

“Signifying the American Experience”:
An Intraracial Study of Political and Protest Literature
in the African American Canon From the Reconstruction to *Native Son*

by
Carmine Somma

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the
English
Program

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

December, 2006

“Signifying the American Experience”:

An Intraracial Study of Political and Protest Literature

In the African American Canon from the Reconstruction to *Native Son*

Carmine Somma


I hereby release this thesis to the public. I understand that this thesis will be made available from the OhioLINK ETD Center and the Maag Library Circulation Desk for public access. I also authorize the University or other individuals to make copies of this thesis as needed for scholarly research.

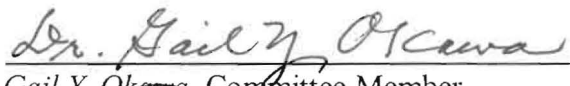
Signature:

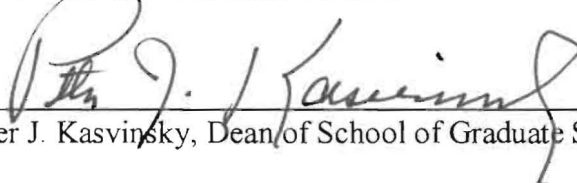

Carmine Somma, Student 12/13/06
Date

Approvals:


Dolores V. Sisco, Thesis Advisor 12/13/06
Date


Linda J. Strom, Committee Member 12/13/06
Date


Gail Y. Okawa, Committee Member 12/13/06
Date


Peter J. Kasvinsky, Dean of School of Graduate Studies & Research 12/14/06
Date

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to look at the African American political writings and protest literature from the failure of Reconstruction 1877 to the publication of *Native Son* in 1940. This study analyzes in depth black activist reaction to white oppression in the aftermath of Reconstruction, an era also known as the “nadir of race relations.” The failure of Reconstruction, which is symbolized by the end of black political representation and racial violence, continued a fundamental discussion within black leadership which led to the creation of organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, whose primary aims were the end of legal segregation and the push for political equality. By looking at the works of African American poets such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, Countee Cullen, and Claude McKay we will see how African American literature reflects the struggle for civil rights from the last two decades of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. In this framework Richard Wright’s *Native Son* acquires a fundamental role which testifies to an important formal change in the African American literature canon because it fueled the Black Arts movement of late 1960’s as a blueprint for art as political propaganda.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Dolores Sisco my thesis advisor. Dr. Sisco, with her knowledge and criticism of the field, has been able to turn a rough idea into a draft, and then a draft into a master dissertation. Special thank goes to Linda Strom who open my eyes on African American Studies, and introduce me to dr. Sisco. Dr. Strom supported me spiritually in these two years and has always been by my side. I would like also to acknowledge another member of my thesis committee: dr. Gail Okawa.

Nothing had been possible without the support of the people of my former university and in particular of professor Antonella D'Amelia, former chairwoman of the Foreign Languages department in the University of Salerno. Among the people I met during my undergraduate years in Salerno, two of them have changed my academic career and now I would like to acknowledge both of them: professor Michele Bottalico, a great scholar, and my mentor dr. Sante Farnararo.

I spent two wonderful years in this university, and Youngstown State University has been the right place to improve as a student and as a man. I enjoyed all classes of my master, and those in which I taught Italian. Everything I have done so far is all because I spent these last two years in a wonderful community, and now that is time to leave I feel very sad. I would like to acknowledge the people of the Foreign Languages and English departments. Of the Foreign Languages department a special thank goes to dr. John Sarkissian, who introduce me to Richard Wright's works, and dr. Iole Checcone my American mom. Among the people of the English department I would like to acknowledge dr. Salvatore Attardo, a great scholar, refined intellectual, and a friend.

Last but not least I would like to acknowledge my family and my friends (both Italian and American). My parents, Eugenio and Angelina, who encouraged me since the beginning, my brother Raffaele and my sister Mariarosaria. All my relatives, in particular grandpa and grandma, my cousins Francesco and Giusy. My friends: Franco, Claudio, Giulio, Annalisa, Armando, Raffaella, Ilaria, Maddalena, Mary Ann, Attilio, Laura, Larissa, Elisa, Ron, and Terry. I love you all! This quote is for you all: we must never be afraid to go too far, for success lies just beyond!

CONTENTS

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Chapter One</i> Black Activism in the Aftermath of The Reconstruction	1
<i>Chapter Two</i> United States or Africa? Black Activists' Solutions for Negro Emancipation	21
<i>Chapter Three</i> Black Literary Activism in The Great Depression: <i>Native Son</i>	46
<i>Conclusion</i>	82
<i>Works Cited</i>	86

What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence, not pity,
not sympathy, but simply justice!
Frederick Douglass - "What the Black Man Wants"

Chapter I

Black Activism in The Aftermath of The Reconstruction

The most significant changes of Reconstruction legislation were three Constitutional amendments: the Thirteenth, the Fourteenth, and the Fifteenth Amendment. The Thirteenth Amendment was passed in 1864-1865 and abolished slavery. It stated in the first section that "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction"; in the second section it also stated that "Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." Soon after, another important amendment was ratified by the congress, the Fourteenth in 1866-1868.

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

This amendment to the Constitution recognized for the first time in American history the citizenship of blacks which changed their status from property to full American citizens. The last modification to the Constitution which completed the citizenship of blacks in the United States of America was given later in 1870. In this year the Congress ratified the Fifteenth Amendment which gave to blacks the right to vote. In

fact, the Fifteenth Amendment stated that “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous conditions of servitude.” This last modification to the Constitution gave blacks an important tool: the opportunity to directly influence society. Thanks to this amendment, blacks elected and sent their representatives to Congress in the elections of 1868 under the Republican Party. No black was elected governor, but black leaders, such as Blanche K. Bruce and Hiram Revels, represented their state (Mississippi) in the United States Senate.

The right to vote was a great conquest for blacks. Before the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendments by the Congress, universal suffrage was discussed in many places by Frederick Douglass. In the essay “What the Black Man Wants” Douglass argues that the deprivation of the ballot meant that blacks were, legally, aliens and not citizens of the United States; Douglass contends:

I want the elective franchise, for one, as a colored man, because ours is a peculiar government, based upon a peculiar idea, and that idea is universal suffrage. If I was in a monarchical government, or an autocratic or aristocratic government, where the few bore rule and the many were subject, there would be no special stigma resting upon me, because I did not exercise the elective franchise. It would do me no great violence. Mingling with the mass I should partake of the strength of the mass; I should be supported by the mass, and I should have the same incentives to endeavor with the mass of my fellow-men; it would be no particular burden, no particular deprivation; but here where universal suffrage is the rule, where that is the fundamental idea of the Government, to rule us out is to make us an exception, to brand us with

the stigma of inferiority, and to invite to our heads the missiles of those about us; therefore, I want the franchise for the black man. (161)

Douglass points out that the vote was a right which could not be denied to blacks, because they lived in a republic. To blacks as electors would also mean to deny them as American citizens, to consider them an exception, as aliens in a foreign country. In another place in this essay, Douglass underlines that the right to vote is important for educating his people:

Men are so constituted that they derive their conviction of their own possibilities largely by the estimate formed of them by others. If nothing is expected of a people, that people will find it difficult to contradict that expectation. By depriving us of the suffrage, you affirm our incapacity to form an intelligent judgement respecting public men and measures; you declare before the world that we are unfit to exercise the elective franchise, and by this means lead us to undervalue ourselves. (160)

The right to vote not only made blacks American citizens, but it strengthened their self-esteem; black convictions grew after the government extended suffrage to them. The elective franchise allowed blacks to be active participants of American political and social life. Blacks no longer saw themselves subordinate to whites. Many of them ran for public offices which were traditionally occupied only by whites. Additionally, others pushed themselves further and created businesses or got an education. The Fifteenth Amendment gave blacks something more than the right to vote; it gave them self-confidence.

Although the Constitutional amendments had important effects, they were not ratified uniformly throughout the country. This situation occurred because the states

of the former confederacy did not re-enter into the Union at the same time. They **had** to sign the amendments before they could be admitted again into the Union. Tennessee was the first state to be admitted to the Union in 1866. Two years later, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Louisiana, Florida and Arkansas joined the Union. And, in 1870, Virginia, Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas joined the Union.

During Reconstruction, blacks organized politically around several personalities. Most of them were educated in Europe or in the North, but there were also some self-educated black leaders. Among the prominent black leaders of the time were Francis L. Cardozo, a minister who became a member of Congress; J.J. Wright who became a state Supreme Court justice; Congressman James Rapier, whose white father sent him to study in Canada, and Henry M. Turner. These politicians did not seek revenge against whites, but were more inclined toward conciliation with whites. Black leaders occupied important public offices during Reconstruction. Historian John Hope Franklin maintains in his book *Reconstruction* that black political leaders became influential during Reconstruction because of their work in public office; however, “Negroes were not in control of state governments at any time anywhere in the South. They held public office and, at times, played important parts in the public life of their respective state” (133). Furthermore, “it would be stretching a point to say that their roles were dominant, and it would be hopelessly distorting the picture to suggest that they ruled the South” (133). It was in the state of South Carolina that they had the greatest numerical strength, and, in fact, in the first legislature there were eighty-seven blacks and forty whites.

Together with the Constitutional amendments, the government made other interventions in order to help people who came out of slavery. Among those interventions, one of the most important was the Freedman’s Bureau, directed by

General Oliver O. Howard. The bureau was given enormous responsibilities. It was responsible for helping freed men obtain land, gain an education, negotiate labor contracts with white planters, provide food, medical care, and also settle legal and criminal disputes involving black and white people. Through the Freedman's Bureau, thousands of northerners came south to set up schools, cooperatives, and train the freed slaves in the rituals of citizenship. Many schools which were built during this period became independent colleges, and are now designated as Historian Black Colleges. Between the 1866 and 1868 schools such as Fisk, Atlanta, Morehouse, and Howard were founded. These schools were important institutions because they trained the future black leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. For instance, Morehouse College, which is in Atlanta, was the school from which Martin Luther King graduated.

The Aftermath of Reconstruction

Even though the Republican government tried to build an egalitarian society in the South, the reality was different. African American daily life did not change during Reconstruction. In fact, as happened during slavery, blacks continued to work on farms often for the same people who had once owned them. An example of how blacks were once again under the authority of whites was sharecropping. Sharecropping was a labor contract between laborers and landowners (whites), in which the landowners paid laborers with part of the crop. The contracts lasted a year and the laborer could not quit or strike. Many landowners demanded that the laborers work the fields in gangs that created a condition of involuntary servitude banned by the Thirteenth Amendment. Again in his essay "What the Black Man Wants" Frederick Douglass underlines that freedom also means the right to choose one's own employment: "when any individual or combination of individuals undertakes to decide for any man when he shall work, at what he shall work, and for what he shall

work, he or they practically reduce him to slavery.” Unfortunately, by 1866 many bureau officials tried to force freedmen to sign sharecropping contracts, and those who did not sign them could be arrested. Additionally, another form of slavery was created during this time: the convict-lease system. The convict-lease system was a system of penal slavery instituted in the South in 1863. Convict leasing involved leasing out prisoners to private companies that paid the state a certain fee. The convicts worked for the companies during the day outside the prison and returned to their cells at night.

In 1877, Democrats withdrew troops and federal protection from the South. White racist organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, began a brutal wave of discrimination under the slogan of white redemption. Southerners had no intention of accommodating themselves to federal control or Reconstruction. The historian John Hope Franklin defined this period as the counter reconstruction; he claims that “the reaction of former confederates was violent and bloody” (*Reconstruction* 152). Targets of white southerners were organizations that helped blacks during Reconstruction, for example the Union League, Heroes of America in North Carolina, and the Lincoln Brotherhood. Those institutions were attacked by the KKK, and many of their members were killed because they taught blacks self-respect. In 1870 in North Carolina the Klan was responsible for two hundred and sixty outrages, including seven murders, and the whipping of seventy-two whites and one hundred forty-one blacks (Franklin 157). In *Reconstruction* Franklin points out that “the Ku Klux Klan was not only a group born to overthrow Reconstruction, but it was the reflection of southern life” (156). In order to forbid the vote to blacks, whites used poll taxes, or literary tests, and those who did not want to take literary test were beaten or lynched. Many black political leaders were forced to leave their public office by force. This

was the case of Alpeoria Bradley who was expelled by the senate on the grounds of an alleged criminal conviction in New York. Through the Ku Klux Klan, southern whites were able to reduce the black electorate, forming a white oligarchy of former confederates. Other ways in which this conservative attitude was carried out was brutal beatings and lynchings. Prison farms, together with sharecropping, became the only labour contracts available for blacks. Additionally segregation was legally supported by Jim Crow laws¹. The withdrawal of federal troops marked the end of Reconstruction.

The period from 1877 to 1914 was known as the “nadir of race relations.” This negative reaction was motivated by the clear failure of the Reconstruction which created only an image of a new, equal, and human society. Additionally, by the end of the Nineteenth century several events contributed to worsen the life of African Americans. In 1883 the Supreme Court outlawed the Civil Rights Act, a series of laws that protected blacks against biased persecution and discrimination, by upholding the Jim Crow laws of Tennessee. In rapid succession, state and federal courts supported laws and changes in state constitutions that segregated public transportation and buildings. The situation got worse after *Plessy v. Ferguson* that established the separate but equal doctrine. During the trial, Plessy’s lawyers argued that segregation deprived their client of equal protection of the law guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. But in 1896 the U. S. Supreme Court in an eight to one decision upheld Louisiana’s segregation statute (Hine et al. 315). The decision of the Supreme Court established a hold on the real social progress of African Americans. With *Plessy v.*

¹ Jim Crow laws forbid to blacks the use of white facilities in the South. It is not very clear how this term was associated with segregation. It is clear that the Supreme Court stripped away what was gained during Reconstruction and enforced segregation by separating public facilities for blacks and whites. As far as the etymology of the word is concerned, the term Jim Crow originated with a minstrel show routine called “Jump Jim Crow” that a white performer, Thomas Daddy Rice, created in the 1830’s and 1840’s. Rice blackened his face with charcoal and ridiculed black people.

Ferguson, the Supreme Court established legal segregation in the South, and this decision influenced the life of southern African Americans for almost sixty years.

Ida Barnett Wells and the Anti-lynching Campaign

The last two decades of the Nineteenth century left very little hope to African Americans. The reality was cruel. In Louisiana, violence accompanied every election from 1868 to 1876. In Mississippi, white racists started a campaign called the Shotgun Policy under which many members of the Republican Party were murdered. One of the consequences of this policy was the murder of thirty teachers and church leaders. Whites refused any legal equality with former slaves. In the aftermath of Reconstruction, a new system was spread in the South: white anarchy. Whites had the law on their side because they occupied public offices, consequently they could use legal and illegal means in order to affirm their superiority.

During the “nadir,” lynching was one of the most common cruelties of daily black southern life. Everybody attended those aberrant spectacles: white men, women, and also children. They showed up to manifest white supremacy. Blacks were murdered, beaten, burned and mutilated for trivial reasons or for no reasons. Most whites justified lynching as a response to the raping of white women by black men, but in many cases the victims had no connection to the alleged offence. All blacks who were lynched did not have the opportunity to have a fair trial, and black women were also lynched. Mobs attacked black people who achieved economic success, like Thomas Moss of Memphis who owned a grocery store that competed with others owned by whites (Hine et al. 319). Whites indicted him for conspiracy, and he was jailed and then lynched. Victims of lynching were not only black men, but also black women. For instance in Oklahoma seventeen-year-old Mary Scott was lynched because her brother had killed a white man who had raped her (320).

