folk and mixed novels contains yet another extension of meaning. The motif also applies to characters whose aversion to daily work is so great as to bar them entirely from it. One of these completely withdrawn characters is yellow-brown Alva. who found the conditions in black service jobs repulsive. He therefore refused to be a porter and "swing a mop" or a bellhop and "work on day-night shifts" (BTB, I68). Another character to whom labor seems objectionable is Jerco who, unlike Alva, has passed his prime. "Me find a job?" he interjected; "I ain't good for no job" (HTH, 257). Later, having turned utterly destitute, he preferred to take away his life than face the "opprobrium" and constraints of regular employment. Yellow Prince, who never did "a lick of work in his life time" (HTH, 283), may be cited as a third example of this band of indolents.

That this withdrawal from the economic process stems

from causes advanced earlier in the present chapter, is suggested occasionally. For example Annjee, replying to Aunt Hager's description of Jimboy as "a lazy nigger" (NWL, 137) and "a good-for-nothing husband" (NWL, I3), does suggest that her mother's view of him is both short-sighted and stereotyped:

> Jimboy was always going, but Aunt Hager was wrong about his never working. It was just that he couldn't stay in one place all the time. He'd been born running, he said, and had run ever since. Besides, what was there in Stanton anyhow for a young colored fellow to do except dig sewer ditches for a few cents an hour or maybe a week. Colored men couldn't get many jobs in Stanton, and foreigners were coming in, taking away what little work they did have. Now wonder he didn't stay home. Hadn't ... father been in Stanton forty years and hadn't he died with Aunt Hager still taking in washings to help keep up the house?

There was no well-paid work for Negro men, so Annjee didn't blame Jimboy ... (NWL, 3I)

In addition, in some novels, sympathy with the shiftlessness and evasion that accompany the above withdrawal from labor is reinforced by outright attacks on the hard-working type of Negro. Exemplifying such attacks is Ray's Philippic against the work ethic. In it he lashes out against that "great body of people" who work in "cages," questioning their ability to "carry it on from day to day and still remain quietly obliging and sane" (HTH, 265).

Like some of Joseph Conrad's shore people, who are unwilling or unable to accept the challenges of the back country or of the sea, the foregoing characters generally lead parasitic lives. Such lives undermine the lower-class or folk ideal in at least two ways . First, they tend to weaken the argument in its favor. For labor, which is inimical to the ideal, is resented while, at the same time, its fruits are sought after for bodily sustenance. Secondly, such lives militate against the folk ideal, when efforts to evade economic duties lead to the exploitation of womanhood. These two untoward effects of the dislike for American capitalism will be further examined in the next and final section of this inquiry into lower-class life.

The third discussion that follows will conclude this second section of the inquiry with an analysis of the educational argument against Americanism in the Harlem School novel. Like the previous arguments (the religious and the economic) against American life, this third argument has been forged to a very large extent by past and contemporary experience in white society. NOTES TO PART TWO/CHAPTER TWO

^I Claude H. Nolan, <u>The Negro's Image in the South:</u> <u>The Anatomy of White Racism</u> (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), pp. II-I2.

² See Alexander Tillinghast, <u>The Negro in Africa</u> <u>and America</u>, 3, No. I (American Association Publications, 1902), p. 121.

³ Claude Nolan, op.cit., p. II.

⁴ Archibald Grimke, <u>Modern Industrialism and the</u> <u>Negroes of the United States(Washington, D.C.: The Ameri-</u> can Negro Academy, 1908), p. 5; Carter G. Woodson, <u>The</u> <u>History of the Negro Church</u> (Washington: The Associated Publishers, 1921), p. 2.

⁵ I have already mentioned examples of the black intellectual supporting a negative racial attribution for similar reasons. See Part I, ch. I, pp. 59 ff.

⁶ See Osborne Monroe, <u>Negro Life in Jamaica</u> (March, 1872), pp. 554, 560.

⁷ See his book, <u>Social and Mental Traits of the</u> <u>Negro</u> (New York: Columbia University, 1910), p. 185.

⁸ See W. W. Reed, <u>African Sketch Book</u> (1873), in Newman I. White, <u>American Negro Folksongs</u> (Hatboro: Folklore Associates Inc., 1965), p. 20; Claude H. Nolan, op. cit., p. 27.

⁹ See Alexander Tillinghast, op. cit., p. 137.

^{IO} Among the supporters of this response figure E. Franklin Frazier, <u>The Negro in the United States</u> (New York: The McMillan Company, 1949), p. 76; Carter G. Woodson, <u>The African Background Outlined</u> (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1936), p. 171; Kelly Miller, "A Review of Hoffman's Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro," in William Loran Gatz, ed., <u>The American Negro Academy Occasional Papers</u> (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), p. 18.

II Melville J. Herskovits, <u>The Myth of the Negro Past</u> (New York:Harper and Brothers, Publishers, I94I), pp. 90, IO2.

^{I2} W.E.B. DuBois, <u>The Gift of Black Folk</u> (Boston: The Stratford Co., Publishers, 1924), pp. 53-54.

¹³ Charles S. Johnson, <u>Shadow of the Plantation</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 208.

^{I4} St Claire Drake and H.R. Cayton, <u>Black Metropolis</u>: <u>A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City</u> (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), p. 583.

¹⁵ Gunnar Myrdal, <u>An American Dilemma</u> (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1962), p. 595.

¹⁶ August Meier and Elliot M. Rudwick, <u>From Planta-</u> tion to Ghetto: An Interpretive History of American Negroes (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), p. 88.

17 Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁸ Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, <u>The Black</u> <u>Worker: A Study of the Negro and the Labor Movement</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 159-60.

¹⁹ Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., pp. 318-26.

20 Ibid.

^{2I} See <u>ibid</u>. Spero and Harris, op. cit., pp. I69-74; W.E.B. DuBois, op. cit., pp. IOO ff.

²² See his book, <u>The Circle of Discrimination: A</u> <u>Economic and Social Study of the Black Man in New York</u> (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 45.

²³ See Joseph A. Pierce, <u>Negro Business and Business</u> <u>Education: Their Present and Prospective Development</u> (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1947), p. 24.

²⁴ See the following chapter for details on this program.

²⁵ I will elaborate shortly.

²⁶ Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 309.

27 Ibid., p. 310.

28 Ibid., p. 307.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., p. 315.

^{3I} See his book, op. cit., p. 20.

³² Harold Cruse, <u>The Crisis of the Negro Intell</u>-<u>ectual</u> (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1967), p. 26.

33 Ibid., p. 25.

³⁴ See his book, op. cit., p. 22.

³⁵ James W. Johnson, <u>Black Manhattan</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), p. 256.

³⁶ See his article, "The Negro in the Political Life of the United States," <u>Journal of Negro Education</u>, 2 (1917), 412.

³⁷ Meier and Rudwick, op. cit., p. I03.
³⁸ W.E.B. DuBois, op. cit., p. 79.
³⁹ Ibid., pp. 53-54.

PART TWO: RADICALISM AND THE ORAL TRADITION Chapter 3:

The School and the Folk Ideal

The rejection of white American education in radical Negro fiction of the I920s has also been nurtured by centuries of dissatisfaction.

Glancing back at the history of Negro education, from the vantage point of the nineteen-twenties, one discovers a record marked by narrow-mindedness or ignorance, not to mention downright prejudice. In the early days, Negro education was generally forbidden in the slave States.^I Of course, there were a growing number of denominational schools; but these provided mainly religious instruction, in conformity with the early Church's assumed God-given mission to Christianize and enlighten the disinherited dark races. As a result, most Negro ex-slaves and their progeny were unable to take advantage of the increasing need for skilled labor in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century. Greating this need was the United States' rapid industrial expansion.² Supplanting the predominantly denominational Sunday schools were embryonic institutions of secular learning from the beginning of the nineteenth-century. These were created in the North and South by the Negro leadership, backed by white philanthropic interests. Moreover, by mid-century, government grants began to supplant community efforts, leading to the creation of mainly separate Negro schools, particularly in the North.

Sometimes, however, occasional attempts by the Negro leadership to obtain badly needed schools in underprivileged areas were not always successful. For example, the Negro National Convention of the I850s failed in its attempts to create a number of trade schools for lower-class Negroes, on account of the hostility of local whites;³ and thus was repeated a pattern that was to persist in later years.⁴

But, even when such a hostility was absent, and Negro schools were tolerated, the conditions therein were generally far from satisfactory -- much inferior to those prevalent in white segregated schools. So the "separate but equal" principle of the I896 legal segregation edict (that should have created a healthy balance in black-white education) increasingly became a matter of "separate and

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unequal."⁵ It is not surprising, then, that black parents preferred white schools to Negro schools. And the "dirt, noise, bad manners, filthy tales, no discipline, overcrowding and poorly trained teachers"⁶ that were apparently rampant in Negro schools only served to reinforce this preference.

There are other handicaps (besides inadequate physical and human resources) which rendered Negro education partially ineffective. One of these is the continuing religious and elitist orientation of a number of Negro establishments like the Ashman Institute and the Wilberforce College. Another is the widespread racism (the failure of white students and teachers to accept non-whites as equals, on account of the latters' generally lower socio-economic status and alleged intellectual inferiority)⁷ undermining • the northern integrated schools of the I840s.

Another cause of instructional ineffectiveness in segregated and integrated establishments was the absence from the curricula of elements of black culture such as history and sociology:

> Little attempt is made to adjust the teaching specifically to the Negroes' existing status and future possibilities. The American Creed permeates instruction and the Negro as well as

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the white youth are inculcated with the traditional American virtues of efficiency, thrift and ambition.⁸

Some of the foregoing handicaps or shortcomings continued to plague Negro education -- particularly the efforts of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois -- after the I850s. Washington, who had taken over the black leadership from men like Frederick Douglass (ex-slave and prominent civil rights leader), generalized the idea of vocational training in the last quarter of the nineteenthcentury. His program of economic salvation called for the exclusive acquisition of the mechanical and industrial skills together with the preceding virtues of American capitalism. Aided by the continuing generosities of white philanthropic groups, such a program led to the establishment of trade schools (Tuskegee) and to the rejuvenation of others (Hampton).

The success of Washington's program was to a large extent undermined by forces both within and without the Negro community. It was opposed by a large section of the intelligentsia, headed by DuBois, the then foremost spokesman of the burgeoning NAACP movement. This opposition argued against what it felt was too narrow and earthy a view of Negro education. S.P. Fullinwider believes that the "more idealistic" DuBois "wanted something finer [for negroes] than the coarse materialism of American culture."⁹ Moreover, an exclusively vocational type of education, such as that proposed by Washington, had the added disadvantage of catering to supremacist bias that the Negro was incapable of academic instruction. This view was held by, among others, Nathaniel S. Shaler in the nineteenth-century and by Alexander Tillinghast at the beginning of the twentieth.^{IO}

With the death of Booker T. Washington in I9^I5, the leaders of the NAACP (mainly W.E.B. DuBois and James W. Johnson) launched their own integrationist program, also with white financial backing and encouragement. This new endeavor, while aiming at economic self-sufficiency like its predecessor, attempted to make up for the latter's deficiency in academic or classical training. This program, moreover, was to be realized through an intellectual elite -- the "talented tenth," as it was called (p. I5). The task of its members consisted in helping the ordinary black worker integrate into American industrial society by assuming the role of intermediary or advocate. The efforts of the new Negro leadership did not achieve more success

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than Washington's, because of the alienation and distrust that were rampant among Negro social classes (pp. I4-I6). Thus N.I. Huggins notes that in the end DuBois' leadership became "impotent to force change," which he attributes to a lack of "popular support" and "grass-roots attachment."^{II}

The foregoing attempts by black leaders to revolutionize Negro education are part and parcel of the general trend to make the American Dream myth -- the belief that the socio-economic system holds the potential for material wealth and happiness for all -- feasible for Negroes:

> The years I900 to I930 saw the first vigorous articulation of this myth by black Americans. A forceful, dynamic black leadership and set of organizations had developed by the early I900s. The NAACP, Urban League, and Booker T. Washington Organization were all founded upon the values and goals of the American Dream. With very few exceptions that will be treated later, these organizations stood for and their leaders expressed, often eloquently, their faith in the American Dream and the possibility of its goals being fulfilled for black Americans.^{I2}

Furthermore, David D. Van Tassel notes:

These three decades, on all counts, constitute a nadir in the political, economic and social condition of black Americans since the end of the Civil War. Yet it is during these very years that the American Dream myth begins to grow and flourish in black literature and periodicals.¹³

Of course, a notable exception to the general endorsement of the American dream among black intellectuals, as the preceding criticism of Protestantism and capitalism have suggested, were the Harlem School writers of the Renaissance. Setting them apart from other Negro writers of the era¹⁴ was their criticism of the educational system which, like its economic counterpart, helped fuel the Dream. This last criticism, inspired by the historical misdeeds we have been enumerating, constitutes these writers third expression of anti-American sentiment in the Harlem School novel.

In this third formulation of anti-Americanism, the school or college is set in opposition with the ideal of lower-class life. Partly dramatizing this opposition is the female protagonist. Two examples are provided by Hughes. He depicts two teenage drop-outs (Annjee and Harriet) escaping from the unpleasant atmosphere of their predominantly white neighborhood school and seeking refuge in love and art (NWL, 28, 22-23). Thurman also dramatizes the teenager's opposition to learning, notably through Hazel Mason, the

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lower-class girl, who was catapulted to the University of Southern California by her father's unexpected oil wealth. But her lower-class stigmatization -- "darky-like clumsiness" and "raucous laughter" together with a "flamboyant style of dress" (BTB, 3^I) -- came into sharp conflict with her snob middle-class campus entourage. However, she counterbalanced her on-campus alienation through cabaret and party revels as well as "drunken mid-night drivers" (BTB, 44) until her leave-taking.

Helping the female drop-out articulate the educational criticism in the Harlem School novel is the persevering student protagonist. On the one hand, he demonstrates a keen awareness (like the middle-class striver after material success or happiness) of the social mobility accruing from the capitalistic virtues. On the other hand, he cannot help entertaining Locke's reservation toward these same virtues¹⁵ and their potential for cultural emasculation:

> One of the most conspicuous and important features in Negro life is the rapid and fundamental change which education produces in social status ... Education as a rule means a complete break with the traditions and ideals and customs of the masses from which the educated Negroes sprung.¹⁶

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In the teenage protagonist, Sandy, Hughes, more than perhaps any other Harlem School writer, portrays this quandary of the black American student. Activating the fires of his juvenile ambition is Aunt Hager, his diehard conservative grand-mother, who wants him to become another B.T. Washington (NWL, I45) and thus enable her to make up for the failures of her two wayward children, Harriet and Annjee. Her parvenu daughter, Tempy, seconded her in this endeavor, devising "prim plans for his improvement" (NWL, 266). Goaded by these two females, he pursues American Dream objectives assiduously and covets a career in engineering. But he is not without having serious misgivings. For, opposing Aunt Hager's and Tempy's persistent call to respectability are Harriet's and Jimboy's happy folk life as well as Uncle Dan Givens', which beckon him in another direction. Eunice Carter expresses this dilemma thus:

> There is a Sandy with his books and dreams of education and a Sandy with his eyes wide open picking up knowledge of life about the house, listening to his father's blues and ballads in purple evenings, watching his aunt ... at her dancing.¹⁷

But the conflict arising from these two divergent demands is not resolved and, as a result, the reader is left un-

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satisfied and wondering at the end of the novel. However, there is a faint suggestion Sandy may very well turn the way of the folk ideal. This suggestion arises from his greater excitement over the echoing of "old folks ... singing" than Harriet's subsequent call to go back to school (NWL, 30I-04). Thus, to one who sympathizes with the folk ideal, Sandy's condition might seem retrievable.

But, in McKay's portrayal of Ray, such retrievability seems impossible, since he has already gone through the white educational process. As a result, Ray's condition is not only poignant but pitiable. Exemplifying this is his subsequent inhibitions -- his inability to relate to women-folk (HTH, I54) and to engage in racial exuberance (BJO, I33-84) like the Jakes and Banjoes. Throughout his tergiversations, McKay suggests that these incapacities issue from moral qualms and emotional atrophy brought on by Ray's white American education that ruthlessly shut out the native black culture.

However, in Bita (the Jamaican girl with a British upbringing), McKay shows that Ray's alienation can be avoided. As one writer observes,

... she returns home, where, to the dismay

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of the missionaries who hoped she "would be English and appearing so in everything but the color of her skin," she feels most at ease among the uneducated, happy natives.¹⁸

Bita is able to re-integrate into folk-life, because of her wholesomeness -- the harmonious retention of white and black cultural elements in her personality. But in her intellectual counterpart (Ray), these elements exist in a state of disorder, with the one dominating the other. His sudden fits of bitterness and aggressivity (HTH, 2II; BJO, 268) are no doubt the result of efforts to control or prevent this unhealthy condition.

The above untoward effects that sometimes accompany Negro education recall others (cynicism and mockery in chapter one and indolence and parasitism in chapter two) stemming from the undue reaction to religious and economic racism. Together, these and other effects constitute the negative off-shoots of the folk ideal that were mentioned at the beginning of this part of the inquiry into lower-class life (p.199).

The ensuing third and final part will examine the attitude of the middle-class protagonist toward the folk ideal. It will, in particular, demonstrate how he was both

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attracted and repulsed by it. To put it more clearly, the various aspects of the oral tradition (pp. II8-22) tended to arouse the approval of a number of strivers after material rewards. But the hedonism that usually accompanies the tradition (pp. I57-6I) together with the anti-American feeling uncovered in the last three chapters tended to alienate these middle-class characters from the folk people. NOTES TO PART TWO/CHAPTER THREE

I See Arna Bontemps, <u>Great Slave Narratives</u> (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. xvi; Frederick L. Hoffman, <u>Race</u> <u>Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro</u> (New York: The McMillan Co., 1896), p. 212.

² Gunnar Myrdal, <u>An American Dilemma</u> (New York: Harper & Rowe, Publishers, 1944), p. 1077.

³ A. Meier and E.M. Rudwick, <u>From Plantation to</u> <u>Ghetto</u> (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), p. 89.

⁴ See Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 945; John P. Davis, <u>The American Negro Reference Book</u> (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 368.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 368-69.

⁶ Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 902.

⁷ For information on the claim of black intellectual inferiority, see Buell G. Gallagher, <u>American Caste and the</u> <u>Negro College</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 176-79.

⁸ Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 879. See, also, Alain Locke, "Education Bids Par," <u>Survey Graphic</u>, 5 (Sept. 1925), 592.

⁹ See his book, <u>The Mind and Mood of Black America</u> (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1969), p. 52.

^{IO} Nathaniel S. Shaler, "The Permanence of Racial

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Characteristics," in Idus A. Newby, ed. <u>The Develop-</u> <u>ment of Segregationist Thought</u> (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1968), p. 281; Alexander Tillinghast, "The Negro in Africa and America," <u>American Economic Association</u>, 3 (May, 1902), 158.

II N.I. Huggins, <u>Harlem Renaissance</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 48.

^{I2} June Sochen, <u>The Unbridgeable Gap: Blacks and</u> <u>Their Quest for the American Dream, I900-I930</u> (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, I972), p. 2.

13 Ibid., "Editors' Preface," pp. viii-ix.

^{I4} Among these writers figure the contributors to the <u>Southern Workman</u>. See June Sochen, op. cit., p. I3, for a sampling of their writings.

¹⁵ See Alain Locke, op. cit., 591-92.

¹⁶ E. Franklin Frazier, <u>On Race Relations</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 211.

¹⁷ Eunice H. Carter, "Review of <u>Not Without Laughter</u>," Journal of Negro Life, 8 (Sept., 1930), 279.

¹⁸ Stephen H. Bronz, <u>Roots of Negro Racial Con</u>-<u>sciousness; The 1920's: Three Harlem Renaissance Authors</u> (New York: Libra Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 86.

PART THREE: RACIAL SELF-DEFINITION Chapter I:

The Problem of Identity

THE

The discussions in Parts I and 2 of the inquiry into the Harlem Renaissance constitute an appropriate backdrop for the study of the identity problem. To recapitulate, these discussions showed the American Negro forging for himself a unique life-style through the prism of folk-lore, in an effort to counter the socio-economic denials arising from his lower-class status. They also showed the writers of the folk and mixed novels rediscovering the survival value inherent in this life-style and advancing it as the most effective weapon for racial renewal in modern-day America. Lastly, the foregoing discussions showed these writers setting off the dislike for American institutions as an indispensable element of the new life-style.

In the ensuing third and final part of the inquiry, I will take a more critical view of this life-style by analyzing the problem of identity that depicts the predicament of the Negro hybrid in white American society. I will show how the middle-class or apologist novelist, who was continually at odds with his lower-class counterpart (pp. I8-I9), used this problem as a fictional device to oppose the lower-class life-style.