Black journalist Ida Barnett Wells started a campaign against lynching, after the Thomas Moss incident she became an agitator, a reformer determined to improve the life of blacks. Wells strongly denounced lynching, and because of her reports, was forced to leave Mississippi. In Chicago she continued her crusade against lynching, and in *A Red Record* Wells underlined how African American conditions changed in the South after slavery: "In slave time the Negro was kept subservient and submissive by the frequency and severity of the scourging, but, with freedom, a new system of intimidation came into vogue; the Negro was not only whipped; he was killed" (597). Wells implicitly maintains that slavery was better than freedom because blacks were not routinely killed because they were property and too valuable. While living in Chicago, Wells urged support for an anti-lynching bill that had been introduced in Congress in 1902, but despite her efforts the federal government did not ratify those laws. In her book *A Red Record* Wells explained what excuses were used by whites in order to justify such barbarism as lynching: "The first excuse given to the civilized world for the murder of unoffending Negroes was the necessity of the white man to repress and stamp out alleged race riots." As a matter of fact, blacks were accused of being responsible for race riots, and paradoxically during these riots they were the only ones to be killed, while white men escaped unharmed. Race riots were not started by blacks, but they were reactions to previous violence or taunts. In 1917 in East St. Louis racial tensions exploded after black workers were hired to replace white workers of the American Federation of Labor who had gone on strike against the Aluminum Ore Company. White people drove through a black neighbourhood firing guns. Shortly after, two white plainclothes police officers drove into the same neighbourhood and were shot and killed by residents who may have believed that the drive-by shooters had returned. Angry white mobs then sought revenge. Black people

were mutilated and killed, and their bodies were thrown into the river. According to Wells, the second excuse used by whites to justify lynching was the right to vote, which became an important factor in all matters of state and national politics. Wells writes:

The southern white man would not consider that the Negro had any right which a white man was bound to respect, and the idea of a republican form of government in the southern states grew into general contempt. It was maintained that "this is a white man's government and regardless of numbers the white man should rule". (596)

In fact, *no Negro domination* became the banner of white radical organizations such as the KKK and the Regulators. Further, Burnett argues that with no fear of negro domination, whites found another excuse to justify lynching: "the murders invented the third excuse – that Negroes had to be killed to avenge their assaults upon women" (599). Many blacks were accused of raping of white woman, even when there was no evidence. As Wells points out in *A Red Record*, "With the Southern white man, any misalliance existing between a white woman and a colored man is a sufficient foundation for the charge of rape" (599). Even when a black man looked at a white woman he could be lynched. What the activist cried out for was justice, a fair trial; she said in another chapter of *A Red Record*, "In lynching opportunity is not given to the Negro to defend himself against the unsupported accusation of white men and women," and later in the same passage she added "therefore we demand a fair trial for those accused of crime, and punishment by law after honest conviction" (603).

Poetry Against White Redemption

The literature of the time denounced the problems of the black community. What black activists wrote in their pamphlets and articles influenced the production of African American writers. Themes discussed in public speeches were also discussed

by influential poets, in particular Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson, both of them very sensitive to the social reality of their times.

Dunbar was the most celebrated African American poet; thanks to his works he was called the black laureate poet by Booker T. Washington. In his career he wrote his poems in the African American vernacular English and in standard English. In "We Wear the Mask," written in 1895, Dunbar tells us about the irony of blacks who suffer oppression, but do not show their feelings. Blacks, like slaves before, masked their feelings in the face of racial intimidation. "We wear the mask that grins and lie/It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes/This debt we pay to human guile" (1-3). At that time, blacks could not show their feeling, nor show rage in front of southern whites; they could be accused of being rebellious, and for this reason be lynched. In the second stanza Dunbar writes "Why should the world be overwise/In counting all our tears and sighs?/Nay, let them only see us, while we wear the mask" (6-9). In these lines the poet states his mistrust in the possibility that whites could recognize blacks' anger. In reality, as the poet writes in line nine, whites saw blacks only when they wear the mask, when they covered their real feelings. Even though whites denied them rights established by the Constitution, blacks could not show disappointment for that, nor expect that white southerners could see beyond the mask that "grins and lies." The mask to which the poet refers is also something which does not allow whites to see blacks and their sufferings, "let them only see us, while/we wear the mask." Dunbar closed this poem by contrasting in the last stanza once again the smile with its sad soul. Here he is aware of the lack of comprehension which blacks have from whites even if their cries arise to Jesus Christ: "We smile, but, O Great Christ, our cries/To thee from tortured souls arise" (10-11). In closing the poem "Let the

world dream otherwise/We wear the mask” (14-15), Dunbar recognizes the unawareness the world has of blacks feelings.

In 1900 southern black poet James Weldon Johnson wrote “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” for a school commemoration of Lincoln’s birthday. It was performed for the first time at the segregated Stanton School where Johnson was principal. This poem, to which Johnson’s brother added the score, resonated throughout Black America and achieving within Johnson’s lifetime the title of the “Negro National Anthem.” The new century was a significant moment for blacks. It was important because it gave blacks hope for a different future and a better future imagined during Reconstruction, but which vanished at the end of the nineteenth century. Johnson’s song served as a mean of protest against racism, Jim Crow and lynching “Lift ev’ry voice and sing/’Til earth and heaven ring” (1-2), and also as a mean to demonstrate black hope for the future. “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” is divided into three stanzas in which the poet mixes blacks experience in the United States with the hope for a future of redemption. In the first stanza, Johnson invites blacks to raise their voices and sing “a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us/sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us” (6-7). According to Johnson past and present can be the starting point for a different future; he says later in the same stanza, “Facing the rising sun of our new day begun/let us march on till the victory is won” (9-10). In the second stanza, Johnson recalls bitter moments of the African American experience in the United States, days in which “hope unborn had died.” In this second part of the poem Johnson mixes the pain and sufferings of slavery with those which came after Reconstruction: “We have come over a way that with tears has been waited/we have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered” (16-17). Regardless of a cruel past, blacks survived and stand “where the white gleam of our bright star is

cast” (21). Johnson closed the poem with an appeal to God for the future; he says “God of our weary years/God of our silent tears/Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way/Thou who hast by Thy might/Led us into the light” (22-26).

Leadership Crises: The Rise of Booker T. Washington

There was a lack of black leadership in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Frederick Douglass died in 1895, and his successors, such as Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, grew up in a different racial context. These “new” intellectuals had been fascinated by the American Dream of prosperity and social mobility that the Civil Rights Act had instilled in blacks. In *Up From Slavery*, Booker T. Washington saw a future of redemption for African Americans. He said, “When persons ask me in these days how, in the midst of what sometimes seems hopelessly discouraging conditions, I can have such faith in the future of this country, I remind them of the wilderness through which and out of which, a good Providence has already led us” (496). This quote explains the trust Washington had for the future of blacks. This optimistic point of view was motivated by changes in the civil status of African Americans that occurred during Reconstruction. Washington came out of slavery at the age of nine, and grew up during Reconstruction, a period in which his people saw some important changes that could only be a starting point for a better future.

The doctrine carried out by Booker T. Washington was characterized by a compromise with the white majority. In fact, he suggested that blacks leave political responsibilities to whites, in favor of a life orientated toward the learning of manual works. After the death of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington became the real black leader with many followers. He was also respected among northern and southern whites because he did not challenge their supremacist political agenda and the violence they used to carry out their plans. It is not unusual to see in the writing of

black leaders a reference to Washington as the leader who accommodates southern white supremacists. In fact, he suggested that blacks had to give up political struggle in favor of industrial education, the accumulation of wealth and the reconciliation of blacks and whites in the South. At the Atlanta Exposition, Washington explained to whites that it is through constant work that progress and the enjoyment of its privileges could be reached by blacks:

The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing. (516)

Washington thought that at that moment social equality did not matter more than the enjoyment of progress and its privileges which came only after constant work. At that time, blacks in the South were surrounded by hostile whites, and even if the Fourteenth Amendment was still operating, social equality did not exist. Washington gave the Atlanta speech in 1895. At that time in the South blacks could not enjoy any kind of privileges because they were denied their civil rights. In addition, in 1895, lynching was very common especially in the South. The *African American Odyssey* maintains that “Between 1889 and 1932, 3,745 people were lynched in the United States, an average of two to three people were lynched every week for thirty years” (320). Washington did not argue against violence, racism, and segregation. He accommodated segregation and discrimination believing that it was better not to protest against an obvious oppression.

During the Atlanta speech, Booker T. Washington underlined the importance of manual work for blacks. In his opinion manual jobs were the way in which blacks could achieve gainful employment through manual training:

It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercises of these privileges. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera house [...] (516).

In the quote above, Washington said it was more important to be given the opportunity to earn a living rather than be given full access to the arts and intellectual other privileges of white society. Here, the black leader underlines what is more important for black prosperity. It is important to note that Washington graduated from Hampton Agricultural School where he paid for his education through manual labor. From a different perspective, Washington's words may be read as an invitation to blacks to conform to the white American myth of individualism in the United States, a concept which has shaped the culture of this country.

In the Atlanta speech Washington argued that manual jobs were the first priority for blacks, and also that whites should be aware of the great labor force that blacks represented. Instead of enforcing social and political equality, Washington offered instead black labor to rebuild the country: "Cast down your bucket among these people who have, without strikes and labour wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, built your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, and helped make possible this magnificent representation of progress of the South" (515). From an analysis of the speech to white capitalists, we might argue that Washington proposed to whites a form of perpetual black servitude. The black leader stressed the importance of learning manual jobs for blacks. Consequently, he left the whites the responsibility of administrating and organizing civic society.

How can a group or an individual raise his social status and become prosperous when they cannot exercise political power? The full enjoyment of rights and duties for citizens is more important than only learning a manual job. The right to vote allows citizens to be an active component of society because through the ballot citizens can directly change society according to their needs. On the other hand, manual job training cannot give citizens the possibility to directly change the place where they live.

Conclusion: Who is the Next Frederick Douglass?

Booker T. Washington's argument did not reflect the reality of time. He suggested to his people to accept the political status quo, and work gradually to change it by showing to whites that they were productive members of American society. On the other hand, it has been historically documented in this paper that white southerners did not want to integrate blacks in American society, and in order to prevent integration they used several means, for example intimidation and violence. Hence, Washington's words only appeased whites and not blacks. Practically, he thought that only through accommodation of white supremacy and submission would blacks gain their own space in American society, a concept which was completely opposed to what Frederick Douglass expected and claimed for his people after the Civil War. In the essay "What the Black Man Wants" Douglass asks whites:

What shall we do with the Negro, I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us! And if the Negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs! Let him alone! If you see him on his way to school, let him alone, don't disturb him! If you see him going to the dinner table at a hotel, let him go! If you see him going to the ballot-

box, let him alone, don't disturb him! If you see him going into a workshop, just let him alone,--your interference is doing him a positive injury. (164)

If Douglass in 1865 argued that whites had to leave blacks alone, thus they could be free and responsible for their actions; Washington twenty years later suggested to his people the contrary. He gave up with a radical protest on civil rights and accepted that his people were subordinate to whites. Those two approaches to black emancipation contrast each other. On one hand, Douglass wanted full equality for his people with all its rights and duties toward society. On the other hand, Washington did not care about the right to vote (a fundamental social power and also a pillar of citizenship), nor did he want blacks to be responsible for the organization of society. In his opinion blacks should focus more on an economical advancement rather than an attempt to regain political power. Therefore we might say that in twenty years there had been a big change in black political leadership. The attitude of revolt and revenge which was born during slavery was substituted with a more moderate attitude whose aim was slow integration. It was a significant change within the community because Washington was the African American leader at that time. He was influential, and he had more power than other black activists. Thanks to his moderate political program, Washington gained sympathy among white southern philanthropists who financially supported the Tuskegee Institute, but at the same time he also had many followers in the southern black community.

As previously stated in this paper, activism was also carried out through literary works. Paul Laurence Dunbar in "The Fourth of July and Race Outrages" contrasts the celebration of freedom by Americans with the segregation and disfranchisement of blacks in the whole country. It is a remarkable text that contrasts

the celebration of the day in which this country gave to itself a Constitution and became independent from England with the cruel social reality that blacks faced during this time. Dunbar's work discusses the same point of Frederick Douglass' essay, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July" written by the black leader in 1852. The question that arises from both essays is, Are the great ideals and principles of the Declaration of Independence extended to blacks too? Douglass admits that "The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, and not by me" (386); Dunbar agrees with Douglass. As a matter of fact he argues that during the day in which Americans celebrate their constitution "For the sake of re-enslaving the Negro, the Constitution has been trampled under foot, the rights of man have been laughed out of the court, and the justice of God, has been made a jest and we celebrate" (906). The poet points out that the mistreatment which blacks suffer in the country is not only carried out in the South, but even in the North, "Like a dark cloud, pregnant with terror and destruction, disenfranchisement has spread its wings over our brethren of the South. Like the same dark cloud, industrial prejudice glooms above us in the North" (906). Dunbar explains that racism and racial prejudice can be found in the South as well in the North. The poet argues that there were racism and segregation in the whole country, but in the south blacks were beaten, burned, and murdered; in the industrial North they were victims of racial prejudice that did not allow them to get a job or to get a fair compensation.

In the book *Reconstruction*, historian John Hope Franklin maintains that "In the post war years the Union had not made the achievements of the war a foundation for the healthy advancement of the political, social and economic life of the United States." Slavery was abolished, but what Reconstruction brought, the three

amendments to the Constitution, worked only for a very few years, before the former confederates started to redeem the “last cause” under the rule of white supremacy. As a matter of fact, in the North as well as in the South of the country there was racism; blacks could not exercise their right to vote and they found difficulties in improving their economic life.

In those years black activism was represented by many social and political activists, among them journalists and artists. Ida Barnett Wells became politically active, and was one of first to denounce lynching in the black press. There were no trials, not even attempts to verify accusations; blacks were found guilty even when they did not do anything wrong. Wells answered in her journal with some strongly worded attacks to the Mississippi white folks, and because of this she was forced to move to Chicago where she continued her struggle.

The literature of the time embodied the events that characterized African American history in this period. Inspired by the sufferings of their people, Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson wrote “We Wear the Mask” and “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,” thus reflecting the African American experience during in the aftermath of Reconstruction. They also gave to African American literature two powerful literary texts.

An important and controversial figure of this time was Booker T. Washington. After Frederick Douglass died in 1895, he became the foremost African American black leader. His past in slavery, his education, together with hopes and promises of Reconstruction inspired in him a doctrine in which the priority for blacks was to become a part of the labor force of the United States. In the Atlanta speech he said that common labor had a dignity, and beginning life from the bottom was nothing to be ashamed of: “No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in

tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, not at the top. Not should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities” (514). Washington suggested to blacks that the way to pursue their emancipation was to give up the political struggle and do manual work, so that they could gain a better economical position. In other words, he proposed to blacks a future of servitude, which in reality was not different from slavery. He proposed a moderate solution to blacks’ problem, a political agenda which contrasted with what Frederick Douglass had wanted for blacks years before. Washington pleaded with powerful whites to give help to blacks by using them as willing laborers; he suggested to whites to “Cast down your bucket among twenty million black hands.”