A review of black-white ancestry in America will no doubt help indicate the nature and scope of the identity problem. Race mixture originates at least as far back as the middle or transatlantic passage, when countless boatloads of captured Africans were transported to the New World plantations. In colonial times, in particular, the practice was very common, becoming a virtual right of the master or his overseer.^I After Emancipation, however, it fell into disrepute and gradually disappeared, except in remote or unguarded areas, where it continued to be an indulgence of "unscrupulous whites."² Yet, in spite of the falling-off trend, the practice of blood-mixing was sufficiently great to bolster the hybrid population, prior to the I920s, to an unprecedented high.³

The identity problem itself arises out of the "natural and universal desire"⁴ of the near-white Negroes (mulattoes, quadroons, quintaroons, octoroons) to gain overt membership in the majority culture. On the one hand, this desire was motivated by a number of factors. First, there

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was skin color. Some mixed-blood types, like those just enumerated, are so Caucasian in appearance that their partial black origin becomes virtually unrecognizable to the average person, as the following passage suggests:

> I saw plenty of men and women who were unquestionably Negroes But I also met men and women as white as I am, whose assertion that they were really Negroes I accepted in defiance of the evidence of my own senses. I have seen blue-eyed Negroes and goldenhaired Negroes; one girl I met had an abundance of soft straight red hair. I have seen Negroes I could not easily distinguish from the Jewish or French types.⁵

It is this ostensible sameness of features that continues to push the near-white Negro⁶ to identify himself with the white race instead of with the dark-colored majority that make up the Negro race.⁷

Reinforcing the hybrid's desire to be recognized as white was a white education or upbringing, as R.S. Baker further notes:

> In making my inquiries among colored colleges, I found to my astonishment that in nearly all of them mulatto boys are being educated, and well educated, by their white fathers ... Wilberforce College ... was largely supported in slavery times by Southern white men who felt a moral obligation to educate their colored sons and

daughters.⁸

This near-of-kin kindness on the part of many whites -some of them were prominent individuals in southern and northern societies⁹ -- accounts for the generally much higher level of education among the mixed-blood. In addition, academic training was, to all intents and purposes, under white control, as evidenced in the curricula of colored institutions of higher learning and in the makeup of their teaching staff.^{IO} This is what Hughes has to say about Lincoln University in the I920s:

> I liked it very much. But just as I like America and still find certain things wrong with it, so I found several things wrong with Lincoln it had an all-white faculty There was an unwritten official colorline that said no Negro could teach on that faculty. Most of the professors on the faculty were elderly, kind ... old gentlemen, graduates of Princeton in the '80's.^{II}

These, then, are some of the conditions of colored education, which fostered in the hybrid Negro a great sympathy for the values and ideals (pp. 236-37) of the majority culture.

A third factor (besides skin color and education)

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that reinforced the desire to belong to the white group was the traditional stigma associated with life within the black community (pp. 48-51).

But the overt desire of the mixed-blood for white status recognition has consistently been repulsed by whites. The refusal to lower caste barriers for him is due mainly to the long-time repudiation of racial admixture and to the relegation of hybridity to the same inferior status as blackness.

There were at least four reasons in support of this repudiation. Morally, racial admixture was said to engender an intermediate biological type that adulterated the purity of the Caucasian stock, as it "inherited the vices of both races [the white and the black], but the virtues of neither."¹² Genetically, too, this type was attributed less vitality and a weaker constitution than the full-blooded Negro; and so, in the eyes of anti-amalgamists, it was more prone to mortality and disease.¹³ Besides, anti-amalgamists resorted to the preceding arguments to oppose race-mixing on sociological grounds. They cited a number of territories (Mexico, Santo Domingo) where that mixing had presumably resulted in social chaos and strife.¹⁴ Also, the stemming of the white Negro's desire to participate in the majority culture was reinforced by Protestant dogma. Race-mixing was said to be un-Christian and ungodly, since the Creator had divided human-beings into distinct races and ordained that they remain so.¹⁵ Hence, the association of racial crossing with sin, which became a powerful theme in American fiction. "The taint of black blood," observes C.W. Chesnutt, "was the unpardonable sin from the unmerited penalty of which there was no escape except by concealment."¹⁶ Nowhere, perhaps, is that theme more exploited than in William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga, in which a number of hybrid characters -- Charles Bon (<u>The Sound and the Fury</u>), Joe Christmas (<u>Light in August</u>) -- become the butt of submerged guilt that sporadically erupts in tragic violence.

Lastly, as mentioned earlier (pp. 23-24), the refusal to lower racial barriers for the light-skinned Negro was, and still is, due to the failure of American whites to recognize the internal color gradations within the black community. The rationale underlying this attitude has been that what is not pure white is necessarily Negroid and, as such, has to be circumscribed. James W. Johnson has expressed this attitude succinctly by observing that "one drop of

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Negro blood renders a man unfit."¹⁷ Some other writers have done so more copiously:

Consequently, in respect to the white world, the near-white negro tends to be treated in much the same fashion as a person with more Negro ancestry.¹⁸

The color-line itself admits of no distinction between Negroes of varying degrees of Negro blood. The whitest Negro and the very blackest alike must bow to its inexorable decrees.¹⁹

... the white race draws a sharp color-line against the mulatto just as it does against the black: both are placed in a subordinate category.²⁰

For the black hybrid, such a sociological situation (wherein the desire for white middle-class status is repulsed) may engender an identity crisis, which allows of one or two possible responses, as this passage suggests:

> The failure of the white group to acknowledge the former's superior status may often provoke a psychic tension which may lead him to take steps to secure it from the white society as well as the Negro.²¹

Traditionally, these "steps" have been insularism and the surreptitious transference of racial affiliation. Together these constitute the sum of efforts on the part of the very light Negro to come to terms with his <u>déclassé</u> feeling.

Insularism as a response to exclusion from involvement in the majority culture can be defined in terms of in-group isolation:

> There was a profound tendency for the lighterskinned to set themselves apart socially from the darker members of their class and to some extent from the race itself.²²

As most studies of the Negro half-breed have pointed out, this insularism betrays indifference and, in some cases, contempt for the dark-colored segment of the race.²³ It can also be interpreted as a kind of ostentatious refusal to accept the white-imposed inferior status. One of the salient manifestations of that refusal was the pursuit of some form of New Englandism in behavior, outside of white color-caste limits, and through conformity with the genteel tradition of the Old South or with bourgeois etiquette in general. The half-breed's insular social behavior also manifested itself in the adoption of an exclusive life-style within the confines of the Negro community. As with the New Orleans <u>café-au-lait</u> society,²⁴ or the Louisiana <u>gens</u> <u>de couleur</u>,²⁵ this life-style was studded with selective parties, clubs or exclusive societies, whose "blue veinism"²⁶ acted as a deterrent against all dark-colored intrusions. The nineteen-twenties, with its heavy emphasis on dilettantism and the senses, witnessed an unprecedented increase in such social niceties.

Most of the apologist novelists now under study were of mixed parentage²⁷ and indulged in such exclusive associations. This is what Hughes has to say about one of them -- Jessie Fauset, whom Larry E. Thompson describes as having never "known the life of the black people of the rural South, nor the ghettoes of the Northern cities"²⁸:

> At the novelist's, Jessie Fauset's, parties there was always quite a different atmosphere from that at most other Harlem good-time gatherings. At Miss Fauset's, a good time was shared by talking literature and reading poetry aloud and perhaps enjoying some conversation in French. White people were seldom present there unless they were distinguished white people, because Jessie Fauset did not feel like opening her home to mere sightseers At her house one would usually meet editors and students, writers ... and serious people who liked books and the British museum, and had perhaps been to France. (Italy, not Alabama.)²⁹

The above ironical observation by Hughes, the rival lowerclass writer (pp. I8-2I), on his middle-class counterpart, tends to give credence to the opinion that the well-to-do, light-complexioned Negro's ostentatious isolation within black society was partly aimed at setting off the race in the eyes of the majority culture and even rivalling some of its social graces, in a studied attempt to compensate for the loss of white status recognition.³⁰

Anne Grey, more than any hybrid character of the apologist novel, seems to represent this behavior. Although professing a great dislike for white folks, her elaborate, Gatsby-like parties in Harlem were partly used by her to "ape their clothes, their manners and their gracious ways of living" (QSD, IO6-07). Miss Grey's form of compensation for the loss of white status is supplemented in the novel by the persistent recitation of white family background, as in the case of Miss Mac Gooden, the prudish and strait-laced matron of the Naxos establishment, who would boast of her kinship with a Reconstruction congressman (QSD, 26-27). Similarly, Jean Daquin, the wealthy insurance broker, would set off his life from that of other Atlanta families by reminiscing about his creole lineage: We Daquins trace our history a long way back -- back to the early days of the convent Louis XV founded here in 1727 -- the Ursulines -- to teach the Negro and Indian girls Girls of good family were sent to the colony -- <u>les filles à la cassette</u> they were called. From these matings sprang many of the great families of Louisiana -- and to one of them you and I owe our being. (FHT, 38)

As the above observations indicate, the middle-class writer tends to re-create the historical secularism of the Negro hybrid in some of his novels.

The Negro hybrid also sought compensation for his loss of status through the second response to white membership denial -- the transference of racial affiliation from the minority to the majority group. This form of upward mobility, which still persists in American race relations,³¹ has been referred to as passing or crossing the color-line (pp. I66). Here, the degree of compensation is in direct relation to the type of crossing at hand.³² Compensation is greater in the permanent type of crossing that seeks economic advantage (careerism, wealth or profit) and social convenience (service or amusement facilities) on a long term basis. But it is smaller when either of these goals is sought only occasionally or during a brief period.

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The apologist writer depicts both types of passing, but alters their frequency a little. Thus the permanent type becomes more flexible and the impermanent less regular in its occurrences. Also, he effects a re-ordering in the relative importance of the above incentives to passing, giving more or less prominence to this or that one according to the needs of his fictional purpose -- the criticism of the radical folk option. I shall elaborate later on these changes as well as point out their significance in the current strategy whereby the middle-class writer seeks to carry out that purpose.

A three-fold reason seems to underlie the use of the passing phenomenon by the apologist writer. To begin with, there was a desire to portray a sociological reality of some importance. This importance has somewhat been established by a recent study, which points out that the crossing-over ratio of black hybrids was highest in the period incorporating the nineteen-twenties (I9II-30) than during the entire period covered by the survey (I860-1960).³³ This importance is also borne out in observations by contemporary writers. Elmer A. Carter, for instance, writes: ... a movement among negroes of far-reaching significance It is nothing less than the crossing-over of thousands of negroes from their own race to the dominant white race.³⁴

Also emphasizing the contemporary importance of passing is McKay's comment on an anonymous lady writer's disobliging remarks in Don'ts for My Daughter:

> I have read an interesting article on "America's Changing Color-Line," which stresses the idea that America is steadily growing darker in complexion and is informing about the increasing numbers of white Negroids who are absorbed by the white group.³⁵

Secondly, the use of the passing phenomenon by writers of the apologist novels was also dictated by racial considerations. The surreptitious migration of the very light Negro into the larger white community had serious negative repercussions on the race itself. This is evident in descriptions of the opting-out process as a form of braindrain that was robbing the black race of its potential for intellectual and economic growth.³⁶ Also, whereas the isolation created by secularism (the withdrawal of the nearwhites into a separate caste within the black community) allowed for at least a minimum of interchange between the dark-colored majority and the light-colored minority,³⁷ passing sometimes led to an unbridgeable gap between these two racial components. From this more serious type of withdrawal arose anger and frustration that increased the humiliation already attached to the lower-class status, as members of the same family and (or) friends were torn apart. Robert L. Sutherland, for example, cites the case of a Negro brother and sister who had passed and who were deeply upset when their mother became ill and later died, and they were unable to visit her.³⁸

The middle-class novels also depict the tension arising from such family disorganization. Examples of this are the absence of communication between Helga and her dark father (QSD, 50-52) and the truncated relations which settled between the non-passer, Irene, and her friend, Clare, whose life, as a result of the crossing-over, "had deliberately diverged from hers" (PSS, 48).

Moreover, the above feelings consequent upon withdrawal from the black community sometimes provoke charges of betrayal and transform individual members of the race into "spotters" who try to denounce passers as renegades.³⁹ As indicated earlier (p. 169), the novelist mirrors such a concern by giving his near-white protagonists feline traits and reflexes that are intended to translate their wari-

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ness of detection. Walter White's <u>Flight</u> provides a good example of this:

... a purposeful looking woman in front of them turned and glared at him through an imposing pair of lorgnettes. (290) Mimi was startled when a roar of sound plunged from the open door, sound which had been wholly inaudible, when the door was shut. (292)

And as she watched them Mimi began to see for the first time what Wu Hseh-Chuan had meant - it had taken an Oriental ... to make her see things she had seen all her life and yet had never seen. (293)

Thirdly, added to the foregoing reasons for the portrayal of the black hybrid was another -- the feeling that this subject was first and foremost the responsibility of the apologist writer. It was felt that the social predicament of the very light Negro was essentially a middleclass problem that should be handled by him just as the writer of the folk or mixed novel was preoccupied with lowerclass issues. Besides, folk writers like McKay and Hughes had, in their endeavor to formulate a cultural solution to the continuing Negro problem, largely ignored that of the mulatto. Their feelings regarding the latter are summed up in the following remark: The vicarious stories of "passing white" are merely of slight importance to the great group of fifteen millions who are obviously Negroes.⁴⁰

Furthermore, the charge of excessive manipulation that has been levelled at the apologist novelist — for his treatment of the Negro hybrid⁴¹—suggests a high degree of concern and involvement. The apologist or middle-class novelist, however, far from supporting racial disaffiliation or passing, sought to discourage it as an ideal or as a viable form of adjustment in the hostile American environment. This is evident in the pervasive idea of tragedy and failure that he associates with crossing-the-color-line.⁴² This idea, for example, underlies Brian's comment in the middle-class novel, <u>Passing</u>: "They always come back [to the black fold]. I've seen it happen time after time" (96)

As the last comment suggests, the apologist writer portrays passing, while rejecting it as a solution to the narrow problem of the black American hybrid. But, at the same time, he exploits the predicament of the latter in order to show his disapproval of the comparatively more important folk solution of the lower-class writer. The focus of the next chapter -- the second element in the study of Negro racial identity -- is the rejection of passing by the middle-class or apologist novelists, while the chapter that follows (the penultimate) will cover the third element of this identity issue or the rejection of the folk solution to the American Negro problem by these novelists. NOTES TO PART THREE/CHAPTER ONE

I Edward Eggleston, <u>The Ultimate Solution of</u> <u>the American Negro Problem</u> (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1913), p. 116.

² S.J. Holmes, <u>The Negro Struggle For Survival</u>: <u>A Study in Human Ecology</u> (New York: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1966), p. 167.

3 Ibid., p. 168.

⁴ Edgar T. Thompson, <u>Race Relations and the Race</u> <u>Problem: A Definition and An Analysis</u> (Durham: Duke University Press, 1939), p. 258.

⁵ Ray S. Baker, "What is a Negro?", in John H. Franklin, ed. <u>The Negro in Twentieth-Century America</u> (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 8.

⁶ For some evidence, see Sidney Kronus, <u>The Black</u> <u>Middle-Class</u> (Columbia: Charles E. Merril, 1971), pp. 78, 85-86.

⁷ According to M.J. Herskovits, the dark-colored group is far less unadulterated than has traditionally been supposed. See his book, <u>The American Negro: A Study in</u> <u>Racial Crossing (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1928), pp. 16 ff.</u>

⁸ Quoted in S.J. Holmes, op. cit., pp. 167-68.

⁹ <u>Ibid</u>., p. 167.

^{IO} See, for example, E. Franklin Frazier, "Education of the Black Bourgeoisie," <u>Black Bourgeoisie</u> (Glencoe: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1957), p. 74.

II Langston Hughes, "Lincoln University," <u>The Big</u> Sea (New York: A.A. Knovf, 1940), pp. 279-80.

¹² S.J. Holmes, op. cit., p. 176.

¹³ See Kelly Miller, "A Review of Hoffman's <u>Race</u> <u>Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro</u>," in William L. Katz, ed. <u>The American Academy of Occasional Papers</u> (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), p. 20.

^{I4} Claude H. Nolan, "Amalgamation," <u>The Negro's</u> <u>Image in the South: The Anatomy of White Racism</u> (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), p. 35.

¹⁵ <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 30-32.

¹⁶ Charles W. Chesnutt, <u>The House Behind the Cedars</u> (Ridgewood: The Gregg Press, 1968), pp. 127-28.

¹⁷ James W. Johnson, <u>The Autobiography of an Ex-</u> <u>Coloured Man</u> (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1928), p. 197.

¹⁸ Otto Klineberg, <u>Characteristics of the American</u> <u>Negro</u> (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1944), p. 304.

¹⁹ Elmer A. Carter, "Crossing Over," <u>Opportunity</u>, 4 (Dec., 1926), 376. 20 Edgar T. Thompson, op. cit., p. 258.

^{2I} Otto Klineberg, op. cit., p. 305.

²² David A. Gerber, <u>Black Ohio and the Color-line</u>, <u>1860-1915</u> (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 128.

²³ See E. Franklin Frazier, op. cit., p. I37; G.E. Simpson and J.M. Yinger, <u>An Analysis of Prejudice and</u> <u>Discrimination: Racial and Cultural Minorities</u> (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1965), p. 160.

²⁴ Allison Davis and John Dollard, <u>Children of</u> <u>Bondage</u> (Washington: American Council on Education, 1940), pp. 134-37.

²⁵ E. Franklin Frazier, op. cit., p. 137.

²⁶ This catch-word refers to lightness of skin as a pre-requisite to membership in Negro upper-class circles. See David A. Gerber, "Class Lifestyle and Conditions," op. cit., p. 129.

²⁷ See Langston Hughes, op. cit., p. 242; Claude McKay, <u>A Long Way From Home</u> (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), p. 312.

²⁸ See his article, "Jean Toomer: As Modern Man," in Arna Bontemps, ed. <u>The Harlem Renaissance Remembered</u> (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1972), p. 80.

²⁹ Langston Hughes, op. cit., p. 247.

³⁰ In this respect, see Le Roi Jones, "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature'," <u>On Being Black</u>, C.Davis and D. Walden, eds. (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett, 1970), p. 295.

^{3I} See G.E. Simpson and J.M. Yinger, op. cit., p. 380.

³² For a description of the various types of crossing, see Otto Klineberg, op. cit., pp. 302-03; St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, <u>Black Metropolis: A Study of</u> <u>Life in a Negro City</u> (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1945), pp. 160-61; James E. Conyers and T.H. Kennedy, "Negro Passing: To Pass or Not To Pass," <u>Phylon</u>, XXIV, 3 (Fall, 1963), 218-19.

³³ G.E. Simpson and J.M. Yinger, op. cit., 380.

³⁴ Elmer A. Carter, op. cit., 376.

35 Claude McKay, op. cit., p. 348.

³⁶ See, for example, Walter F. White, "Color Lines," <u>Survey Graphic</u>, LIII (March, 1925), 681; Elmer A. Carter, op. cit., 376.

37 A portion of the middle-class has always had its economic base in the ghettoes (See Part 2, ch. 2) and, like some whites, depended upon them for entertainment (See pp. 5-6).

38 See G.E. Simpson and J.M. Yinger, op. cit., p. 160.

³⁹ See, for example, Charles S. Johnson, <u>Patterns</u> of Negro Segregation (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1943), p. 285; A. Davis and J. Dollard, op. cit., p. 155.

40 Claude McKay, op. cit., p. 348.

^{4I} See Gunnar Myrdal, <u>An American Dilemma</u> (New York: Harper and Rowe, Publishers, 1944), p. 699.

⁴² See, for example, <u>Max Dorsinville</u>, <u>Caliban With</u>-<u>out Prospero: Essay on Quebec and Black Literature</u> (Ontario: Press Porcepic Erin, 1974), pp. 43-50.