On the other hand, twenty years before the Atlanta address, Douglass claimed the exact contrary; he wanted for blacks full enjoyment of civil rights and equal opportunities. Washington did not care about political rights, therefore he did not argue about whites attempting to avoid the Fifteenth Amendment which was the modification to the constitution that gave blacks the ballot. Douglass maintains in the essay “What the Black Man Wants” that the right to vote was a priority for blacks. According to Douglass the right to vote was fundamental, firstly because this country is a republic based on universal suffrage, secondly because the right to vote recognized that blacks were American citizens. The elective franchise Douglass claimed in his speech in 1865 was given to blacks five years later in 1870. Unfortunately, during “the nadir,” blacks could not freely exercise their civil duty, especially in the former confederate states. The disfranchisement shows us that whites did not respect the American constitution, and also that blacks were not recognized as American citizens.

We have no right to sit silently
by while the inevitable seeds are sown
for a harvest disaster to our children, black and white
W. E. B. Du Bois - *The Souls of Black Folk*

Chapter II

United States or Africa? Black Activists' Solutions for Negro Emancipation

The dawn of the twentieth century did not carry many expectations for African Americans. It was the era of Jim Crow law and the aftermath of *Plessy v Ferguson*. In the country there were lynching, segregation, discrimination and violence, and in the South blacks could not exercise their right to vote because of the Ku Klux Klan. Furthermore, they were economically enslaved through harsh labor contracts such as sharecropping. In the industrialized North things were not different. Blacks, especially those who migrated from the South to the North, had to struggle for jobs and housing. The competition was even harder because of the presence of immigrants from Europe. Additionally, discrimination did not save blacks who joined the army in order to fight for the United States. Most white military leaders, politicians, and journalists embraced racial stereotypes and expected little from black soldiers, who were often forced to drill with picks and shovels rather than rifles. The army preferred to employ black troops in labor battalions, as stevedores, in road construction, and as cooks and bakers. When veterans came back from World War I they were victims of the same discrimination. In many places, in the South as well as in the North, the social situation became unstable, race riots exploded one after another, and the problem of the color line could no longer be controlled.

The response to the result of years and years of bad administration by Democrats came from the activism of the Niagara Movement which later became the

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Founded in 1909 by W. E. B. Du Bois and a group of other white and black progressives, the NAACP was very active at the beginning of the last century in order to end legal segregation. In their opinion, political equality could not be realized unless blacks could fully enjoy the civil and political rights the Constitution guaranteed to all citizens. In 1918, the NAACP tried to secure a federal law prohibiting lynching, but this law passed only the House of Representatives and not the Senate. The NAACP was very active also for an equal distribution of employment, education, and housing. The organization carried out its propaganda through its magazine *The Crisis* edited by Du Bois who from this magazine denounced white racism and atrocities and demanded that black people stand up for their rights.

The NAACP was not the only Black political organization at the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, other socio-political organizations were created such as the Urban League, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. The former organization was founded in 1910 in New York City. The goals of this welfare organization were addressed to improve housing, medical care, and recreational facilities for blacks who lived in segregated neighborhoods. The latter had a completely different agenda. UNIA was founded in 1914 by the charismatic Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey and its response to white oppression was separatism. With the slogan: "One God! One Aim! One Destiny!" (*The American Odyssey* 399) he stressed the need for black people to organize their own advancement. UNIA and its members thought that the only way to escape white oppression and avoid race conflicts was a voluntary re-patriation to Africa.

NAACP and UNIA with their leaders, W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, were the most influential political organizations at the beginning of the last century.

However, both approached racial injustice from opposite directions. The NAACP pushed for full participation in American civic life and an end to government supported racial segregation. On the contrary the UNIA and its members believed that American Negroes could only realize their freedom in Africa. In "Africa for the Africans" Marcus Garvey claims that "It is hoped that when the time comes for American and West Indian Negroes to settle in Africa, they will realize their responsibility and their duty" (975).

Du Bois The Heir of Frederick Douglass

The first black leader to step up in the last century was William Edward Du Bois who argued against Washington and his doctrine of accommodation. Du Bois was one of the most prolific, brilliant and influential black intellectuals of the last century, and because of his longevity, Du Bois was a great observer of almost a century of American history. Du Bois was a young man when Douglass died, outlived his rivals Washington and Garvey, and died one day before the March on Washington in 1963. Du Bois published mainly in sociology and history about African American life and history, and for these reasons he is considered the founder of Black Studies in American academic life. Thanks to all his work he was able to create a framework for Black cultural pride, and helped forge links between African and African American intellectuals. The last year of his life was chaotic as Du Bois was forced to argue against new black leadership, and defended himself against the House on UnAmerican activities. Stripped of his citizenship and fired by the organization he created because of his turn to Marxism, a tired Du Bois retired to Ghana where he died in 1963 as a citizen of that country.

One of the events which changed Du Bois' life, and led to his active involvement with issues of his race was his moving from the North to the South of the

United States. In the essay "Of Booker T. Washington and Others" he wrote about the South as "a land in the ferment of social change, wherein forces of all kinds are fighting for supremacy; and to praise the ill the South is to-day perpetrating is just as wrong as to condemn the good" (70). Du Bois' first trip to the South was when he attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, but it was during his teaching year that he actually saw the condition in which his people lived. He was hired at Atlanta University in 1899, and remained there until 1910. In Atlanta, Du Bois saw the horrible conditions of life behind "the veil." He checked out the segregation in which his people lived, and this led him to questioning more about the problem of the "color line." In the essay "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" he claims that "The nation has not yet found peace from his sin; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promise land" (40). Down in the South Du Bois saw that the nation was still perpetuating slavery against blacks, and claimed that even if slavery had been abolished, blacks lived in a condition of servitude in the form of forced labor as work gangs, and the fraudulent practices of the sharecropping system.

Civil rights had always been a matter of discussion among activists. On one hand, people involved in this debate focused on whether there is or not an equal enjoyment of them. On the other hand, not everybody agreed on the way in which problems regarding the relationship between human beings and civil society had to be faced. In "Of Booker T. Washington and Others," which is collected in *The Souls of the Black Folk*, Du Bois underlined three points blacks had to pursue if they wanted to rise up from the condition in which they were: "Political power, insistence on civil rights, higher education of Negro Youth" (69). Those three elements together were fundamental for the civil advancement of the African American. Political power, insistence on civil rights, and higher education were the path to follow for the creation

of the "New Negro," a new cultural identity which had to replace the exploited "Old Negro." According to Booker T. Washington, political power, insistence on civil rights, and higher education were not important for blacks' advancement. In opposition to Washington W. E. B. Du Bois argued that "Negroes must insist continually, in season and out of season, that voting is necessary to modern manhood" (70). Du Bois echoed the argument of Douglass in 1865 that voting is fundamental for blacks. Moreover, Du Bois argued against the concept of submission and assimilation that was implied in Washington's Atlanta speech: "We have no right to sit silently by while the inevitable seeds are sown for a harvest of disaster to our children, black and white" (70). Here the scholar expanded his discussion and thought also about the future of his community. He underlines that a refusal by blacks of political rights would also negatively influence the destiny of the next generation of American blacks. He rejected Washington's ideas by claiming that blacks had to insist on civil rights, because they were (and are) the ways to share in the prosperity of the United States.

Du Bois discussed racism and assimilation in several articles and essays. In "Of the Dawn of Freedom" the scholar maintained that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the 'Color line,' -- the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (45). In this passage, Du Bois referred to consequences derived from the encounter or clash between people of different ethnic groups. At that time the United States had to deal with discrimination and segregation carried out by whites in order to keep their dominant position over other ethnicities, especially over African Americans who grew in number since slavery. In the article "The Color Line Belts the World," Du Bois writes that issues derived from black and white relations in the United States were not

merely local in scope: "The Negro problem in America is but a local phase of a world problem" (41). Other countries like France, Italy, Russia, and Belgium were having problems because of their imperialist and colonialist aims toward other countries and their native races. Furthermore, the scholarly opinion may be seen in a different light nowadays. In fact, if we think to the contemporary history of this country, Du Bois' point of view acquires a shape of the prophetic message, which anticipated by years and years the riots of the sixties and of seventies. During this period the so called "minorities," such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans reacted violently against an establishment which denied their civil rights, and also their cultural identity.

Du Bois' analysis of race did not deal only with history and politics, but he added to the debate a socio-political view that was unique. At the turn of the last century racial theorists embraced a form of social/biological determinism that maintained physical racial differences to explain the perceived psychological and social differences among the races. Phenotypes and genetics became the basis for the affirmation of white supremacy, but Du Bois elaborated upon a personal theory about race that argued against those theories. He handled this problem by offering a solution which dealt more with history and sociology. According to the scholar, "While race differences have followed mainly physical race lines, no mere physical distinctions would really define or explain the deeper differences." Du Bois rejected white supremacist ideologies and in "The Conservation of Races" proposed a different concept of race:

. . . race is a group whose identity is partly fixed by socio-historical characteristics. A race is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions

and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life. (Du Bois 230)

Du Bois' idea of race incorporated biology (common blood) but also sociohistorical features (such as language, history), so his idea of race involved biological features but also involved other elements that belonged to custom and folklore. Biology could not only explain race differences, and Du Bois proposes the idea that a race is also socially and historically defined.

Du Bois believed that “ideas not slogans, principles not personalities were essential to the eradication of the many forms of bigotry and inequality that had perverted what he called ‘the ideal of human brotherhood in America,’” (Du Bois 606). While writing, teaching and lecturing he created the Niagara Movement which later became the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In “NAACP,” which appeared in *The Crisis*, Du Bois explained the core beliefs of this organization: “It is a union of those who believe that earnest, active opposition is the only effective way of meeting the forces of evil. They believe that the growth of race prejudice in the United States is evil” (370). In another article, “The Class Struggle,” Du Bois explained also how the NAACP wanted to pursue its own aims. “We do not believe in revolution. We expect revolutionary changes in many parts of this life and this world, but we expect these changes to come mainly through reason, human sympathy and education of children, and not by murder” (555). He also added that “The NAACP is organized to agitate, to investigate, to expose, to defend, to reason, to appeal. This is our program and this is the whole of our program” (555).

At the core of Du Bois' thinking, there was the idea that blacks perceived themselves as a problem, as something different, strangers in a land which after two centuries was their own native land. Were they Negro or American? It is an important point which can be connected through all of his discussions about civil rights. The concept of "two divided souls" created in black people a kind of psychological block which split their own consciousness. Du Bois referred to this split with the term twoness, and in "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" he wrote "One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (38).

In *Souls* Du Bois elaborated his idea of the double consciousness. This concept appeared for the first time in the essay "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" which opens *Souls*. Double consciousness is a psychological condition which shaped blacks' perceptions and created in them the twoness. In other words, it is a sense of looking at oneself through the eyes of others, "of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois 11). Throughout the centuries blacks in the United States had perceived themselves through the eyes of whites. In addition, the refusal of whites to recognize black Americans' humanity and culture has resulted firstly in whites seeing blacks as strangers, and secondly in the tendency of blacks to see themselves as strangers (Du Bois 11). By assuming how whites saw them, blacks assumed also a position of submission toward whites. Therefore the perception of blacks created, consciously or unconsciously, an idea of not being an integral part of American society, but a conception of being Negro rather than American. This psychological condition influenced the way in which blacks related socially and also politically. Du Bois suggested that one of the steps that blacks had to

take in order to gain their own space in American society was to become aware of this psychological condition. In fact, blacks had to be acquainted with their double-consciousness and try to perceive themselves through their eyes. Through the description of the double-consciousness Du Bois gave also a lesson of self reliance to his people. This lesson led blacks to discover a new self and to create a new cultural identity which embodies the African heritage and the American reality; it makes them feel part of a multiethnic environment. In conclusion, the concept of double-consciousness could not be split by the discussion on political rights, because it influenced the active participation of blacks in civil society. The perception of themselves as strangers led blacks to think that integration was not possible. The acquisition of a civil status had to pass from an abandonment of an old self and a creation of another one that was neither African, nor Negro, but African American.

In W. E. B. Du Bois' works there is a particular emphasis on education as one of the three things which blacks had to insist upon. One of the tropes which characterize slave narratives is the trope of the "Talking Book." This term refers to the acquisition of literacy by slaves. It was when they acquired the ability to read that books started "talking" to them. Before Du Bois, other important voices of the black community, such as Frederick Douglass, stressed the importance of literacy and the importance of education. Before the Civil War in the South, whites had forbidden literacy for slaves. It was the way in which they kept power and legitimated slavery. Even with the abolition of slavery, education was still kept from blacks by way of segregation, and poor facilities. In fact they did not allow blacks to get into institutions in which they could obtain higher education, and discrimination was very common in schools.

At the turn of the century a majority of colleges, universities, and schools did not accept blacks. Philosophy, religion, history, and the sciences were subjects that only whites could study in depth. A higher education was a dangerous weapon for the large black community, and whites could not allow giving up any more of their power. Many brilliant artists, even if they had the possibility, even during the Harlem Renaissance, could not find a place in “white” academia. As a result of this condition, many of them were forced to migrate to Europe. In the essay “Of Booker T. Washington and Others,” Du Bois maintains that blacks had to keep asking for the higher education of Negro youth (69). This point of view contrasted to what Booker T. Washington advocated. In fact, the founder of the Tuskegee Institute suggested a professional education rather than an intellectual one, because that was the way in which blacks could learn a job and consequently be prosperous. In contrast to what Washington said and realized, Du Bois thought that higher education was fundamental because otherwise people could not enjoy civil rights, and also there could be a lack of future black leaders without higher educational schools. The result will be a lack of black intelligentsia, black leadership which Du Bois refers also as “The Talented Tenth.” Du Bois defined the concept of “Talented Tenth” in “The Talented Tenth: Memorial Address”:

It is clear that in 1900, American Negroes were an inferior caste, were frequently lynched and mobbed, widely disfranchised, and usually segregated in the main areas of life. As student and worker at that time, I looked upon them and saw salvation through intelligent leadership; as I said, through a “Talented Tenth.” And for this intelligence, I argued, we needed college trained men. Therefore I stressed college and higher training. (348)

Because of the term “Talented Tenth” Du Bois was often accused of creating a black aristocracy which neglected black masses. In reality, with the term “Talented Tenth” the scholar meant leadership of the Negro race in America by a trained few.

Even through his great influence on the community, and especially on writers and artists, at the time W. E. B. Du Bois’ arguments did not “speak” to all African Americans. The North was changing little by little. By the turn of the century black communities in the north of the country became bigger and bigger in terms of population. Many black southerners moved north for several reasons: jobs, segregation, discrimination, Ku Klux Klan. Also their migration was accompanied by the desire to be in an environment that was culturally more frantic than the South. The North could offer to black artists more opportunities than the South. Places like New York and Chicago were the main stop for young talented and ambitious black artists, who saw those cities as places where it was possible to gain success, money, and popularity, which all formed the so-called American Dream. Consequently due to this migration, black communities of the North gathered also a class of workers which came from the South. Those people formed the black working class, because they did manual jobs or they worked on the assembly line in factories. On the contrary, northern blacks had already gained important positions in society, and they were wealthier than the people of the South. Therefore, at the turn of the century, there was in the North a middle class composed of blacks who were there before the Civil War, and a working class composed of blacks who had just migrated from the South. Those two classes had two distinct social perspectives, different political views, and as a result they identified with different black leaders.