PART THREE: RACIAL SELF-DEFINITION

Chapter 2:

Aftermath and Return

Many a black hybrid, who forsakes the insular type of existence within Negro society, discovers at some time that life beyond the color-line is not always as good as was imagined:

> Persons who become white have seldom been known to rise high in their new field which they have adopted by stealth.^I

The apologist novel, one of whose aims was to discourage passing as a solution to the problem of the mulatto, echoes this disillusionment mainly through a number of female protagonists. One of these, for instance, deplores her profound pain and unhappiness in white society (PLB, 245); another regrets her past desire for freedom (PSG, 8); and a third declares that she "got ... sick going about with white people" (TIC, 270). Usually, this disappointment leads to another crisis,² as the white Negro passer, having lost a part of his former self in transit, has not been able to acquire a new one to replace it. One writer thinks that such a situation is characteristic of the "déraciné" (the uprooted) and that it is due to a lack of adjustment to an alien milieu.³

The maladjustment of the black half-caste within white society can be ascribed to at least three causes. The social refers to the individual's new system of group relations with diverse persons of the new group. In the middleclass novels now under study, these persons are mainly friends and loved ones of the opposite sex. There comes a time when these relations break down either through the fault of the new-comer or through that of his associates. Angela, whose influential friend, Mary, abandoned her after getting to know about her mixed parentage (PLB, 40-44) exemplifies the latter situation as well as Vera Manning whose origins were similarly discovered (TIC, 271). Moreover, when passing is founded upon the desire to marry a member of the white group in which one takes refuge from black society, the failure on the part of the passer to contract a permanent or growing amorous relationship, as in the case of Miss Murray, becomes a major source of disappointment:

> Life had somehow come to a standstill The fault, she decided, was bound up in her relationship with Roger She no longer

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had the old, heady desire to feel herself completely his For some reason he had lost his charm for her There was to be no permanence in the relationship and it was to lack the dignity, the graciousness of an affair of long standing, of sympathy, of mutual need ... (PLB, 225)

The second cause of maladjustment to life beyond racial boundaries may be termed psychological and refers to the role-playing on which the hybrid's new existence hinges. The lighter Negro, who takes advantage of the color ambiguity surrounding his physical appearance in order to gain admittance into the life of the 'upper' white caste, has to resort to make-believe, if he wants to avoid disclosure or discovery of his true identity. Hence, the necessity to play the part of a white male or female convincingly. In his pre-Renaissance novel about passing, James W. Johnson brings out the above association between role-playing and racial invisibility or secrecy:

> Up to this time, I had assumed and played my role as a white man with a certain degree of nonchalance, a carelessness as to the out-come, which made the whole thing more amusing to me than serious Now I began to doubt my ability to play the part. I watched her to see if she was scrutinizing me, to see if she was

looking for anything in me which made me differ from the others she knew.⁴

The necessity to indulge in make-believe is emphasized in the apologist novel by a vocabulary of disguise (PSS, 54; FHT, I66-67) and by delicate attitudinizing (BNM, 70; PSS, 18).

The form of make-believe that appears the most difficult to sustain for the fictional Negro posing as white touches on the lower-class stigma. I am here referring to the denigrating allusions and innuendoes regarding the black race to which the hybrid passing as white is subjected to continually and which become as common a stimulus 5 for social interaction or dialogue as the weather or politics in our contemporary society. Thus the light Negro passer, because of his assumed membership in the white group, must occasionally initiate that stimulus as well as respond to it adequately. To put it more clearly, sometimes he has to take up an anti-Negro stance in his white entourage and, at other times, he has to respond fittingly to that stance when initiated by native whites. In the heyday of racial bigotry that includes the Harlem Renaissance period, such a behavior functioned not only as a privilege, but also as a responsibility, of upper-caste status. In the following excerpt, the protagonist, Clare Kendry, is acting out

this responsibility to better mask her black identity from Jack Bellow:

Clare handed her husband his tea and laid her hand on his arm with an affectionate little gesture. Speaking with confidence as well as with amusement, she said: "My goodness, Jack! What difference would it make if, after all these years, you were to find out that I was one or two per cent coloured." Bellow put out his hand in a repudiating fling, definite and final. "Oh, no, Nig," he declared, "nothing like that with me. I know you're no nigger, so it's all right. You can get as black as you please as far as I'm concerned, since I know you're no nigger. I draw the line at that. No niggers in my family. Never have been and never will be (PSS, 68)

The novelist, Nella Larsen, as if to underscore the irony and risks of the situation, adds tautly: "A faint sense of danger brushed her, like the breath of a cold fog" (PSS, 69).⁶ This comment as well as the remarks of the "excolored man" before it testify to the high degree of resilience and courage needed to keep up with the pretence.

The third cause of maladjustment in the alien white territory is occupational as it relates to the hybrid's desire for economic advancement or professional training.

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The few cases of crossing-over for purely economic advantage arise mostly when the protagonists suffer dire material need -- though from well-to-do households and upper-class background -- after unexpected family disaster has left them homeless or destitute. Exemplifying this hybrid prototype are Anthony Cruz, whose father was killed in a biracial brawl (PLB, I42) and Mimi Daquin, who had to provide for her fatherless boy after the death of her own father had left her virtually on the streets (FHT, 151, 163). Moreover, the desire of the mixed-blood to catch hold of a white position or to aspire to a good one through academic training invariably runs aground or falters. The predicament of Helga Crane and Angela Murray provide good examples of this. The former sought in vain to become a Chicago librarian and later to obtain work at an employment agency, the hidden facts of her existence having made it impossible for her to get the necessary letters of support (QSD, 67, 70). The latter, an art student, failed to win a scholarship to Fontainebleau at the New York Academy, on account of her dubious origins; and thus was undermined her hope of making art a conduit to "gaiety and freedom" (PLB, 340).

The above three destabilizing factors affecting life beyond the color-line help create a social situation in the novel wherein the pursuit of normal, everyday activities becomes difficult, dangerous, if not impossible. For Angela Murray, for instance, life was not easy after she had lost all three of her friends -- Anthony, Rachel and Mary (PLB, 252). Then she felt a heavy loneliness descend upon her shoulders (PLB, 254). Besides, walking up the narrow path of disguise and pretense never ceases to cause tension and anxiety, as the passer endeavors to avoid falling into the booby-trap of denunciation -- by a member of the inner or outer group taking revenge for a past misdeed or wishing to protect the inviolability of upper-caste white life. The would-be painter, Angela Murray, was thus victimized by a vindictive white girl of her former school:

> She laughed spitefully "Well, she's coloured, though she wouldn't let you know. But I know. I went to school with her in North Philadelphia. And I tell you I wouldn't stay to pose for her not if you were to pay me ten times what I'm getting. Sitting there she was as good as a white girl." (PLB, 7I-72)

Miss Daquin, the unmarried mother, was similarly spited by someone of her own race who knew her past life in Atlanta:

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The eyes of Mrs. Plummer picked out Mimi's form as it appeared and disappeared. She was giving a complete, more than complete, account of Mimi and her life "You can't fool me. I can spot 'em a mile off. (FHT, 202)

Moreover, the tension and anxiety arising from this situation may sometimes erupt in premature self-disclosure, with the protagonist fitfully letting out what Nella Larsen has dubbed the "dark secret" (PSS, I33) -- the revelation of one's Negro affiliation. And this unexpected avowal may lead the individual to seriously question his dallying with white life (PLB, 287).

What is more, the difficulties and dangers encountered in everyday life, as a result of the above social, psychological and economic factors, may force the individual hybrid into a marginal existence⁷ in the alien society, where he ends up inhabiting a netherland of insecurity and uncertainty.⁸ It is this latter situation which obtains in the middle-class novel under study. Here, the soto-speak Negro option of existence becomes (again) attractive, as the protagonist tries to recapture that part of the racial self which he had suppressed or lost. In the ensuing part of this discussion, I will examine the various determinants of this attraction. One of the incentives which may induce the Negro passer to rejoin the black group is "ties to family and friends."⁹ Helping to portray this influence are Clare and Mimi. When alienation in white society had become unbearable, the first character decided to renew relations with her girl-friend, Irene (PSS, 44, 82), and the second, with her sister, Virginia, after a long period of mutual silence and neglect (PLB, I69, 259).

In addition, other ties linking the individual hybrid with his people may induce him to return to the racial fold. Such ties are particularly felt after the alienation has made him aware of the full extent and nature of his desertion. This awareness, as E. Franklin Frazier reports, ^{IO} is accompanied by a feeling of guilt or betrayal for which he may wish to make amends through racial reunion. Max Disher, the protagonist of the slapstick satire on passing, felt that urge: "Sometimes a slight feeling of regret that he had left his people would cross his mind" (BNM, 63). A strong impulse to return seems at work in two other novels: one heroine talks about "a yearning for contact with her own people" (FHT, 2I4) and, another, about an emerging "new tenderness" toward them (PSS, 88).

A more utilitarian reason for opting out of life in the outer group is the desire to cash in on one's newly-

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acquired experience or training among whites. Frazier again cites two examples of this third source of attraction to the black group: the case of a "prominent colored physician" and of a well-known ... businessman ... who had accumulated both capital and insight into white business practices."^{II} I have not uncovered any overt allusion to this form of economic incentive in any of the novels. Anthony Cross' apparent reference to it -- "those of us who have gained the front ranks in money and training" should turn our attention to "the unwashed, untutored herd" (PLB, 220) -- reads more like a call for racial altruism than one for profit-making.

The altruistic motif for returning, which has also been pointed out by a number of writers,^{I2} is very common in Harlem fiction. It is evident, for example, in Anthony's observation above as well as in Helga Crane's decision to work "in the vineyard of the Lord" among a "scattered primitive folk" (QSD, 263). The altruistic urge also signals the abandonment by the incumbent returnee of his "Uncle Tom" psychology for that of "race man,"^{I3} as he undoes himself of his strong dislike for the dark-colored majority. Moreover, the return of the mixed-blood as "race man" tends to offset (by its promise of material and social upliftment) the ill effects arising from the brain-drain hemorrhage (p. 275).

The "race man" psychology permeates even more the character of the near-white, whose return is mainly influenced by cultural, as opposed to, racial considerations. These, of course, center upon the functions of Negro folk-art -- dance, music, song and tale. As mentioned initially (pp. I23-24), these functions were defined by the writers of the folk and mixed novels as the life-blood or soul of the black people.

It has been suggested that these functions are uppermost among the five enumerated factors influencing a return to the racial homeland:

> Thus the Negro who does not pass, or one who does but subsequently returns to the Negro group, may feel that he is a member of, or returning to, as the case may be, a "more comfortable and enjoyable milieu" -- the Negro sub-culture.¹⁴

Also, the cultural incentive to return is based upon the better-life idea associated with the black lifestyle:

Probably most of those who "cross to the other side" remain in the white group, but thousands returning after a trial period have shown that life for them in the Negro community is more enjoyable and more comfortable.¹⁵ This overriding attraction exerted by the folk culture on would-be middle-class returnees is delightfully rendered in the following passage by R.S. Baker:

> At first he said he could hardly restrain his exultation, but after a time, although he said he talked and smoked with the white man, he began to be lonesome.

"It grew colder and colder," he said.

In the evening he sat on the upper deck and as he looked over the railing he could see, down below, the Negro passengers and deckhands talking and laughing. After a time, when it grew darker, they began to sing -the inimitable Negro songs.