Marcus Garvey: Moses of His People

In the second decade of twentieth century, one of the most influential black leaders was Marcus Garvey who had many followers and challenged Du Bois's leadership. Garvey's success may be explained not only for the way in which they discussed black issues in the United States. Maybe the light skinned Du Bois was too intellectual for the time or too European in his manners; on the other hand, the black Garvey knew how to address blacks, not only with his rhetoric of black pride, but also with his appearance, and manners.

Born in St. Anna's Bay in Jamaica, Garvey is considered one of the most influential black leaders of the last century. Thanks to his leadership, his charisma, and his proclamations, Garvey was able to gain sympathy in the community, even though his writing and speeches were strongly attacked by other black leaders. Garvey's philosophy was radical, and he believed that there was no possibility of creating an American society in which whites and blacks could live together. The only solution to all of the problems of the "Negro race" was to come back to their mother land of Africa. He believed that black and white had separate destinies, and he regarded interracial cooperation as absurd. Thanks to this radical point of view he was able to gain also sympathy of white radicals, in fact he met members of the Ku Klux Klan in 1922 (Du Bois – "Marcus Garvey and The NAACP" 345). Garvey became so popular because he was able to instil in blacks a pride in their African heritage that had been unrealized. Garvey showed to blacks and whites the beauty of Africa and its culture. Thanks to Garvey activism, Africa was no longer in white American minds a land where inhabitants were savages who ate other men. Those stereotypes were originated by theories from important European philosophers, in order to justify slavery. David Hume in *Of National Characters* said that "I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different

kinds) to be naturally inferior to whites.” Garvey taught his people to not be ashamed of their African heritage, because Africa was the cradle of civilization. In the essay “The Future as I See It,” Garvey wrote “But, when we come to consider the history of men, was not the Negro a power, was he not great once? Yes, honest students of history can recall the day when Egypt, Ethiopia and Timbuctoo towered in their civilizations, towered above Europe, towered above Asia. When Europe was inhabited by a race of cannibals, a race of savages, naked men, heathens and pagans.” Thanks to his lectures and speeches Garvey was able to cancel old stereotypes which whites used to depict blacks as uncivilized. Moreover, he was able to lift them from a condition of subordination towards whites in which they had been since slavery.

Garvey was very sensitive to the problems of Africans who were brought to the New World during slavery, and started his struggle for his race when he was still in Jamaica. The reading which changed his life was Booker T. Washington’s *Up From Slavery*. Garvey was a great admirer of the founder of the Tuskegee Institute, and tried to create in Jamaica a school similar to Tuskegee, but he did not get the same result. Garvey did not have the opportunity to meet Washington because he died before Garvey arrived in the United States.

One of the most important events in Garvey’s career was the foundation, in 1914, of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. At that time the UNIA became the political rival of the NAACP. Those two organization had different political agenda for blacks. In “Aims and Objects of the UNIA” Garvey underlined UNIA main goals:

The culmination of all efforts of the UNIA must end in Negro independent nationalism on the continent of Africa. That is to say, everything must contribute toward the final objective of having a

powerful nation for the Negro race. Negro nationalism is necessary. It is political power and control. (211)

The priority for Garvey was the creation of a Negro nationalism through which could be created a new and powerful nation on African soil. The UNIA's main goal was to gather American blacks under an ideology that supported a nation as the fundamental unit for human social life, and this goal took precedence over any other social and political principles. In the editorial "African Fundamentalism" Garvey shows the pillars on which his people had to build their nation. Firstly, one was a change in blacks' behavior, where they had to stop the adoration of other races: "The time has come for the Negro Race to forget and cast behind him his hero worship and adoration of other races"; secondly blacks needed to create their own doctrine: "We must inspire and promulgate a doctrine of our own without any apologies to the powers that be" (3). Those points created a black self-reliance and a black philosophy.

Garvey arrived in the United States in 1916. The purpose of his trip, at first, was to raise money for his school in Jamaica, an institution which had to prepare blacks professionally. In Harlem, Garvey founded periodical *The Negro World*, through which he was able to spread his ideas. At the time Garvey arrived in the United States, Harlem was the beating heart of American culture, and little by little African American artists showed American society their arts. At that moment, there was a fever in Harlem, and many blacks were struck by Garvey's radical philosophy. A quote from the Sunday supplement of the *New York World* may give us an image of the real influence Garvey had on the black community. The headline of the newspaper depicts the Jamaican activist as "The Moses of the Negro race has come to New York" (Hill and Bair xxi). The headline played with Garvey's middle name (Moses), and also with the great leadership that he had. In fact some blacks had the same

confidence in Garvey that the Israelites had in Moses, the leader who freed them from slavery.

Some statistics may give us more details about what this man was able to do. In 1920 Garvey's organization counted something like two million followers, and little by little it became more and more numerous. Scholars and intellectuals in the black community did not admire Garvey; they attacked him, and some wondered if this man had some psychological problems. In fact, Robert Bugnall, an influential member of the NAACP, said "We may seriously ask, is not Marcus Garvey a paranoiac?" (qtd. in Hill and Bair xxv). Even professor Du Bois did not like Garvey, and in the essay "Marcus Garvey" he wrote about Garvey as a man who was "suffering from very serious defects of temperament and training" (975). Additionally, because of Garvey and his followers' use of green uniforms, he said in the same text that Garvey was a "dress rehearsal of a new comic opera" (976). Black intellectuals did not like Garvey's manners, especially because he was very authoritative. Du Bois wrote two essays on Garvey in which he discussed both the man and his ideas. He wrote in "Marcus Garvey" that the man Garvey was "essentially an honest man with a tremendous vision, great dynamic force, stubborn determination and unselfish desire to serve; but he is dictatorial, domineering, and very suspicious" (971). This is partially true because Garvey fired a lot of his collaborators, and did not get along with people who argued too much about his own ideas. Members of the NAACP, like W.E.B. Du Bois, did not see in Garvey the man who could help African Americans' advancement. In order to better understand Du Bois' idea about Garvey's politics, it is useful to look at the essay "Marcus Garvey and The NAACP." In this article Du Bois quoted a pamphlet written by Garvey which said "The white race can best help the negro by telling him the truth, and not by

flattering him into believing that he is as good as any white man” (345), then the scholar to this pamphlet “Garvey is carrying on a vicious campaign, he is not attacking white prejudice, he is grovelling before it and applauding it” (344).

In August of 1920 Garvey and other members and representatives from various parts of the United States, the Caribbean, the Canal Zone and Africa, adopted a declaration of independence with sixty-six articles and elected Garvey as Excellency – the provisional President of Africa. Garvey did not work as a president of Africa. The election and the declaration of independence were an attempt to reinforce black nationalism, but they were a symbol of Garvey’s faith in one man leadership. Garvey believed in leadership and authority. He thought an ideal state must be administrated by only one man. In the essay “Governing the Ideal State” he says, “When we elect a President of a nation, he should be endowed with absolute authority to appoint all his lieutenants from cabinet ministers, governors of States and Territories, administrators and judges to minor offices” (30). Perhaps Garvey derived his ideas about leadership from Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, a text the Italian politician wrote for the ruler of Florence Lorenzo Dei Medici. In that work, Machiavelli stresses that a prince must exhibit “virtù,” which can be translated as strength, skill or prowess, in both favorable and adverse circumstances. Garvey believed that the key function of law was the maintenance of authority.

Every opinion about the man Garvey has a degree of truth, but he urged blacks to take pride in themselves. As the editors of *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* point out in their preface to Garvey’s writing, what he was able to do had no comparison because “It awakened a race consciousness that made Harlem (which at the time was the centre of social and cultural black re-birth) felt around the world” (xv).

Where did Garveyism come from?

In one of her memoirs about her husband, Amy Jacques Garvey recalls a symposium held at Harvard University in 1928, where students debated the differences between 'The Man' and 'The Movement.' She stresses that everybody agreed that "Garvey's philosophy was distinguished from the man Garvey," in fact "Garvey was temporal, but Garveyism was eternal" (Garvey – *The Marcus Garvey*). Those two quotes may be very indicative of the real impact that this man was able to produce on his community. Even though Garvey spent only eleven years in the United States, he taught to African Americans something very important about their identity: to be proud of their color and their origin, because they were the progeny of noble and advanced civilizations. He gave to his people a history, but he wanted to give them something more. He wanted for them a land (Africa) and a flag (that of the African empire).

Garveyism is a term that refers to the ideas developed by Garvey. It is a philosophy that combined black pride and pan-Africanism. At the core of his beliefs was the desire that blacks from all over the New World had to come back to Africa in order to create a great African nation:

The masses of Negroes in America, the West Indies, South and Central America are sympathetic accord with the aspirations of the native Africans. We desire to help them build up Africa as a Negro Empire, where every black man, whether he was born in Africa or in the Western World, will have the opportunity to develop on his own lines under the protection of the most favorable democratic institutions.

(976)

According to Garvey, Africa was the place where blacks who were all over the American continent could create their own empire and then gain complete freedom that was denied them in the New World. It was also important that this separatist idea become the new black doctrine. In fact, Garvey maintains that “to rise out of this racial chaos new thought must be injected into the race and it is this thought that the Universal Negro Improvement Association promulgate” (Garvey svii).

In his book *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, Caribbean pan-Africanist scholar George Padmore refers to Garveyism as Black Zionism. He says, “Black Zionism among American Negroes was inspired by the Universal Negro Improvement Association founded by Marcus Garvey, the greatest black prophet and visionary since Negro Emancipation.” In his opinion, the dream of creating an African empire, a central issue for Garvey, could be compared with Jewish Zionism, a political movement which gave birth to Israel, the Jewish national state in Palestine.

Garvey’s separatist idea was not brand new. In 1822 a group of free blacks, with the help of the American government, left the United States and settled in a territory bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d’Ivoire, which in 1847 was declared independent and called Liberia². The actual capital of this country is Monrovia, a name given in honor of President James Monroe by the Afro-American settlers. Later, other African Americans tried to move to Liberia. In the aftermath of Reconstruction, the idea of leaving the United States for Liberia was very attractive for southern blacks because in the South they could not enjoy their civil rights. So in 1878 the ship *Azor* left for Liberia with 216 black migrants on board. The exodus failed because many migrants did not survive the long trip, and those who were able to reach Africa were not able to stand the African climate (Hine and Harold 321).

² Liberia means Land of the Free.

Garvey derived most of his own ideas about race from the Ethiopianist Movement, which was popular in Jamaica before he left for the United States. The Ethiopian movement was a religious movement which began at the end of the Nineteenth century in South Africa when two groups broke away from the Anglican and the Methodist churches. The reason for their break was segregation. This movement was based on the interpretation of a biblical passage "Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth its hands unto God" (Psalm 68:31). Adherents to this doctrine claimed that Ethiopians were identified with Jews, and were the people elected to be in Canaan, the promise land. In fact, they were taken from their own country in order to build the pyramids. Thanks to this concept, Garvey grounded his theory. By using the Bible he was able to give his philosophy a solid basis.

The creation of an empire could not be accomplished without financial strength. The ideal state had to be wealthy, and the citizens of this country had to contribute actively to this task. According to Garvey, "wealth is strength, wealth is power, wealth is influence, wealth is justice, it is liberty and also human rights" (Garvey - "Black Man" 37). Garvey identified wealth as the key to putting blacks on the same level as other ethnic groups. Garvey derived this idea from Jews, and believed that they were treated in a different way because they had wealth saying, "The Jews are a powerful minority group" (lx). Other sources that helped Garvey shape the idea that wealth was important were writings of great personalities of the last century, such as Booker T. Washington, and also Andrew Carnegie who wrote "The Gospel of Wealth."

In order to return to Africa, Garvey created a transportation company called the Black Star Line. The Black Star Line had three objectives. First, it had to make a profit, second, it had to employ black people in important positions denied to them in

the traditionally white shipping industry and third it had to serve as a means of transportation for blacks interested in escaping white oppression by moving to Africa. The UNIA was able to raise about five hundred thousand dollars for this society. Obviously, that money came from blacks who made donations to Garvey and especially to his dream of redemption for blacks. W. E. B. Du Bois wrote about this society in his articles "Marcus Garvey" and "Black Star Line." In the former, he analyzed in depth Garvey's economics skills. In order to introduce his own analysis, Du Bois talked about the man Garvey, and he admitted Garvey's "dynamic force" (971) and great leadership. On the other hand, Du Bois cannot say the same for Garvey's ability in business. In fact, Du Bois maintains that "Garvey's corporations are incorporated in Delaware where no financial statement is required"; he also says "Garvey had never published a complete statement of the income and expenditures of UNIA which revealed his financial situation" (973). As a matter of fact, The Black Star Line went into bankruptcy because the ships bought by Garvey were not worth the money that he said he paid. According to Du Bois, the conception of the Black Star Line was a unique idea. In fact, he says in the essay about this society, that "the Black Star Line was a definite plan to unite Negrodom by a line of steamship. It was a brilliant suggestion, and also Garvey's only original contribution to the race problem" (980). The Harvard scholar underlines that Garvey's idea was great and also it was Garvey's best idea. As far as Garvey's experience with finances is concerned, there was a sad epilogue which ended his influential activist career in the United States. Garvey was arrested on a federal charge of mail fraud in 1922, and three years later, he was sentenced to a five year prison term which he never finished because in 1927 he was deported to Jamaica.

Claude McKay and Countee Cullen: Poems of Resistance Against Oppression

Claude McKay was one of the most important poets of the Harlem Renaissance. Three of his numerous poems, "If We Must Die," "To the White Fiends," and "The White House" are three literary texts that reflect black activism, interracial relationships, and discrimination in America at the beginning of the last century. McKay wrote those three poems using the sonnet, a form that became his trade mark. "If We Must Die" was written following the "Red Summer." The "Red Summer" refers to the summer and fall of 1919, when race riots exploded in a number of cities in both the North and South. The three most violent episodes occurred in Chicago, Washington D.C., and Elaine, Arkansas. Later in his career McKay denied that the poem referred to blacks and whites specifically. In the text there are no explicit reference to blacks and whites, the theme of "If We Must Die" is an invitation to step up and fight injustice back. "If We Must Die" is an invitation to not die in vain. Because of its theme, this poem was used by the English Prime Minister Winston Churchill in a speech against the Nazis. The main idea developed in "If We Must Die" makes it a kind of manifesto for activism, an incitement to fight against oppression. McKay writes "If we must die, O let us nobly die/So that our precious blood may not be shed/In vain; then even the monster we defy/Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!" (5-9). The only place of the poem that seems to show a reference to interracial tensions in the United States is the final couplet, in which McKay writes "Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack/Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" (13-14). At that time, black activists and poets pointed out often that whites were responsible for many black deaths because of lynching.

“To the White Fiend” is a warning to the white man fiend. In this poem, McKay starts explaining to whites that blacks are capable of murdering racists whites “Think you I am not fiend and savage too?/Think you I could not arm me with a gun/And shoot down ten of you for every one/Of my black brothers murdered, burnt by you?” (1-4). Later in the poem McKay explains that there are no such reactions from blacks, because they know what their real purpose on earth is. They are the lamp that will shine “Before the world is swallowed up in night” (13), and God placed them in the chaos of the United States because he wants to show them their worth. “Thy dusky face I set among the white/For thee to prove thyself of higher worth.”

It is clear from the first line that the theme of “The White House” is discrimination. McKay starts the poem in this way, “Your door is shut against my tightened face.” The white house of the title and of the first stanza may be seen as the residence of the president of the United States, the political world which was practically off limit for blacks. The white house may also be the American society which was full of injustice, white dominated and regulated by legal segregation. To the description of the white world in the first stanza follows a description of the poet’s feelings. Because of discrimination he has to find a way to stay calm, or find wisdom, and finally finds in them a resource; he writes, “Oh, I must search for wisdom every hour/Deep in my wrathful bosom sore and raw/And find in it the superhuman power/To hold me to the letter of your law!” (9-12).

Another important writer of the Harlem Renaissance was Countee Cullen. In one of his most famous poems, “Incident,” Cullen recalls an episode of racism that he was a victim of in Baltimore:

Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart Filled, head filled with glee,

I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.
Now I was eight and very small
And he was no whit bigger
And so I smiled, but he poked out
His tongue, and called me, "Nigger" (1-9).

Cullen's poem, written in 1925, testifies for the racial tension in the United States. In this poem Cullen showed that the problem of the color line still characterized American society in the second decade of the last century. In this poem he is describing himself as a child encountering a white man. Whites could not stand any idea of equality with another racial group, especially blacks. Even though in the poem Cullen is a child he is addressed with a derogatory term. "Incident" shows us a proof of why black activists were so concerned about racism in the United States.

Conclusion

The first decade of the last century was characterized by a great artistic verve, and Harlem was the place to be, the beating heart of American culture. Even though blacks became more and more popular on the artistic scene, interracial relationships did not change. Blacks were still prisoners of old stereotypes and racial prejudice, but a new social identity "The New Negro," was shaped during that time. The Harlem Renaissance avant-garde with its poets was very important for the creation of this new social identity, the New Negro, and the consequent uplifting of blacks, but it was fundamentally the activism of new black leaders, two of them in particular: W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey. They influenced intellectuals, and also electrified the entire black community. Their thoughts about the issues that African Americans were exposed to in American society were extremely different, but they both had at the core the need of helping their people.

The concept of the New Negro, a new black who had to wipe out the stereotypical image which at that time still persisted in American culture, was elaborated upon by both of them in different manners. Their concept about their race, and how their race had to relate with American society, was derived by different experiences and training. Du Bois, because of his education, observed that the first step that blacks had to take was to insist on civil rights and higher education. Another important step was the recognition of their true self. It was doubleconsciousness, blacks' perception of themselves through white eyes that socially inhibited them. It was important that blacks perceived themselves as one cultural identity, which was the result of a combination between African heritage and American reality. This was the path to follow in order to claim their civil rights, and be integrated into American society. Du Bois did believe that integration was possible, but he rejected the "old attitude of adjustment and submission" which characterized Washington's doctrine. He did not believe in separatism but, as Frederic Douglass pointed out years before, he wanted civil rights for blacks, as the American Constitution recognizes for all citizens. He felt racism was the cancer of the American society; the problem of the "Color line" was the burning issue which America had to face.

Garvey was the popular hero. He claimed that a new Negro could not exist if he did not have two qualities: wealth and success. It was only through success and wealth that the majority could give civil rights to blacks. Marcus Garvey believed that members of the Negro race could realize their emancipation only in their motherland. According to him there was only one way in which race problems could be fixed: blacks had to leave the United States and come back to Africa. In the essay "The Future as I See It" he made this point clear by saying that it was "the only solution to

the race problem. There is no other way to avoid the threatening war of races that is bound to engulf all mankind” (977).

Garvey’s separatist theory was able to instill in the black community, and especially in the working class, a hope and a dream of redemption for the entire black race. He taught blacks to be proud of their African origin, because they were the progeny of old African civilizations. In the essay “Africa for the Africans” he said “It is only a question of a few more years when Africa will be completely colonized by Negroes, as Europe is by the white race. What we want is an independent African Nationality” (975). His ideas had a great influence on the masses who came from the South to the North; thanks to his pan-Africanist ideas, blacks did no longer feel prisoners of stereotypes popularized by whites.

On one hand, Garvey’s idea of creating an African Empire was arguable because it was a utopian concept out of time for the twentieth century. On the other hand, he awakened consciences; he started a fire which burned for a long time and inspired later movements, such as the Black Muslims, Malcolm X, Black Power groups of the seventies, such as the Black Panther Party, and also his fellow Jamaican Bob Marley who dedicated the song “So Much Things To Say” to Garvey.

Death cut the strings that gave me life,
And handed me to Sorrow,
The only kind of middle wife
My folks could beg or borrow.
Countee Cullen - "Saturday's Child"

Chapter III

Black Literary Activism in The Great Depression: *Native Son*

The Great Depression was an era of suffering for African Americans and a time of important political change. The economic crises, together with racism, made blacks suffer more than the decades before. In the North as well as in the South, Americans did not have jobs and they had to fight against starvation. In the North, which had developed an economic system based on factories, production went lower and lower because of demand collapse; therefore, there was no longer a need for workers. Likewise, in the rural South there was less demand for crops such as cotton, and consequently no need for labourers. A list of statistics may help give a clearer idea about the African American unemployment rate during the thirties. In 1934 in Chicago, the jobless rate for African American men was 40%, in Pittsburgh it was 48%, in Harlem it climbed to 50% percent, in Philadelphia it reached 56%, and in Detroit it rose to 60% percent. Although there was a low employment rate and the majority of people had to fight against starvation, the very few rich white Americans kept their high standard of living, and the building of the luxurious Waldorf Astoria hotel was an example of this imbalance of wealth within American society. In "Advertisement for the Waldorf Astoria" Hughes shows us the contrast between rich and poor during the Depression. Hughes was very upset by the building of this hotel, as he wrote in his autobiography *The Big Sea*, "The thought of it made me feel so bad,

so I wrote this poem” (321). He modelled the poem on an advertisement in “Vanity Fair” announcing the opening of New York’s greatest hotel, where, as Hughes writes, “No Negroes worked and none were admitted as guests” (321). In the section “Negroes” of “Advertisement for the Waldorf Astoria,” Hughes underlines the condition of blacks in Harlem who at that time suffered more than white. He writes:

Thank Gawd A’mighty!

(And a million niggers bend their backs on rubber plantations, for rich
behinds to ride on thick tires to the Theatre Guild Tonight)

Ma soul’s witness!

(And here we stand, shivering in the cold, in Harlem.)

Glory be to Gawd-

De Waldorf Astoria’s open! (The Collected Works of Langston
Hughes, 209-210)

However, things started changing, and NAACP activism was fundamental for blacks’ social and political advancements. The biracial organization became very dynamic, especially after 1930, when Walter White took a prominent role in the successful campaign to defeat Hoover’s nomination of Circuit Court John J. Parker of North Carolina to the United States Supreme Court. Parker incited the anger of the organization because he openly embraced white supremacy, stating for example that “the participation of the Negro in politics is a source of evil and danger to both races” (Hine et al. 432). The NAACP’s effectiveness was enhanced by a dramatic expansion of its legal campaign against racial discrimination. Central to this project was the hiring of Charles Hamilton Houston, an African American lawyer and Harvard alum. At the NAACP, Houston laid out a plan for a legal program to challenge inequality in education and the exclusion of black people from voting in the South. Houston fought

many cases of discrimination, and the best result was achieved in 1944 when the United States Supreme Court ended the Terrel Law in Texas, a law enacted in 1923 that excluded blacks from voting in the local Democratic primary.

The Republican Hoover was defeated in the 1933 elections by Democratic candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roosevelt inaugurated a multitude of programs to counter the Depression – also known as the New Deal – which contributed to the shift in allegiance of African Americans from the Republican party to the Democratic party. An important ally for blacks was first lady Eleanor Roosevelt who personally defied Jim Crow laws by refusing to sit in a whites-only section while attending a meeting in the South (Hine et al.) By 1933, the federal government hired blacks to work in different fields. A group of highly educated African Americans became linked in a network called the Federal Council on Negro Affairs, also known as Roosevelt's Black Cabinet.

Another important achievement for black activism came from labor unions. During the twenties and thirties the American Federation of Labor did not admit black workers; consequently they organized in different unions called brotherhoods. One of the most active was the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters which was directed by Asa Philip Randolph. After years of struggle with the Pullman company, the company for whom BSCP's members worked, AFL granted BSCP full membership as an international union. Thanks to the work of Randolph and his Brotherhood, organized labor bridged the race gap for the first time in the United States.

Although in the midst of the Great Depression African Americans made important steps toward a socio-political equality, they were still victims of episodes of racism, segregation, and violence. Proof of the racism and segregation which characterized American society during the thirties is given to us by the Scottsboro

case in 1931. The case began when nine black youths who caught a ride on a freight train, were tried, convicted, and sentenced to death for raping two white women. While other organizations, such as the NAACP, either dawdled or refused to intervene, the Communist Party's International Labor Defense (ILD) rushed to the aid of the "boys" by appealing the conviction and death sentence to the United States Supreme Court. The case produced two important decisions that reaffirmed black people's right to the basic protections enjoyed by all other American citizens. The Court ruled that the nine Scottsboro defendants had not been given adequate legal counsel and that the trial had taken place in a hostile and volatile atmosphere. On the basis of the Fourteenth Amendment the Court ordered a new trial, and also a new jury which had to be composed of blacks too. The Scottsboro events did not pass unobserved to African American writers. For Scottsboro as well as other events which characterized black experience in the United States, literature became the *signifier* of blacks' quest in America and a fictional place to denounce white oppression. Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen wrote a poem about the Scottsboro case: "Scottsboro, Too, Is Worth Its Song." Cullen's work protests the paralysis of other poets (in extension American society) in front of a case of injustice as was the Scottsboro case. Cullen writes:

I said:
Now will the poets sing,
Their cries go thundering
Like blood and tears
Into the nation's ears,
Like lightning dart
Into the nation's heart.

In this first section of the poem it seems that Cullen thinks that there will be a common reaction against another episode of oppression towards his people. In reality what he really thinks comes up at the end of the poem.

Surely, I said,

Now will the poets sing.

But they have raised no cry.

I wonder why

The last lines contrast with the opening of the poem. Here Cullen admits that besides the injustice of which the nine blacks were victim, there is for them very little hope that white poets would support them. Cullen does not make any explicit reference to whites in the text. We might assume that whites played an important role against the nine black youths because of the racism that characterized interracial relations in Scottsboro. W. E. B. Du Bois in "The Negro and Communism" explains the influence of the color line during the Scottsboro's trial. Du Bois argues also against the Communists who helped the nine black youths only for their propaganda. Du Bois writes:

Scottsboro whites belong to the labouring class and they formed the white proletarian mob which is determined to kill the eight Negro boys. They demand to kill "niggers" whenever their possessions, especially in sexual matters are informed by propaganda. The persons who are killing blacks in Northern Alabama and demanding blood sacrifice are the white workers, sharecroppers, unionists and artisans.

The white workers want to kill the competition of niggers. (591)

In fact, episodes like Scottsboro were created by white workers' anger against blacks. White workers wanted blacks lynched or jailed because they competed with them for

jobs. They refused any legal equality with former slaves, even more in a moment of great economic crisis where there were very few jobs. The role played by the white racist population in Scottsboro, those who wanted the death of the nine youths, is also reflected in a short poem written by another great representative of the Harlem Renaissance: Langston Hughes. In "The Town of Scottsboro" Hughes writes:

Scottsboro's just a little place:

No shame is writ across its face-

Its court, too weak to stand against a mob

Its people's heart, too small to hold a sob (The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, 230).

Fiction for Activism: Richard Wright

In the *Signifying Monkey*, the scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. maintains that African American experience in the United States is signified in African American literature. In the thirties, black literary production followed this concept conjectured by Gates. African American literary productions of the thirties dwelled on the adversity which blacks had to face in order to be equal citizens. Harlem Renaissance poets such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Margaret Walker, and later Robert Hayden discussed in their poems themes of racism, legal segregation, and discrimination, social issues that blacks had to face in American society. One of the most famous poems that can be used to show how black creative writings reflected and denounced issues that affected African American is "I, Too" by Langston Hughes. Hughes writes:

I, too, sing America

I am the darker brother

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong (*Norton Anthology of African America Literature*,
1258)

Lyrical works of the Harlem Renaissance showed on one hand great formal achievement by black writers, but they were also able to represent black interracial experience in the United States.

In the essay "The Criteria of the Negro Art," Du Bois claims that art has to be propaganda. Du Bois was not interested in art, but he recognized in creative art a useful tool for the advancement of his people. He says "All art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists" (103); he adds, "I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda" (103). In Du Bois' mind propaganda has the Latin connotation that means 'things to be propagated.' When the scholar talks about art as propaganda he means that art had to be produced to show the real image of blacks, an image that was trapped in racial prejudices and old stereotypes created by whites. Art as propaganda also means that art has to show whites black potential and the beauty of African American culture. Du Bois wanted artists to show the white majority that they were able to produce a symphony, poetry, painting, the things that at that time characterized the 'avant-garde' of Western Culture. In Du Bois' mind art was an imitation of white culture; he literally hated jazz music, a product of African American culture and together with blues the most important American artistic contribution to world culture. It seems that Du Bois is proposing to his people a model of cultural assimilation. Perhaps he thought that if blacks had a European artistic taste they could gain a step toward social advancement in a society based on European values.

Alain Locke, one of the most influential black intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance, in the essay "The New Negro," underlines the importance of the Harlem Renaissance as a group of enlightened minds whose work was able to restore the real image of black people. Locke's image of black people is a highly educated middle class person, the bourgeoisie prototype. He thought blacks were prisoners of stereotypes in American minds. Locke called those stereotypes 'formulas' or the 'Old Negro.' He maintains:

So for generations in the mind of America, the Negro has been more a formula rather than a human being – a something to argued about, condemned or defended, to be "kept down," or "in his place," or "helped up," to be worried with or worried over harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden. (47)

Locke's 'formula' consisted of prejudicial concepts whites had about blacks. This formula, which is full of prejudices, such as that blacks were sexually promiscuous, was one of the ways whites used to claim their superiority. White supremacist attitudes were carried out with violence and without violence. In the South the Ku Klux Klan lynched blacks who claimed social equality through civil rights. In the North white supremacy was carried out using scientific theories like social Darwinism, and with a proliferation of folkloric caricatures of blacks that were based on the western misconception of African culture.

The Talented Tenth, which was what Harlem Renaissance artists were called, contributed to show the world the real image of blacks. They ignored the Old Negro formula and showed what blacks were capable of. Harlem Renaissance groups became, as Locke says in his article, "the advance-guard of the African peoples in their contact with Twentieth Century civilization," carrying out "a mission of

rehabilitating the race in world esteem from that loss of prestige for which the fate and conditions of slavery have largely been responsible” (49). Locke saw in the Harlem Renaissance a group of artists whose works had an important social function for the community because they started a new phase for blacks. This new phase was characterized by the recognition of whites as well as blacks of great contribution to American culture. As Locke points out, blacks were no longer a social burden but “now become a conscious contributor and lay aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization” (50). Locke recognized in the work of the Harlem Renaissance not only a group of talented artists, but also the best representatives of the black race. Thanks to their art, they were able to show that blacks have the same skills as whites, therefore they were not “something to be argued” (Locke 47), but they were real contributors to the development and advancement of American civilization. Locke believed that middle class artists could lead blacks toward political and social equality; in reality, the more the ‘Talented Tenth’ showed their ability in imitating white culture, the more they move away from the black majority, which in the thirties was represented by the black working classes.