"That finished me," he said. "I got up and went downstairs and took my place among them. I've been a Negro ever since."¹⁶

Noteworthy in this passage is the earthward motif. Thus the blacks who are dispensing the elixir of racial wellbeing are "down below"; and so to reach them the needy traveller must "go down." The reversing of Christian symbolism, here¹⁷ -- it recalls a similar manipulation in \underline{Cane}^{18} -- is repeated from time to time in the apologist novel: Bert (the singer of "Mammy" songs) was apparently no stranger when they turned from Seventh Avenue into a side street and alighted before a door guarded by a huge uniformed Negro. Down a narrow stair they went to a barred door ... (FHT, 292)

Entering the waiting door-way, they descended through a furtive, narrow passage, into a vast subterranean room ... (QSD, I28)

In precincts like the above, the retrieved Negro passer is shown renewing contact with the racial soul (pp. 172-73) like the unknown traveller just mentioned. Such benefits, dispensed by folk-art execution, are emphasized in these two passages:

> She was drugged, lifted, sustained, by the extraordinary music; blown out, ripped out by the joyous, wild murkey orchestra. (QSD, I29)

To her sitting there in a semi-darkness ... these songs were of peace and hope and faith and she knew the peace which so long had eluded her. (FHT, 299)

The foregoing discussion has shown that the "pull of the darker race,"¹⁹ as the manifold attraction to the Negro group is sometimes called, affects the disillusioned passer in more ways than one. One writer has expressed this fact thus: "the Negro genius is imprisoned in the Negro problem."²⁰ Adds another writer: "blackness imposes a common identity that prevails over all other identities and has inherent in it unique social pressures and role expectations."²¹ In <u>The Ex-colored Man</u>, the pre-Renaissance fictional study of passing, James W. Johnson symbolically depicts that multiple attraction, which affects many a black hybrid so diversely, through Shiny, a jet-black Negro (he stands for the race as a whole) and a one-time schoolmate of the nameless protagonist. The "sympathetic bond" (23), which had sealed their early friendship together, seemed torn asunder by their eventual separation, until they ran across each other several years later:

> We were standing leaning on the rail in front of a group of figures, more interested in what we had to say to each other ... when my attention became fixed upon a man who stood at my side studying his catalogue. It took me only an instant to recognize in him my old friend "Shine." My first impulse was to change my position at once But the noble part in me responded to the sound of his voice and I took his hand in a hearty grasp. (202)

Finally, I would like to make some observations regarding the above attraction to the folk culture, before embarking on the third and last chapter of this section, which seeks to analyze the fictional strategy whereby the apologist writer expresses his view of the radical solution to the American Negro problem of his lower-class counterpart.

The altruistic motive for racial re-integration, one of several discussed above, conveys an idea of heroism that is totally lacking in the cultural. By wanting to return to help his fellow race-men, the Negro hybrid takes on, and is entrusted with, the role of savior or redeemer. This suggestion, which clearly underlies my analysis of this motive above, has been taken to task by critics with lower-class or proletarian sympathies. Among objections to this suggestion in Renaissance criticism are Richard Wright's allusion to "prim and decorous ambassadors"(p. 3I) and Le Roi Jones' ironic reference to the "best and most intelligent of the Negroes."²²

The return of the hybrid to his original group also implies a capitulation to the folk culture, as Wayne Cooper's remark suggests:

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One of the chief results of the Renaissance was to force the Negro middle-class to reevaluate their relationship to the Negro masses.²³

Besides, this return appears like a vindication of the lower-class life ideal of the non-middle class novelist. And another remark, this time by McKay (in which he seems to associate the hybrid to a misguided son temporarily gone astray), tends to lend support to this view:

> And this I know to be a fact: Right here in New York there are children of mixed parentage When they come up against the great white city on the other side ... it was more than their Negroid souls could stand.²⁴

But, in the final analysis, the hybrid's return to the racial fold, as a result of the attraction dispensed by the folk culture, does not at all signify endorsement of the folk culture by the middle-class novelist. Rather, it represents an unsuccessful attempt on his part to accept that culture. The next chapter will focus on this fact. ^I Otto Klineberg, <u>Characteristics of the American</u> <u>Negro</u> (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1944), p. 304.

² I noted the first crisis on p. 269.

³ Everett V. Stonequist, <u>The Marginal Man: A Study</u> <u>in Personality and Culture Conflict</u> (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 6.

⁴ James W. Johnson, <u>The Autobiography of an Ex-</u> <u>Coloured Man</u> (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1928), pp. 199-200.

⁵ For a discussion of this and other related phenomena, see Robert E. Park, "Communication," <u>Race and Cultur</u>e (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 44 ff.

⁶ The analogy to cold temperatures in describing the inherent dangers of passing is frequent in literature of this kind. See, for example, Otto Klineberg, op. cit., p. 3II; Elmer A. Carter, "Crossing Over," <u>Opportunity</u>, 4 (Dec., 1926), 376.

⁷ For a discussion of this form of existence, see Robert E. Park, "The Marginal Man," op. cit., pp. 332-45; Everett V. Stonequist, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

⁸ See David A. Gerber, <u>Black Ohio and the Color-</u> <u>line, 1860-1915</u> (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 128.

⁹ James E. Conyers and T.H. Kennedy, "Negro

Passing: To Pass or Not to Pass," Phylon, 24, 3 (Fall, 1963), 222.

¹⁰ E. Franklin Frazier, <u>Black Bourgeoisie</u> (Glencoe: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1957), p. 166.

II Ibid., p. 169.

^{I2} See Otto Klineberg, op. cit., p. 318; James W. Johnson, op. cit., pp. 146-48; E.B. Reuter, <u>Race and</u> <u>Culture Contacts</u> (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1934), p. 83.

¹³ See Sidney Kronus' analysis of middle-class types, Daniel C. Thompson, <u>Sociology of the Black Exper-</u> <u>ience</u> (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974), pp. 220-21.

¹⁴ James E. Conyers and T.H. Kennedy, op. cit., p. 222.

¹⁵ G.E. Simpson and J.M. Yinger, <u>An Analysis of</u> <u>Prejudice and Discrimination: Racial and Cultural Minor-</u> ities (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1965), p. 380.

^{I6} Quoted in Otto Klineberg, op. cit., p. 3II.

¹⁷ In Christian mythology, subterranean descent, sometimes signifying Hell, is usually self-destructive. Here, the descent is rendered positively.

¹⁸See Max Dorsinville's analysis that may be applied to the above passage, in <u>Caliban Without Prosper</u>o:

Essay on Quebec and Black Literature (Ontario: Press Porcepic Erin's 1974), p. 49.

¹⁹ Edgar T. Thompson, <u>Race Relations and the Race</u> <u>Problem: A Definition and An Analysis</u> (Durham: Duke University Press, 1939), p. 258.

²⁰Gunnar Myrdal, <u>An American Dilemma</u> (New York: Harper and Rowe, Publishers, 1944), p. 28.

^{2I} Daniel C. Thompson, op. cit., p. 228.

²² See Hiroko Sato, "Under the Harlem Shadow," Arna Bontemps, <u>The Harlem Renaissance Remembered</u> (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1972), p. 80.

²³ Wayne Cooper, "Claude McKay and the New Negroes of the 1920's," <u>Phylon</u>, 25, 3 (1964), 305.

²⁴ Claude McKay, <u>A Long Way From Home</u> (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), p. 347.

PART THREE: RACIAL SELF-DEFINITION

Chapter 3: Rejection

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That a recrossing of the white color-line to rejoin the black community signifies but a vain effort on the part of the apologist writer to endorse the lowerclass formulation of a solution to the American Negro problem is evident in the subsequent behavior of the hybrid.

The actions of the returning mixed-blood disenchanted with life in the majority culture tend to fall into three more or less distinct patterns. In one of them, the individual finally and definitely accepts the ways of the subculture only after a protracted period during which he stealthily goes up and down the narrow stream of white and black life. Among the characters already mentioned, there are two (Mimi Daquin, Angela Murray) whose dichotomous lives fit into this pattern. Before putting an end to their successive attempts to penetrate the confines of white life, these heroines had made several forays into the low-life milieu. For Angela Murray, to cite but one example, the latter is represented by Maude's beauty parlor on New York's I36th street. There, it is reported, she "would accompany the girls," sitting "through the long process," and later taking "off for the backwoods," after promising "never to forget Harlem" (PLB, 328-29).

In the second pattern of behavior figure characters who, unlike the preceding ones, are continually on the run. That is, their lives do not settle in either racial group (the Negro or the white) for any sizable length of time, but shuttle persistently between them. Among those adopting this rootless mode of existence were Clare Kendry, who visited Harlem each time her husband, John Bellow, was out on business (PSS, I47); Albert Hamond, who "used to be forever haunting" the Seventh and Lenox avenues, and the dancing places (PSS, 96); and Todd James, whose white wife was not able to prevent him from answering "the repeated call of Harlem" (FHT, 200).

The characters in the third behavioral pattern both resemble and differ from those we have so far examined. On the one hand, they are like the preceding in that existence on the borderline of white life (passing) is accompanied by the same <u>va-et-vient</u> movement between the two racial groups. On the other hand, they are unlike the characters described above, as their pendulum-like life-style does not persist indefinitely, nor does it end in final or permanent reunion with the black subculture. For, after a trial period, these third-type protagonists sever all ties with the folk culture and re-enter white life -- to be exact, only a pseudo form of it (pp. 285-86) -- never to return back again. The behavior of Helga Crane is a good example of this. S.P. Fullinwider sums it up in this way:

Her first flight was to Harlem to be "among her own," but it was no good; she was soon hating the dark faces around her She escaped from the dark faces Then back to Harlem, the world of wild color, of dark laughter, to glory in her primitivism But primitivism was a delusion and Helga found no escape in it The final attempt to escape ended in her ripping away all illusion.^I

This occurred when the heroine retreated from Alabama lowlife -- "the quagmire into which she had engulfed herself" (QSD, 296). Similarly, Max Disher went to and fro black and white life; then rejected the one for the other:

> Unaccountably, he felt at home here among these black folk. Their jests, scraps of con-

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versation and lusty laughter all seemed like heavenly music. Momentarily he felt a disposition to stay among them But, then, he suddenly realized with just a tiny trace of remorse that he must seek other pastures He was white now. (BNM, 46)

Sometimes a slight feeling of regret that he had left his people forever would cross his mind but it fled before painful memories of past experience in his home town. (BNM, 63)

Thus, as the foregoing modes of existence indicate, the initial return to the black subculture by the disenchanted white Negro is never permanent or lasting at first and may be followed by outright separation from it.