Later in the thirties, the discussion about the aim of African American art continued with Richard Wright. He elaborated in his writings a social naturalism that addressed a strong social critique of the establishment, and showed a literature that did not distort the reality of African Americans’ daily life in the United States. Richard Wright’s works marked an important change in African American literature, and in his production black art and social protest became synonymous. In his novels, the text becomes like a small laboratory in which the writer explains to the reader how the destiny of each human being is determined by people who control and administer power. In the essay “How Bigger Was Born,” Wright maintains:

Why should I not, like a scientist in a laboratory, use my imagination and invent test-tube situations, place Bigger in them, and, following the guidance of my hopes and fears, what I had learned and remembered, work out in fictional form an emotional statement and resolution of this problem. (449)

We might argue that in Wright's fiction the narrative space offered a place in which readers could test the relationship between man and society. Additionally, we might add to Wright's idea that because of its formal characteristics fiction has more abstract space to show in depth the relation between men and power than poetry has. It is a matter of room. Fiction allows novelists to create fictional characters with deep personalities. Novel writers can build in their work a physical environment in which they can place those fictional characters and show readers how they develop their lives.

In the essay "Blueprint for Negro Writing," Wright discussed firstly the state of African American literature before him, and secondly what should be the purpose of black writers. This essay starts with a critique of previous black writings, for example works created during the Harlem Renaissance that were not related with the life of the majority of African American and the American reality of the time, but were only a "conspicuous ornamentation, the hallmark of achievement" (1380). According to him, African American writing in the past years "had been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to white America" (1380). He also claims that black writing in the past showed that "the Negro was not inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people. For the most part these artistic ambassadors were received as though they were French poodles who do clever tricks" (1380). In other

words, black writings in the past had only to show what a group of talented and highly educated black artists were capable of as black bourgeoisie. The result of this process was nothing more than pure entertainment which is compared by Wright to French poodles that do clever tricks. On the contrary, the idea of using writing for social criticism, for example to talk about black life in the United States had never been an issue for black writers. In fact, Wright says in his essay "Rarely was the best of this writing addressed to the Negro himself, his needs, his sufferings, his aspirations" (1380). Wright's idea of black writing contrasted with what Du Bois said in the essay "The New Negro." As a matter of fact, Du Bois thought that art should only be directed to produce an image of blacks different from the stereotypical one perpetuated by mainstream culture, an image that depicted blacks as culturally inferior to whites. He wanted an art that would show African American skills and not African American problems.

Again in his essay "Blueprint" Wright suggests that literature should find his material in the Black working classes:

The workers of a minority of people, chafing under exploitation, forge organizational forms of struggle to better their lot. Lacking the handicaps of false ambition and property, they have access to a wide social vision and a deep social consciousness. They display a greater freedom and initiative in pushing their claims upon civilization than even do the petty bourgeoisie. Their organizations show greater strength, adaptability, and efficiency than other group or class in society. (1381)

Wright points out that it was the black working classes that could lead their group toward advancement to emancipation and not the petty bourgeoisie. The problem for

Wright is that previous black writers did not recognize the political strength of black workers, for example they did not reflect black workers' struggle for recognition as a legal union of labourers, and also previous black writers did not denounce lynching. By pursuing their goal, Negro bourgeois writers "have lagged sadly, and as time passes the gap widens between them and their people" (1381). We might trace a parallel between Wright's argument in "Blueprint" and Langston Hughes's point of view about racial art in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Hughes noticed in black middle class artists an urge towards white America standardization that created "A very high mountain indeed for the would-be racial artist to climb in order to discover himself and his people" (1268). Hughes wrote that in the middle class black artist mind silently runs the whisper "I want to be white" (1268) and therefore "one sees immediately how difficult it would be for an artist born in such a home (Hughes refers to a prototypical black middle class family) to interest himself in interpreting the beauty of his own people. He is never taught to see that beauty. He is taught rather not to see it, or if he does, to be ashamed of it when it is not according to Caucasian pattern" (1268). Likewise Richard Wright, Hughes found in the black working classes the real representatives of African American individuality. He writes in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain":

Those common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colourful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardization. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself.
(1268)

Hughes and Wright recognized that black middle class artists were pushing the entire black race towards white standardization, and this pushing created a race gap between black middle class and black working class. Further, this race gap between black middle class and black working class created two black cultures, as Wright says: “Two separate cultures sprang up: one for the Negro masses, unwritten and unrecognized; and the other for the sons and daughters of a rising Negro bourgeoisie, parasitic and mannered” (Blueprint 1382). The two authors shared a common sensibility toward their people’s quest for emancipation in America, and they believed that art could help blacks on condition that it uses ‘materials’ from the black working classes. Hughes was fascinated by black working class people because they embodied black folklore; they represented the spirit of art as the blues and jazz; those were the real expression of African American beauty. In “Blueprint” Wright also underlines the importance of folklore for black arts and identity. Further he argues against black middle class artists who did not continue to develop this tradition in their work. He writes:

One would have thought that Negro writers in the last century of striving at expression would have continued and deepened this folk tradition, would have tried to create a more intimate and yet more profoundly social system of artistic communication between them and their people. But the illusion that they could escape through individual achievement the harsh lot of their race swung Negro writers away from any such path. (1382)

Wright’s argument about folklore seems contradictory if we read “Between Laughter and Tears.” In this article, a review of Zora Neal Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching*

God published in *New Masses*, Wright harshly criticizes Hurston's novel, a book acclaimed for its use of black folklore. He writes:

The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought. In the main, her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a White audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of Negro life which is "quaint," the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the "superior" race. (76)

Wright is not refusing black folklore, but he could not stand the image of blacks which came up from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Wright saw in Hurston's novel a static image of the black community rather than the Marxist working class, those who "chafing under exploitation, forge organizational forms of struggle to better their lot" ("Blueprint" 1381). Hurston constructed her novel around black folklore that is, together with blues and jazz, one indicator of black cultural identity. Hurston's Eatonville characters produced in Wright's mind an image of blacks similar to Locke's conception of the "Old Negro" or the blacks' mask, which 'grins and lies,' used by Dunbar in his poem. Hurston dealt in her book with "intraracial folkloric situations rather than with interracial confrontations" (Hemenway 242), and this could not be understood by a Marxist intellectual working for a social change like Wright was. Wright did not reject folklore, but he thought that black writing should focus at the contemporary reality of the black working class instead of 'celebrating' black folklore. In his works, he describes black working class harsh life conditions and their struggle to survive. Wright prefers to stress in his novels the issues that derive from the interracial confrontation with the white majority.

In "Blueprint for Negro Writing," Wright described what had to be the new role of a black writer. In this essay, Wright shapes a new function for the black writer

that connects him with black political activism. In Wright writing becomes black political activism, and serves for a struggle toward full enjoyment of civil rights. In the nineteenth century, blacks' struggle for religion on the plantation "assumed a form of struggle for human rights" ("Blueprint" 1382), and "it remained a relatively revolutionary struggle until religion began to serve as an antidote for suffering and denial" (1382). The immobile condition of black churches, and the inconclusiveness of black middle class, made the Negro writer a prophet of his race. This new prophet of black *folk* creates his arts by using 'material' of the working classes, and by doing that he feeds the spirit of his people. Wright says:

With the gradual decline of the moral authority of the Negro Church, and with the increasing irresolution which is paralyzing Negro middle class leadership, a new role is devolving upon the Negro writer. He is being called upon to do no less than create values by which his race is to struggle, live, and die." (1384)

To illustrate, Wright maintained that the writer must play an active role in his community. Thanks to his works he should create values which are fundamental for life and survival of his group. Wright adds, that "because he can create the myths and symbols that inspire a faith in life, he may expect either to be consigned to oblivion, or to be recognized for the valued agent he is" (1384). Wright's 'black bard' would be the leader of his people; through his writing he would educate his community and also point the finger against white oppressors' injustices. Wright's idea of black art is not propaganda in the Du Bois' connotation, but it is a fundamental tool to address and explain social issues regarding black working class daily life in America.

A Novel with a Political Commitment: Native Son

The concepts that Richard Wright elaborates in his essay "Blueprint For Negro Writing" found their best realization in his work *Native Son*. It was in this novel that

Negro fictional writing became synonymous of social criticism, the same that Wright advocates in his essay "Blueprint." In the article "The Novel as Social Criticism," African American author Ann Petry champions *Native Son* as a fine example of the novel as social criticism. She recommends that any novelist planning to write about race relations in America should "reread *Native Son* and compare the small talk with touches on race relations with that found almost in any novel on the subject published since 1940" (1117). *Native Son* showed readers what could happen if the establishment did not face race issues. In the preface to *Native Son*, scholar Rampersad maintains that "Bigger Thomas, the main character of *Native Son*, is the epitome of the most radical effect of racism on black people" (15). This character is a product of a white capitalist oriented society, a place where blacks could gain only crumbs of white prosperity. His violent reaction is the answer of millions of young oppressed black working class men to an establishment that denied them any chances for social advancement. Thomas is the American native son, and he is the son of the color line that is the real cancer of American society.

Native Son may be seen as a literary manifesto of black activism because it addressed a social criticism against American political establishment. It has been considered a protest novel. Protest novels are literary works that aim is to denounce oppression and exploitation carried out by a majority ethnic group. Those novels are often produced by a minority ethnic group in an asymmetrical power relation with a majority group. In the essay "Everybody's protest novel: the era of Richard Wright," scholar Jerry W. Ward argues about the meaning of the term "protest novel." He maintains that "In twentieth-century literary usage, 'protest,' a word inextricably associated with 'race,' might be taken as a pure product of America. Protest was a pejorative code word for work of inferior artistic accomplishment" (173). The

problem is that books like *Native Son* were read as documents: “they had a kind of outlaw status in the republic of letters than as genuine examples of literature” (Ward 174). It seems restrictive claiming that *Native Son* is only a historical document or a simple protest novel. Wright’s work, and especially *Native Son*, has something more than a document that reflects a social status quo; in fact as Ward argues, “His novels instruct; they challenge beliefs about the human condition. They remain in dialogue with the past and the present, responding to and transcending the situational imperatives of their time” (174).

James Baldwin wrote one of the most famous critiques of *Native Son*. In the seminal essay “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” published in 1949, nine years after the publication of *Native Son*, Baldwin compares Wright’s work with Harriett Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom Cabin*, saying “Bigger is Uncle Tom’s descendant, flesh of his flesh” (1659). Baldwin contends that the protest novel was too similar to a pamphlet, and the demands of pamphleteering hindered the novelist in his true pursuit, which is the discovery and revelation of the truth. According to Baldwin, “truth is meant to imply a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfilment; freedom which cannot be legislated, fulfilment which cannot be charted” (1655). Baldwin underlined that the protest novel supported a passion for categorization; consequently human beings are transformed into data, ciphers, and real problems are made remote. According to Baldwin, *Native Son* falls into ‘the trap’ of the protest novel and instead of challenging the myth of black inhumanity it reinforces it. In his essay Baldwin writes, “For Bigger’s tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at birth” (1659). In

the essay "Many Thousands Gone," Baldwin addresses another attack to the social criticism which is in *Native Son* and to Richard Wright. He is fascinated by the idea of the novel itself; he says that Bigger Thomas' story "is an arresting and potentially rich idea," but "we would be discussing a very different novel if Wright's execution had been more perceptive and if he had not attempted to redeem a symbolical monster in social terms" (1665). Baldwin has a strong argument about *Native Son*. The limit of this novel may be seen in the main character who stands for the entire black race. Bigger's quest for humanity is 'covered' by his violent personality and also by his victimization. In the first two sections of the book, "Fear" and "Flight," Wright depicts a social monster that in a racist white audience could only reinforce prejudices about blacks as dangerous individuals. Perhaps Bigger's redemption comes too late, in the last section of the novel, which is called "Fate." In this section, supported by a Marxist approach to American society, Wright explains that Bigger is a creature produced by the racism of the American system. The other weakness of *Native Son* is that of presenting black characters as victims who have to battle for their humanity, but "our humanity is our burden, our life; we need not battle for it; we need only to do what is infinitely more difficult — that is, accept it," as Baldwin writes in "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1659). Here Baldwin is not accepting white oppression; rather, he is underlining the importance of accepting our humanity. In the novel, Thomas refuses his humanity, his blackness, because for him blackness is a trap; in order to set himself free from this trap he battles the white oppressor. Thomas wants to gain the symbols of whiteness that the white oppressor denies to him, and to accomplish his purpose he battles violently.

Native Son is widely considered Wright's top achievement in fiction. It was an important book, "a magic mirror which revealed as yet unexamined psychological

monstrosities to the American public” (Ward 176). In *Native Son* Wright describes the story of Bigger Thomas, a working class youth who lives in the ghetto of Chicago. Thomas is hired as a chauffeur for The Daltons, a white rich family. One night he drives Mr. Dalton’s daughter Mary to her Communist friend Jan. Eager to prove their progressive ideals and racial tolerance, Mary and Jan force Bigger to take them to a restaurant in the South Side. Despite Bigger’s embarrassment, they order drinks, and as the evening passes, all three of them get drunk. Afterward, Mary is too drunk to make it to her bedroom on her own, so Bigger helps her up the stairs. Drunk and aroused by his proximity to a young white woman, Bigger begins to kiss Mary. As Bigger places Mary on her bed, Mary’s blind mother, Mrs. Dalton, enters the bedroom. Though Mrs. Dalton cannot see him, her presence terrifies him. Bigger worries that Mary, in her drunken condition, will reveal his presence. He covers her face with a pillow and accidentally smothers her to death. Unaware that Mary has been killed, Mrs. Dalton prays over her daughter and returns to bed. Bigger tries to conceal his crime by burning Mary’s body in the Daltons’ furnace.

The scholar Ward maintains that “Wright made the nemesis of race in the United States the subject of his novel. It was impossible for American readers to be untouched by its stinging indictment and by the spectre of the novel’s main character Bigger Thomas” (177). Wright’s creation of a nemesis of race as the subject of his novel was a risk because it could aggravate existing racial prejudices, but it followed what he said in his essay “Blueprint for Negro Writing” when he says, “Today the question is: Shall Negro writing be for the Negro masses, moulding their lives and consciousness of those masses toward new goals, or shall it continue begging the question of the Negroes’ humanity?” (1382) Wright did not want to create a novel that created in the white reader sympathy for the tragedy of black race. *Native Son* is a

novel designed to induce fear and trembling. In the essay "How Bigger Was Born," Wright observed that in writing *Native Son* he did not want to write a piece of fiction like his first collection, *Uncle Tom's Children*, that could be mistaken for an over-romantic story that would blur his reader's perceptions with tears:

I had written a book of short stories which was published under the title *Uncle Tom's Children*. When the reviews of that book began to appear, I realized I had made an awfully naïve mistake. I found I had written a book which even a banker's daughters could read and weep over and feel good about. I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears. (454)

In *Native Son*, Wright outlined a frightening aspect of race in America and the potential explosion for violence. The main character of the novel, Bigger, is a violent black young-man. In "How Bigger Was Born," which explains the genesis of Bigger Thomas, Wright explains from where he derived the violent side of Bigger's personality. He writes that during his childhood he knew three Biggers, the first one "a boy who terrorizes me and all of the boys I played with. If we were playing our games he would saunter up and snatch from us our balls, bats, spinning tops, and marbles" (434). Then there was Bigger number two: "Bigger No. 2 was not directed toward me or the other Negroes, but toward the whites who ruled the South. He bought clothes and food on credit and would not pay for them. When we asked him why he acted as he did, he would tell us that the white folks had everything and we had nothing" (435). Bigger number three was a juvenile delinquent, "whom the white folks called a 'bad nigger.' He carried his life in his hands in a literal fashion" (436). Ward points out in his essay "Everybody's Protest Novel: the Richard Wright Era"

that *Native Son* shows “the possibility that incipient pathology among young adolescents who were consistently denied the chance to develop healthy psycho-social identities might manifest itself in extreme violence. *Native Son* asserted that deferred dreams might explode in the Bigger Thomases of America” (177).

The character of Bigger Thomas is a literary projection of Richard Wright’s personal experiences and thoughts. Uneducated, intellectually Bigger is a creature of the movie house and of Hollywood fantasies; in fact, he spends most of his time at the movie theatre where he watches and admires rich white people. In this passage Bigger and his friend Jack are watching the first picture:

Bigger sat looking at the first picture; it was a newsreel. As the scenes unfolded his interest was caught and he leaned forward. He saw images of smiling, dark-haired white girls lolling on the gleaming sands of a beach. The background was a stretch of sparkling water. Palm trees stood near and far. The voice of the commentator ran with the movement of the film: *Here are the daughters of the rich taking sunbaths in the sands of Florida! This little collection of debutantes represents over four billion dollars of America’s wealth and over fifty of America’s leading families.*

“Some babies,” Jack said.

“Yeah, man!”

“I’d like to be there.”

“You can,” Bigger said. “But you’d be hanging from a tree like a bunch of bananas....” (31)

In “The Negro and the Racial Mountain,” Hughes recognized that there was an “urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold

of American standardization and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible” (1267). It is possible to see in the novel what Hughes says in his essay. In this passage of *Native Son* Bigger is still at the movie theatre:

He looked at the Trader Horn unfold and saw pictures of naked black men and women whirling in wild dances and heard drums beating and then gradually the African scene changed and was replaced by images in his own mind of white men and women dressed in black and white clothes, laughing, talking, drinking and dancing. Those were smart people; they know how to get hold of money, millions of it. Sure, it was all a game and white people knew how to play it. (33)

The two passages are taken from the first section of the book: “Fear.” This chapter focuses mainly on the relationship: Bigger/whites. Thomas is afraid of white people because they are more prosperous than him, further they have access to everything they want and that he cannot have. Thomas does not feel comfortable in a white world and with white people. His reaction is even more clear in another passage of the novel, a moment in which Thomas is in the car with two whites, Miss Dalton and her Communist friend Jan.

Did not white people despise black skin? Then why was Jan doing this? Why was Mary standing there so eagerly with shining eyes? What could they get out of this? Maybe they did not despise him? But they made him feel his black skin by just standing there looking at him, one holding his hand and the other smiling, He felt he had no physical existence at all right then; he was something he hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to black skin. It was shadowy

region, a No Man's Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood upon. (67)

Even though Jan and Miss Dalton did not say anything to Bigger, he perceives a difference that cannot be bridged easily. Bigger feels himself as different and inferior to the two white youths.

Bigger lives by committing small thefts with his gang in the Black Belt. He despises religion; he is estranged from his family, even from his mother. In the essay "The Violence of *Native Son*," scholar Jerry H. Bryant argues that Bigger represents the prototypical mass man that Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset depicts in *The Revolt of the Masses*. According to Bryant, Bigger is an example of a mass man who is "aching for sensation, ignorant of the complex element of the new world, godless, and valueless. He has been estranged not only from the folk, but from the past and from himself" (16). Thomas is the result of a society which is oriented toward profits and interests, rather than individuals, a society in which very few people get rich while others can get only crumbs. The genesis of this character started before Wright moved to Chicago; in fact Bigger was already "born" when the author lived in the South with his family. In the essay "How Bigger was Born," Wright claims that during his life he had met five different Bigger Thomases. The first prototype was a boy he met in Mississippi who terrorized him, and the other four prototypes distinguished themselves from the way in which their antisocial behaviour was linked to their hatred of whites.

It is easy to trace a parallel between Bigger and individuals who populate the ghetto. Wright's experience in Chicago influenced the creation of Bigger Thomas. In the essay "Composing Bigger: Wright and the Masking of *Native Son*," the scholar Joseph T. Skerrett argues that "the cathartic event in the process of committing Bigger

to paper was Wright's new job at the South Side Youth Club. Here he was able to observe the rebellious urbanized alienated black youth of whom Bigger is a composite and symbolic projection" (106). What Skerrett maintains is true; Wright used his experience with the ghetto to create Bigger Thomas. The South Side Youth Club was a community center in Chicago's Black Belt. In 1936 Wright started to attend this place because he needed material for a series of biographical sketches. In his autobiography *Black Boy (American Hunger)* he recalled this experience:

I found my work in the South Side Boys' Club deeply engrossing. Each day black boys between the ages of eight and twenty five came to swim, draw, and read. They were a wild and homeless lot, culturally lost, spiritually disinherited, candidates for the clinics, morgues, prison, reformatories, and the electric chair of the state death's house.
(324)

Bigger Thomas was not only a product of an urban environment. This character became not just the metaphorical representation of how white racism and segregation could dehumanize other individuals. Thomas also symbolizes the oppressed working class: "I made the discovery that Bigger Thomas was not only black all the time; he was white, too, and there were literally millions of them" (Wright, "Born" 441). In Chicago, Wright became aware that the oppressed were not only young black youths of the Black Belt, but also all members of the working class, black as well as white. The oppression was carried on by a commodity-profit machine over a working class composed by blacks and whites.

The discussion about Bigger Thomas could not be satisfied without looking at his situation in the novel. Skerrett suggests that Bigger is "trapped by the economics of the Depression and the resultant intensification of racial prejudice and

discrimination.” The argument is evident in Bigger’s dream. Bigger reacts to this trap by dreaming of becoming a pilot. In this passage Bigger is with his friend Gus and they are walking to the poolroom:

“Look!” Bigger said.

“What?”

“That plane writing up there,” Bigger said, pointing.

“Oh!”

They squinted at a tiny ribbon of unfolding vapour that spelled out the word: USE....The plane was so far away that at times the strong glare of the sun blanked it from sight.

“You can hardly see it,” Gus said.

“Looks like a little bird,” Bigger breathed with childlike wonder.

“Them white boys sure can fly,” Gus said.

“Yeah,” Bigger said, wistfully. “They get a chance to do everything.”

(16)

In this passage Wright shows us Bigger’s situation. Thomas wants to escape, fly away from his blackness because blackness means for him to be a social captive, blackness means to not have any chances of realizing a dream. Bigger is resentful because he cannot have the same opportunities that whites have. Thomas is trapped like the rat that he kills in the opening of the novel. Thomas is trapped in himself and because of this situation he is forced to deny himself and act. Thomas is forced to repress his own impulses even more rigorously because “He knew that at the moment he allowed what his life meant to enter fully into his consciousness, he would either kill himself or someone else. So he denied himself and acted tough” (10).

Symbologies Behind Murders

Native Son is also popular because of the violence that characterizes the actions of the main character. In Wright's novel, violence becomes a means of agency because it is the only way in which the main character can resist white oppression and the socio-economical enslavement that white capitalism creates on individuals like Bigger. Violence is very brutal in several scenes: in the opening fight between Bigger and a rat, the murder of Bessie, and the death of Miss Dalton whose body is put in a furnace by Bigger.

The previous chapter discussed the concept of double-consciousness. Double consciousness is a psychological condition which shaped blacks' perceptions and created in them the twoness. In other words, it is a sense of looking at oneself through the eyes of others, "of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, *Souls* 11). According to James Baldwin the double-consciousness is the reason to explain Mary Dalton's murder as an "act of creation" operated by Bigger Thomas. In the essay "Many Thousands Gone," Baldwin maintains:

The American image of the Negro lives also in the Negro's heart; and when he has surrendered to this image life has no other possible reality. Then he, like the white enemy with whom he will be locked one day in mortal struggle, has no means save this of asserting his identity. This is why Bigger's murder of Mary can be referred to as an "act of creation" and why, once this murder has been committed, he can feel for the first time that he is living fully and deeply as a man was meant to live. (1666-1667)

Thus we might argue that through Mary's murder Bigger Thomas "kills" his double-consciousness, and after that he is able to feel for the first time that he is totally living

his life. The murder of Mary is what Baldwin calls an adjustment: "there is no Negro, finally, who has not had to make his own precarious adjustment to the 'nigger' who surrounds him and to the 'nigger' in himself." ("Many Thousands Gone" 1667)

A question arises from an examination of the two murders. Why does Wright use a white woman (Mary Dalton) and black woman (Bessie Mears) as victims of Bigger Thomas? The two murders have two different meanings. On one hand, Mary's murder may be connected with the attempt of Bigger to set his repressed impulses free, on the other hand Bessie Mears' murder may be seen as an impossibility for the main character to realize his full psychic liberation. Mary's murder allows him to escape from the trap in which he is. In fact, as scholar Skerrett maintains, "The act (the murder) opens Bigger to a flood of realizations that he had managed all his life to repress with a half-conscious resistance." Mary's murder gives to Bigger a sense of power and security, like the knife and gun that he carried with him: "His crime was an anchor weighing him safely in time; it added to him a certain confidence which gun and knife did not" (*Native Son* 105). The murder of a white, beautiful and rich girl allows Bigger Thomas a change of his own status. Bigger's crime becomes a creative act which contributes to the creation of a new identity. "He had murdered and he had created a new life for himself" (*Native Son* 105). After the murder he no longer feels different from whites, but he feels equal: "the knowledge that he had killed a white girl they loved and regarded as their symbol of beauty made him feel the equal of them, like a man who had been somehow cheated, but had now evened the score" (*Native Son* 120).

As far as Bessie Mears' murder is concerned, it is also connected with Bigger's ambition to set his repressed impulses free. Skerret argues that "Full psychic liberation can come to Bigger only when the image of his self reflected back at him by

others coincides with his own image of his self.” In order to reach this full psychic liberation Bigger needs someone else who could listen and agree on what he has done. In fact, Wright writes in the novel:

He was not satisfied with the way things stood now; he was a man who had come in sight of a goal, then had won it, and in winning it had seen just within his grasp another goal, higher, greater. He had learned to shout and had shouted and no ear had heard him; he had just learned to walk and was walking but could not see the ground beneath his feet; and had long been yearning for weapons to hold in his hands and suddenly found that his hands held weapons that were invisible. (130)

Skerrett points out that “Bessie (Bigger’s girl) is the ear he needs to sound out the meaning of Mary’s death. Through her, Bigger can gain some insight into his family’s judgment of his act, without actually telling them” (113). Bessie Mears represents a mother figure for Bigger Thomas, an oasis of motherly comfort. Wright describes her as “a fountain whose warm waters washed and cleaned his senses, cooled them, made them strong and keen again to see and smell and touch and taste and hear, cleared them to end the tiredness and to reforge in him a new sense of time and space” (*Native Son* 135). These aspects of his mistress contrasts strongly in Bigger’s mind with the other Bessie terrified that she will be implicated in Mary Dalton’s murder. As soon as he tells her about the murder she is no longer in his mind, “a warm night sea” (135), a mother figure, because she rejected him:

She bent her head to the floor. “God only knows why I ever let you treat me this way. I wish to God I never seen you. I wish one of us had died before we was born. God knows I do! All you ever caused me was trouble, just plain trouble. All you ever did since we been knowing

each other was to get me drunk so's you could have me. (*Native Son* 229-230)

In Bigger's mind Bessie's outburst is a rejection to his will and mind. Because of her rejection, Bessie forbids Bigger to accomplish a full psychic liberation. Consequently, he realizes that she can neither accompany him on his flight, nor be left behind to betray him. "He couldn't take her and he couldn't leave her; so he would have to kill her. It was his life against hers" (*Native Son* 236).

Another argument that has been discussed about *Native Son* is whether or not Bigger rapes Mary Dalton. In the introduction to *Native Son*, the scholar Arnold Rampersad suggests that the rape is not realized in the book, but it is a possibility for Bigger Thomas, especially because the rape of a white woman could acquire the status of a political act. He maintains his point of view by underlining a scene in which Bigger sees Mary for the first time in a newsreel at the movie theatre:

Then Bigger saw in close-up the picture of a slight, smiling white girl whose waist was encircled by the arms of a man. He heard the commentator's voice: *Mary Dalton, daughter of Chicago's Henry Dalton, 4605 Drexel Boulevard, shocks society by spurning the boys of La Salle Street and the Gold Coast and accepting the attentions of a well-known radical while on her recent winter vacation in Florida....*

"Say, Jack?"

"Hunh?"

"That gal... That gal there in that guy's arms.... That's the daughter of the guy I'm going to work for. They live at 4605 Drexel.... That's where I'm going tonight to see about that job...." (32)

Bigger is surprised about what he sees on the screen of the movie theatre. Further, he feels a sense of excitement for his new job when his friend Jack tells him about white women's sexual promiscuity. Bigger thinks that he would be able to have Mary and the world she stands for. Wrights writes:

“Sure,” said Jack. “When you start working there you gotta learn to stand in with her. Then you can get everything you want, see? These rich folks do their dirt on the sly. I bet the reason the old man was so mad about that Communist was ‘cause his gal was too open about it...”

“Yeah; maybe so,” said Bigger.

“Shucks, my ma use to work for rich white folks and you ought to hear the tales she used to tell...”

“What kind of tales?” Bigger asked eagerly.

“Ah, them rich white women’ll go to bed with anybody, from a poodle on up. They even have their chaffeurs. Say,” Jack said, punching Bigger in the ribs, “if you run across anything too much for you to handle at that place, let me know.”

They laughed. Bigger turned his eyes to the screen, but he did not look.

He was filled with a sense of excitement about this new job. (33)

Since slavery there has always been in the white man a fear of the black phallus. In order to deal with this sense of being physically inferior whites created the prejudice of blacks as rapists. Ida Burnett Wells denounced this fear of the white man as one of the causes used by whites to justify lynching. She points out in *A Red Record*, “With the Southern white man, any misalliance existing between a white woman and a colored man is a sufficient foundation for the charge of rape” (599). In *Native Son*

Bigger is fascinated by Mary's sexuality and her body becomes like an object of desire. Rampersad suggests:

Because the sexuality of white women is flaunted in movies and magazines but absolutely forbidden to black men, Bigger and men like him sometimes develop a potentially murderous fixation on these women. Rape may acquire the illusion of being a political act. (xviii)

In the novel, before the accidental death of Mary, Bigger takes advantage of the drunk girl and kisses and touches her. He stops only because Mrs. Dalton gets in the room. During the passage in which Mrs. Dalton, Mary and Bigger are in the bedroom, it seems that Thomas is very willing in getting Mary's body which is something morally and socially prohibited to him.