Significantly, the above types of hybrid behavior do not seem to have a wide basis in contemporary Renaissance society. This is because separation as a social phenomenon never existed or did so on an insignificantly small scale. Hence, the apparent absence of any mention of it in the literature of the times. As for the related phenomenon of cultural return (upon which the above three patterns of hybrid behavior also hinge), it had but a minimal incidence in Negro life of the I920s. This is no doubt why Wallace Thurman has one of his characters say:

> My dear, you've been reading novels. Thousands of Negroes cross the line and I assure

you that few ... feel that fictional urge to rejoin their own kind ... Negroes who can pass are so glad to get away ... ²

That racial recrossing or return was more a reality of Negro Harlem art than of life is also supported by Robert Bone, who describes it as an "invariable outcome in fiction, if not in fact."³

The absence, on the one hand, of sociological evidence and the smallness of it, on the other, lead us to question the apologist writer's intention in the portrayal of the above types of hybrid behavior. In other words, why did he (or she), consciously or otherwise, compound the factual problem of racial crossing (passing) with the much rarer phenomenon of return and of rejection? In my view, this quasi imaginary expansion of the passing problem has its raison d'être, as Sterling Brown argues, in the Renaissance need to subscribe to "race flattery ... and idealism."⁴ It is used additionally as a device to dramatize disagreement with the folk ideal.

The folk ideal, as we have seen in the first two sections of the inquiry into lower-class life, constitutes a radical solution to the American race problem. To better comprehend the apologist view of it, a further study of the phenomenon of rejection (through which that view is articulated) is imperative.

The rejection of the black subculture, whether intermittent or lasting, as in the above three patterns of behavior, points to another crisis in the life of the returning near white. For just as he was unable to achieve his social goals in the white community, so he found lower-class life wanting in a number of respects. I have already mentioned how his inability to maintain permanent white contacts or relationships and otherwise penetrate the majority culture had forced him into a marginal position within its limits (p. 292). This marginality, moreover, is reinforced by the rejection of low-life, as the protagonist, partly or totally disillusioned by that life, becomes sooner or later a rootless wanderer, in continual transit between the two cultures. That such a high mobility is characteristic of the marginal man has been further suggested by Robert E. Park, who argues that the individual, "not quite at home in either of the two worlds, tends to live on the margin of both."⁵ E. Franklin Frazier attributes this behavior to the peasant and genteel make-up of the average hybrid personality,⁶ while W.E.

B. DuBois, himself a mixed-blood, poignantly describes it as a social burden:

> One feels his two-ness, -- two souls, two thoughts, two unrecognized strivings; two warring ideals in one ... body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.⁷

The foregoing split-personality and divided-self explanation for the rejection of the minority black culture is but a partially valid one when applied to the hybrid cases hitherto examined. Thus it could be applied to and account for only some of Helga Crane's vacillations. As will become evident in this continuing discussion, the hybrid's dual nature is not the principal factor for the rejective types of behavior that I have described. This fact naturally leads to the consideration of a more important, because more dramatized, cause for them. Pointing to that cause are such words as "quagmire" and "painful memories" (pp. 306-07) that are used by returnees to articulate their feelings of disillusionment toward the folk culture.

Such feelings tend to suggest an apparent malaise within the fabric of the fictionalized folk culture. In order to circumscribe this malaise -- in my view, it is the main cause for the hybrid's partial or total withdrawal from lower-class life in the novel -- we will have to re-

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examine the folk and mixed novels where this malaise finds its fullest dramatization.

Creating this malaise are the apparent shortcomings or limitations of the folk culture. I am here referring to hedonism -- immoderate eating, drinking and sexual indulgence. These excesses, which constitute a by-product of folk-art involvement, were examined in our discussion of the hedonistic search (pp. 157-61) that featured characters like Latnah and Malty (Banjo), Little Augie (God Sends Sunday) and Jake (Home to Harlem). Another factor motivating these excesses is the libertinism issuing from religious intolerance or disbelief -a trade-mark, like artistic enjoyment, in the lives of these characters. In addition, the malaise which tends to undermine the quality of life in these novels also arises from work apathy. I have already shown how this apathy together with irreligion usually accompany the anti-American feeling that is so rampant in the radical Harlem novels.

The combined influence of the above three social habits -- epicurism, sensuality and sloth -- tends to tarnish the blazon of lower-class life in the novels, as it creates an unwholesome environment where the racial need

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to save oneself spiritually in white America, through involvement in folk-art as artist or participant (pp.180-81), is not subordinated or made complementary to the more basic and larger human need to sustain oneself through honest, remunerative labor or work.

Epitomizing the above habits in these novels is the "sweetman," the Renaissance version of the parasitic fictional type. This individual, whose malingering and inveterate dislike for organized labor have been mentioned (p. 24I), pursues a wholly dependent life-style that makes low-life appear even more reprehensible. Undoubtedly, his prototype is Anatole Longfellow, a minor character in Carl Vechten's black novel, <u>Nigger Heaven</u>.⁸ The "sweetman" has a lot in common with Sherley A. William's streetman, the quick-witted, underdog bully, who forever pretends to be what he is not.⁹

Highlighting the character of the "sweetman" are a number of offensive social traits observable in Vechten's archetypal model. One of these is a slick, flamboyant exterior, as that of Braxton, "the reddish-brown aristocrat" (BTB, IIO), who used to compare himself to Rudolph Valentino, the "cinema Sheik" (BTB, I64). Another is an excessive indulgence in alcohol that ended in sudden

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collapse or death. For instance, it is reported that Alva, Braxton's heterosexual roommate, had turned a deaf ear on his doctor's stipulation to stop drinking liquor beverages (BTB, 202) and, as a result, was one day carried back home on a stretcher from a saloon hide-out (BTB, 2I2). A third trait is a happy-go-lucky temperament, a prominent characteristic of the pre-Renaissance black novels.^{IO} Exemplifying this trait is Strawberry Lips, a typical stage Negro and minstrel coon (HTH, 63-64). A fourth is an almost uncanny capacity to attract and live off womankind, like Jerco Jones who, after Miss Rosalind's death, preferred to take his own life than face the "ignominy" of self-support:

> Jerco had cut his throat and was lying against the bowl of the water-closet. Some empty coke papers were on the floor. And he sprawled there like a great black bear in the mass of blood. (HTH, 262)

Yet another trait of the "sweetman" is a virtually uncontrollable tendency to engage in verbal and physical disputes each time his self-esteem or social pre-eminence is threatened or attacked (GSS, 87) and his feminine supporters run the risk of being pilfered away by rivals (BJO, I67) in the subterranean world of gambling and sex. The above traits, which are, as it were, the privilege of the "sweetman," also permeate the social behavior of other Renaissance character types. This fact, which has been suggested in previous discussions, will become self-evident in the ensuing criticism of these traits that mare lower-class life and provoke partial or permanent rejection of the folk culture by the hybrid returnee.

Strange enough, part of this criticism of the subculture permeates the Marlem School novel itself. Formulating it are a number of McKay's characters: Jake and Banjo, the foremost veterans of low-life; Ray and Squire Gensir, its longtime sympathizers and intellectual advocates. The disgust motif, through which their criticism finds expression, has been alluded to by several writers. Sherley A. Williams, for instance, declares that Jake, the natural man, is "often disgusted by what he sees around him"^{II} and H.M. Gloster recognizes in Ray "a sensitive and intelligent Negro who has a distaste and sometimes aversion for ... low life."^{I2}

Although Banjo, the folk artist, pursues a "loose, instinctive way of living" (BJO, 3I9), he nevertheless feels that life in the Ditch -- the European black cul-

tural outpost -- is being defaced by the utter dependence on panhandling. The constant reproof (BJO, 39-40, 42) that he addresses to his fellow beach boys, the perpetrators of this foul habit, occasionally dampens his relations with them, creating sporadic bouts of estrangement, which remarks like "he went alone" (BJO, 2I) or "he was standing a little way off" (BJO, 4I) tend to capture.

That unpleasant feeling is even more felt by Ray, the black Haitian expatriate who, as poet and freelance philosopher, is not a member of the lower-class, but who, nevertheless, espouses and encourages the folk ideal, because of its proven emotional and spiritual appeal. ' He therefore celebrates the beach boys' way of life, describing it as a microcosm of "how to live [and] how to exist as a black boy in a white world" (BJO, 322). Yet he manifests certain reservations or misgivings vis-à-vis this kind of life which, ironically, can make Alva-like victims (pp. 312-13) of his two companions, Jake (HTH, 217-18) and Banjo (BJO, 244-45), and can unexpectedly turn into ugliness the beauty of a fine evening:

> The interior of the house gave Ray a shock. It looked so much like a comfortable boarding house where everybody was cheerful and nice. ... At the piano a yellow youth was playing blues ... Ray suddenly felt a violent dislike

for the atmosphere. At first he had liked the general friendliness and warmth and naturalness of it. But something about the presence of the little boy there and his being the women's son disgusted him. It was just an instinctive intolerant feeling.... (HTH, 191-92)

Ray's attitude in the lower-class world that he adopted is thus strangely reminiscent of Conrad's Marlowe and Fitzgerald's Nick, both of whom were attracted to, and repulsed by, life in their respective environments.¹³

Another character of Ray's intellectual stature similarly moved by black lower-class life is Squire Gensir, the old English naturalist who, in what Alain Locke has termed "the provincial duel between peasant paganism and middle-class Puritanism,"^{I4} chose to side with the former. During his extended stay in the Jamaican village of Banana Bottom, he maintained close contacts with the peasants, visiting their tropical fields and eating with them under their thatched roofs, and turning the native folklore -- songs, jammas and shey sheys -- into writing (BNB, 7I). Yet, like Ray in Marseille and in Harlem, his intellectual and moral probity (BNB, 308-09) only "tolerated" their manners (BNB, 82) and was "repelled" by the endemic "robust and purely animal sexuality" (BNB, I28-29).

The undesirable aspects of the subculture of the Harlem School novelists that have just been exposed appear even more objectionable to the black hybrid. Unlike the Rays and Gensirs, whose lower-class association was deliberate and free, the Negro hybrid embraced black life only after his forced exclusion from white life had made the former attractive. Hence his association with black life was, naturally, less a matter of the mind and the heart, and thus was more likely to be affected subsequently by the limitations of that life. This likelihood, moreover, was increased by the returning hybrid's middle-class upbringing. As I have indicated in the present section of this inquiry and before, the Negro institutions of learning had made the capitalistic virtues, together with faith in the American Dream fantasy, their sole objective. As a result, the hatred of capitalism, which finds expression in the subculture in "carpe diemism" and sloth, was totally unacceptable to the upwardly mobile and ambitious near-white protagonist. N.I. Huggins expresses this fact by saying of Nella Larsen, the apologist writer, that she resented lower-class life because of its "avoidance of experiment, chance-taking and daring."¹⁵

The hedonistic excesses, too, which complement the above social ills, must have appeared more reprehensible to the half-caste attempting to re-embrace black life than it was to the Rays and Gensirs. On the one hand, the latters' involvement with that life followed their dissatisfaction with Puritan morality with which their consciences had been overfed. I have already noted Ray's ravings against "the false morality of the Christians" (p. 215). As for the Squire, Ray's intellectual counterpart, he was a selfproclaimed atheist (BNB, 91), who used to condemn the influence of the local clergy on the Jamaican peasantry (BNB, On the other hand, the former's association with 202). black life was never divorced from his faith in conventional Protestant morality with which he became acquainted, as I have mentioned earlier, in the religiously-oriented, missionary schools of the North and South. Granting this, it is not difficult to understand Max Disher's denunciation of the "inferior morality of Negroes" (BNM, 63) and Helga Crane's feeling of "absolute horror" of the black man's life (QSD, 181), which finally dissuaded Angela Murray from making a "frank avowal of her race" (PLB, 335).

Finally, looking back at the three discussions comprising this last section of this study, one can discern a fictional strategy whereby the middle-class or apologist writer of the Harlem Renaissance seeks to discount or dissociate himself from the racial solution of his lower-class counterpart. Thus, recrossing the white colorline to rejoin the black community signifies not only the repudiation and disavowal of the Aframerican desire to be white. It also represents a willingness, if not a strong desire, of the Negro bourgeoisie in general to embrace or sympathize with the spiritual values issuing from Negro folk-life. But, more importantly, the subsequent rejection (partial or permanent) of the latter suggests a profound disagreement with the Harlem School writer's formulation of these values.

NOTES TO PART THREE/CHAPTER THREE

^I S.P. Fullinwider, "The Renaissance in Literature," <u>The Mind and Mood of Black America</u> (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1969), pp. 152-53.

² Sterling Brown, "The Urban Scene," <u>The Negro in</u> <u>American Fiction</u> (Washington: The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1937), p. 144.

³ Robert A. Bone, <u>The Negro Novel in America</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 98.

⁴ Sterling Brown, op. cit., p. 145.

⁵ See Robert E. Park, <u>Race and Culture</u> (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 51, 112.

⁶ E. Franklin Frazier, <u>The Negro Church in America</u> (Liverpool: University Press, 1964), p. 77.

⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, "Of our Spiritual Strivings," <u>Souls of Black Folk</u> (New York: Allograph Press Corporation, 1903), p. 3.

^o See Eugene Arden, "The Early Harlem Novel," S.L. Gross and J.E. Hardy, eds., <u>Images of the Negro in Ameri-</u> <u>can Literature</u> (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 109; Gilbert Osofsky, "The New Negro and Harlem Discovered," <u>Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto</u> (New York and Evanston: Harper and Rowe, 1966), pp. 185-86.

⁹ Sherley A. Williams, <u>Give Birth to Brightness:</u> <u>A Thematic Study in New Black Literature</u> (New York: The Dial Press, 1972), pp. 281-82. ¹⁰ Middle class non-fiction writers of the Renaissance have sternly rebuked the Harlem Schoolers for perpetuating this stereotype. The charge that their contemporary version of the latter is race flattering has been interpreted by Sherley A. Williams as a case of inverted symbolism. See, ibid., p. 39.

II See ibid., p. 41.

^{I2} H.M. Gloster, "Fiction of the Negro Renaissance," <u>Negro Voices in American Literature</u> (New York: Russel and Russel, 1965), p. 164.

¹³ Ray's aloof and stand-offish attitude toward folk-life has been interpreted mainly in terms of emotional atrophe caused by an alienated middle-class upbringing. But this explanation only accounts partly for his behavior, as I have just shown. For an analysis of the latter, see N.I. Huggins, "Art: The Ethnic Province," <u>Harlem Renaissance</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 236-37; Robert A. Bone, "The Harlem School," op. cit., pp. 71-72.

^{I4} G.M. Gloster, "Fiction of the Negro Renaissance," op. cit., pp. 183-84.

¹⁵ N. I. Huggins, "The Black Identity," op. cit., p. 161.

CONCLUSION

Just as the reading of the Harlem Renaissance novels conveys a sense of fluid movement (p. 171), so the discussions set forth in the thesis exude dynamism. The latter derives from the multiple social conflicts involved. By social conflict is meant "a struggle over values and claims to ... status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals."^I

The analysis of lower-class life has revealed three broad areas of conflict that involve blacks and whites in American society, stratification within the former as well as racial, artistic and cultural ideologies. In conclusion, I would like to review these conflicts, pointing out, in particular, the way in which they helped bring about the three main findings of this study: the oral tradition of the early Negro, the folk ideal of the Harlem School writer and the rejective stance of his apologist counterpart.

To begin with, I showed how the folk-arts of black Americans arose out of the conflict that set the white plantation plutocracy and the population of slaves and freedmen against each other in Colonial, Civil War and Reconstruction days. We remarked how this conflict was economic. social and physical, as it involved the exploitation of human labor in the fields, mills and factories of America as well as the rigid curtailment or the denial of participatory rights in the white majority culture together with sporadic efforts of a violent kind to flee from these forms of oppression. However, most slaves and their progeny eschewed such efforts through the development of residual African lore. The creation of a large, diversified body of tales, songs, music and dance acted like a Ventilsitten² or safety-valve for the channelling of the tensions, frustrations and bitterness arising from a circumscribed role and a diminished status. As I pointed out, this purely artistic opposition to white oppression has been a great advantage generally to the burgeoning Negro community and a resolution of a sort to the continuing white-black confrontation of the early years. This is evident in the somewhat pleasant

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and inoffensive effects of that opposition, in the psychic rehabilitation that it achieved and in the quality and popularity of some folk-art productions.

As with the oral tradition, a number of conflicts helped forge the ideal of folk-life. Advanced by the younger writers of the Harlem School, this ideal proposed a radical solution to the American race problem in the wake of a series of abortive strategies. Among the conflicts that had a major impact on its formulation were the recent developments in white-black antagonism and class opposition within the Negro group itself. The antagonism culminated in sporadic race riots throughout the pre-Renaissance era and in the abysmal disappointment of the post-World War I years. Class opposition, which grew out of the division of blacks into house-servants and field-slaves, widened steadily, as increased color differentiation, economic wealth and opportunities swelled the ranks of the small middle-class. This opposition, as we have seen, led to the formation of a separate class within and beyond the limits of Negro life that reportedly courted as well as coveted the virtues of American capitalism, often to the exclusion or in defiance of black cultural values issuing from the tradition of folk-life.

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As a result, the members of this select class were for the most part regarded as symbols, if not as <u>de</u> <u>facto</u> agents, of white oppression against the numerically more important underprivileged mass of Negroes. This negative view of the Negro middle-class was, in part, responsible for the resurgence of sympathy for the latter among the folk-oriented intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance. Their unreserved adoption of the lowerclass subject-matter for black fiction -- in the literary controversy of the early I920s -- is but one expression of that sympathy.

But the debate over the fictional merits of the lower-class and of the middle-class theme was not the only ideological conflict that (together with unsatisfactory race and class relations) helped bring about the formulation of the folk ideal. Also contributing to the latter, as I argued, was the racial debate over the biological and social status or position of the darker races in human evolution. This debate pitted supremacist theoreticians against their egalitarian counterparts up to and throughout the Renaissance. I have demonstrated how the twin notions of Negro specificity

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and artistic hegemony (arising from the elder black writers' disapproving response to the latter debate) were made the bedrock of the folk ideal.

The third ideological conflict to affect the ideal of folk-life was shown to be that waged by a privileged group of white intellectuals against current American ethical and artistic norms. Such a conflict, in which their black radical counterparts took part, attempted to revolutionize American culture by reinstating human sensibility -- atrophied by Protestant strictures and the genteel New England tradition -- in art and everyday life. This cultural conflict, which drew from the emotional resources of the black oral tradition, gave moral, aesthetic and economic support to contemporary forms of folk expression. In this way, it made the fictional embodiment of the latter more acceptable to a portion of the white reading public and press, thus contributing to the short-lived popularity and financial success of Harlem Renaissance fiction.

The third finding of the thesis, the rejective response to the ideal of lower-class life by middle-class apologist writers is, like the preceding, the outcome

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of yet another set of conflicts. As I have demonstrated, the underlying factor in these conflicts are the opposing values of the Negro lower-class and the middle-class. The folk ideal, by setting itself against the various aspects of American life (its religious, educational and economic institutions), alienated within the novel the aspiring class of mulattoes that had embraced that life. Moreover, the hedonistic idea, which is part and parcel of the folk ideal and which seeks to supplant the void created by excluding from the latter the Protestant work ethic and the American Dream.stimulus, bred indolence, apathy and overindulgence that acted like a damper on middleclass efforts to embrace or sympathize with the lowerclass.

Thus, while the radical Harlem novelists, the artisans of the folk ideal, may elicit our praise for the affirmation of their group's traditional values, the essence of its racial identity, they have nevertheless failed to carry it through in a way that would be amenable to across-the-board acceptance. If one of the criteria of authentic art is the universality of its appeal, as Lucacs suggests (p.I2), then there is some truth in this: "A satisfactory workable image for the American Negro never emerged from the quest of these writers."³. ^I Lewis A. Coser, <u>The Functions of Social Conflict</u> (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1964), p. 8.

² <u>Ibid</u>., p. 4I.

³ Francis R. Kelly, "The Harlem Literary Renaissance," <u>The North American Review</u>, vol. 253 (May-June, 1968), <u>34</u>. Novels: List of abbreviated titles

God Sends Sunday, GSS One Way To Heaven, OWH There is Confusion, TIC Plum Bun, PLB The Chinaberry Tree, CBT The Walls of Jericho, WOJ The Conjure-Man Dies, CMD Not Without Laughter, NWL Passing, PSG Quicksand, QSD Home to Harlem, HTH Banjo, BJO Banana Bottom, BNB Black No More, BNM The Blacker the Berry, BTB Infants of the Spring, IOS Cane, CNE The Fire in the Flint, FIF Flight, FHT

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