Marxism in Native Son

Native Son is a work in which Wright uses his experiences with Communism in order to explore whether this political doctrine could be the way for gathering blacks and whites against capitalism, and also if it could be the means to fix interracial relations. At the time in which the author wrote this novel, he had already given up on the Communist Party. Wright became a member of the Communist Party after he got to Chicago, in 1930. The Communist Party marked an important stage in Wright's life, and helped him find a space in which he could use his literary talent. The Communist party offered him a sense of ideological and political purpose, and consistency, as well as international connections. He joined the John Reed Club, a nationwide organization founded by the party to attract writers and artists to its ranks. It was during these years, and especially through reading journalist H. L. Mencken, that he learned to use words as weapons. At the beginning he found many ideological affinities with the ideas and the members of the party, but in 1937 he left the Party. The reasons he left can be found in the attempt of the Communists to control his

writing. Wright's departure from the Communist party was marked by the publication of the essay "I Tried to Be a Communist," in the *Atlantic Monthly*. This essay was made up with excerpts of the second branch of his autobiography *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, a part which was taken out from the first release of the book because of an obscene scene, and also because the publishing house had trouble with the Communist Party. The second half of *Black Boy (American Hunger)* was published later in 1977, thirty three years after the publication of the first one. In *Black Boy (American Hunger)* Wright recalled when he met a comrade called Buddy Nelson who forced him to use his talent for Party purposes; it was after that meeting that he decided to quit the Communist Party. Moreover, the situation with the Communists got worse because he could not stand the party's weak position on discrimination in the armed forces during World War II.

Although it is true that Wright left the Communist Party, Marxist analyses of society contributed to the creation of *Native Son*. Wright personally admitted that Communism was important for the generation of *Native Son*, and he wrote about it in the essay "How Bigger Was Born." In this article he maintains that "the contact with the labour movement and its ideology made me see Bigger clearly and feel what he meant." It is possible to argue that Wright's militant years in Chicago through the lines of the Communist party were reflected in his novel. In *Native Son* his past experience gave him a perspective for a study of the confrontation between upper class and working class.

Communism defines identities mainly through the instrument of economic determinism. According to this doctrine economical, social, and historic factors above all determine consciousness. All the elements that shape this doctrine are reflected in the consciousness of the main character of this book, whose thoughts and actions may

be explained by economical and social determinism. Thomas grows up in the **Black Belt**, a ghetto in which working class blacks are marginalized by whites – **represented** in the book by Mr. Dalton – he does not have any kind of material opportunity to **run** away from this world, or change the course of his life except through violence.

Wright's experience with Communism is also present in the person of two characters: Jan Erlone and Max. The former is a young friend of Mrs. Dalton, a naïve young man who believes in the utopian dream of a society based on equal rights for all humankind; the latter is a cold and cynical lawyer who protects Thomas during the trial. Jan Erlone and Max represent two sides of the same coin. Although they are different ages, they both want to pursue their own goal: to spread the effectiveness of Communist ideas. Max says in the novel, "He had heard men like you lie about the Communists so much that he believed them. If I can make the people of this country understand why this boy acted like he did, I'll be doing more than defending" (292). Max knows that Bigger will be sentenced to death, but he wants to use the trial as place to show Marxist ideas. Additionally, Max gets involved in Thomas' case because he wants to protect party's interests from any charge of being associated with Bigger's murder. In fact, in the novel, he says to state attorney Buckley, "If you had not dragged the name of the Communist Party into this murder, I'd not be here" (292). Max fears more for the Communist Party involvement in the trial than for Thomas. In the novel comrade Erlone, who is known for his activism in the party, is accused by Thomas as Mary Dalton's murderer. Consequently public opinion could be swayed toward believing Communist's ideas pushed Bigger to kill Mary Dalton; therefore Communists would be seen by public opinion as riotous and dangerous, potentially harming the entire American Communist movement.

In the essay “Bigger Thomas’s Quest for Voice and Audience in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*,” scholar James A. Miller maintains that “Max’s appearance in the novel is an ideological intrusion which disrupts the artistic unity of the novel” (119). Miller also underlines:

Max’s role in *Native Son* is that it inevitably leads to the conclusion that Bigger himself is inarticulate, incapable of negotiating the conflict between thought and feeling which defines his emotional life for a great deal of the novel, incapable of telling his own story and, therefore, of defining himself. (119)

Miller’s conclusions are arguable. Perhaps Bigger is not able to express verbally, in the same way in which Max does in the last section of the novel, what the causes are that have lead him to murder Mary Dalton. Bigger articulates his feeling in the moment in which he murders Mary Dalton: “He had murdered and he had created a new life for himself” (*Native Son* 105), as we have seen in the previous section of this paper.

By the time Wright was writing *Native Son*, there was a different attempt carried out by the Communist party to help people who had been persecuted by an American legislative body. The most famous case is the trial of the Scottsboro’s boys in Alabama, in which Communists were able to save from jail four of the eight members involved in the rape of two white women. It is possible to trace a parallel between Scottsboro and the Thomas trial because in both of them racism plays an important role. In this chapter, I have discussed the role white workers had on the Scottsboro’ case, as a part of the mob who lynched blacks. In *Native Son* white people act similar to the Scottsboro people; when Bigger is caught by the police a mob starts to insult him with racist vituperation: “Kill that black ape!” or “Lynch’im,” “That

black sonofabitch” (270). In a racist society, such as America in the thirties, Thomas’ fate is determined not because he is guilty, but because of the color of his skin.

Conclusion

Native Son is a synthesis of activism and fiction, a novel in which words are weapons to address a deeply social critique. Through the description of a story that has as its center Bigger Thomas, Wright shows the process of dehumanization to which men were exposed in the United States during the thirties. The analysis of the author is bitter and ascertains the failure of the modern civilization. In the preface of *Native Son*, scholar Rampersad underlines the fundamental role of the American environment for the creation of Bigger Thomases; he adds:

These conditions reflected the failures of modern civilization, the death of genuine spiritual values and traditions, the harshness of economic greed and exploitation, the avarice for glittering material goods that, in a culture of consumerism, ultimately possessed the possessor. (xvi)

The narrative space became in Wright’s fiction a science laboratory. In his laboratory Wright checked American society and also Communism as a political doctrine that could improve, fix the problems of United States society. He shows us that Communists’ ideal of human, social, and economic equality matched perfectly with African Americans’ need at that time. The limit for a practical realization of a Communist revolution in America is represented by race relations. For instance, we have seen that there are no places in the novel in which Communists, represented by Jan and Max, take into account racial relations among members of the working classes. This was the real limit of Marxist perspective; they failed to recognize a division within lower class, a division which derived from the problem of the “color line.” The American lower class could not start a revolution like in Russia because of

racism; it was the real obstacle for a creation of common conscience within white and black workers.

Native Son is a fundamental novel of the black protest literary tradition because it denounces white oppression in a different way for the African American literary canon. Wright's ideas of black writing conceptualized in "Blueprint for Negro Writing" are realized in this novel. The readers see in this text how white establishment created the conditions for the explosion of rage and violence of oppressed black young men. We saw in the novel that violence is the only resource to resist oppression, and this struggle leads individuals like Bigger to a sad epilogue of their life: jail or death penalty. Bigger's quest is metaphorically anticipated by Wright in the opening of the novel where Bigger kills a rat. In the text Bigger is a captive of white oppression, like the rat that is 'captive' in his house. In the end Bigger is free, but in order to get his freedom he is 'forced' to give up his life. He is 'killed' by the white establishment, 'someone' who is stronger and powerful than him, like the rat he kills in the opening of the novel.

“God gave Noah the rainbow sign,
No more water, the fire next time!”

Genesis

Conclusion

Seeds of a Revolution

This study of political writings and protest literature from 1877 to 1940 has revealed some insight for understanding the major events which characterized the period of time analyzed in this paper and also the historical events which shaped American history later in the last century. The discussion within the black leadership after Reconstruction has shown how long and how difficult it had been for blacks to reach the full enjoyment of civil rights. Although at the end of the Civil War, citizenship, with all its rights and duties, was acknowledged to blacks, they were still kept in subordinate positions by whites. Whites adopted different strategies to forbid the civil advancement of blacks, and violence was the most used means to defend their supremacy. Poets such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson echoed in their works the African American sufferings. Black leaders dealt with white supremacists in different ways. Booker T. Washington proposed to his people a moderate approach to white redemption. He suggested to blacks to give up their struggle for civil rights and focus on economic progress. Washington believed that it was best not to protest against oppression. In 1895 at the International Exposition in Atlanta, in front of white philanthropists, he blamed any kind of radical reaction on the social status quo, but his concessions to the White South were only half of the bargain in his opinion. The other half of the bargain was that whites had to allow the economic advancement of blacks, an advancement which he believed possible through professional jobs such as artisans, farmers, and nurses. The Atlanta speech is

also known as the Atlanta compromise. During that speech Washington accommodated the white illegal crusade for supremacy. He accepted segregation and discrimination, that was the era of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in favor of crumbs left by white men. Washington did not echo Frederick Douglass. Twenty years before the Atlanta speech Douglass claimed social equality and justice for blacks in respect of the American Constitution. Douglass' lesson was echoed by other black activists such as Ida Burnett Wells, who urged the Federal Government to pass an antilynching bill.

More than Wells', Douglass' lesson was echoed by W.E.B. Du Bois at the turn of the twentieth century. Du Bois argued against Washington and his doctrine of accommodation to white supremacy. Du Bois maintained that equality was possible only if blacks insisted on political rights and the higher education of black youths. The right to vote was fundamental for blacks' civil progress as well as higher education. Du Bois is a central figure in African American history because he urged in blacks the creation of a new self perception in which they could merge their African and American identity into a unity that they could be proud of. He used the metaphor of the veil, a line that separated whites from persons of African descent, to describe blacks' life in America and to point his finger at racism. The color line was the real problem of the United States and a civil advancement of blacks could not be possible if this issue still characterized interracial relationships. Through his editorials on *The Crisis* Du Bois attacked injustices in the same way that Frederick Douglass did through his newspaper *The North Star*. Du Bois' activism was practically realized not only through *The Crisis* but also through the activism of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a biracial civil rights organization that fought against racism and disenfranchisement and tried to secure for blacks education, employment and justice in the courts.

In the second two decades of the last century another black leader characterized the debate about African American emancipation: Marcus Garvey. With several million loyal and enthusiastic followers Garvey challenged NAACP leadership. Garvey was a charismatic man, and his rhetoric was very attractive to the black urban working class. He is remembered in the history of black activism for his radical points of view. Garvey believed that the only solution for race issues was that blacks had to come back to their mother land, Africa. Garvey's great contribution to African Americans' quest in the United States was his lessons about the greatness of the Negro race. Garvey taught his people to be proud of themselves because they were the progeny of the great ancient African civilization. Garvey emphasized the importance of the African origin in order to uplift his race. Garvey is a central figure in African American history because he set the precedent for the subsequent Black Nationalism movements such as the Black Muslims, and the Black Panther Party.

In the Thirties, despite the great strides made by the NAACP, racism still persisted in the United States. Even in labor movements blacks had to fight in order to be recognized as workers by the white international labor organizations. The urban reality of the late thirties offered an ideal setting to Richard Wright for the creation of his most famous novel *Native Son*. In this book the author develops a social criticism to white America. The editor of *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* Henry Louis Gates Jr. maintains that "Bigger Thomas is the victim of a raw environmental determinism, a juvenile delinquent mired in the unforgiving straits of urban blight and deprivation" (1321). Bigger Thomas is the result of the most radical effect of racism; he is a son of the color line, a result of living the life "within the veil." Thomas testifies to the failure of the American modern society, a society in which there is racism and unequal distribution of wealth. *Native Son* was a warning to

white America. Wright urged whites to face the problem of racism otherwise many Bigger Thomases would start a revolution, and there would be for white America “no more water, but the fire next time!”

Works Cited

- Baldwin, James. "Everybody's Protest Novel." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 1654-1659.
- . "Many Thousands Gone." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 1659-1670.
- Booker, Washington T. "The Atlanta Exposition Address." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 513 – 517.
- . *Up From Slavery*. New York: Signet Classic, 2000.
- Burkett, Randall K. *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*. London: The Scarecrow Press, 1978.
- Cullen, Cuntee. "Incident." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997: 1306.
- . "Scottsboro, Too, Is Worth Its Song". <http://bumba.net/~hmaon/poetry.htm>.
- Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2003.
- . "What the Black Man Wants." *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*. Ed. Foner, Philp S. New York: International Publishers, 1975. IV 157 – 164.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Bedford Books, 1997.
- . *W. E. B. Du Bois Writings*. New York: The Library of America, 1986.
- . "Marcus Garvey and The NAACP." *W.E.B. Du Bois, A Reader*. Ed. David Levering Lewis. New York: Owl Book, 1995. 343 - 346.

- . “NAACP.” *W.E.B. Du Bois, A Reader*. Ed. David Levering Lewis. New York: Owl Book, 1995. 370 – 372.
- . “Class Struggle.” *W.E.B. Du Bois, A Reader*. Ed. David Levering Lewis. New York: Owl Book, 1995. 555.
- . “Criteria of Negro Art.” *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 752-759.
- . “The Present Leadership of American Negroes.” *W.E.B. Du Bois, A Reader*. Ed. David Levering Lewis. New York: Owl Book, 1995. 354 - 358.
- Dunbar, Paul Laurence. “We Wear the Mask” – “The Forth of July.” *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 806 - 905.
- Garvey, Marcus. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*. Eds. Robert A. Hill, Barbara Bair. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.
- . *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*. Ed. Amy Jacques Garvey. New York: Atheneum, 1969.
- . “Africa for the Africans.” *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 974 – 977.
- . “African Fundamentalism.” *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*. Eds. Robert A. Hill, Barbara Bair. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987. 1 – 7.
- . “The Future as I See It.” *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 974 – 977.

- Franklin, John Hope. *Reconstruction: After the Civil War*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *The Signifying Monkey, A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Hemenway, Robert E. *Zora Neale Hurston, a Literary Biography*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977.
- Hine Darlene, Hine William C., Harrold Stanley. *The African American Odyssey, Volume Two: Since 1863*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1986.
- . "Advertisement for the Waldor-Astoria." *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, The Poems: 1921-1940*. Ed. Arnold Rampersad. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001.
- . "I, Too." *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, The Poems: 1921-1940*. Ed. Arnold Rampersad. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001.
- . "Scottsboro." *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, The Poems: 1921-1940*. Ed. Arnold Rampersad. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001.
- . "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 1257-1271.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 1257-1271. 1008-1011.
- Johnson, James Weldon. "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 768.

- Locke, Alain. "The New Negro." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 960-961.
- Maglangbayan, Shawna. *Garvey, Lumumba, and Malcom X*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1973.
- McKay, Claude. "If We Must Die" – "To the White Fiends" – "The White House." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 984, 986.
- Miller, James A. "Bigger Thomas's Quest for Voice and Audience in Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son*. Ed. Keneth Kinnamon. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997. 119 – 126.
- Petry, Ann. "The Novel as Social Criticism." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*. Ed. Patricia Liggins Hill. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 1114 – 1119.
- Skerrett, Joseph T. Jr. "Composing Bigger: Wright and the Making of *Native Son*." *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son*. Ed. Keneth Kinnamon. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997. 104 – 119.
- Taylor, Ula Yvette. *The Veiled Garvey*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Ward, Jerry W. Jr. "Everybody's Protest Novel: The Era of Richard Wright." *The Cambridge Companion to The African American Novel*. Ed. Maryemma Graham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 173 – 189.
- Wells, Ida Burnett. *A Red Record*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

- Wright, Richard. *Black Boy (American Hunger)*. New York: The Library of America, 1984.
- . “Between Laughter and Tears.” *Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*. Ed. Gloria L. Cronin. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998.
- . “Blueprint for Negro Writing.” *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997. 1380-1388.
- . “How Bigger Was Born.” *Native Son*. New York: Perennial Classics, 1998.
- . *Native Son*. New York: Perennial Classics, 1998.