

Mediating Black Modernisms:
Charles S. Johnson and His Circle, Printing Opportunity and Performing the New Negro

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores Black American citizenship and liberal subjecthood, as they were envisioned, defined, and performed during the early twentieth century by the artists, activists, and amateur intellectuals of the New Negro movement, by centering and promoting the work and lived experience of sociologist Charles Spurgeon Johnson (1893-1956). As a writer, editor, and organizer of public events, Johnson, who founded the journal *Opportunity* (1923-1949) and whose work was foundational for other publications, proved himself an irreplicable, if so far underappreciated, member of the New Negro community. Through an appropriately multimedia investigation of his work against a background of modernist New Negro activity, this dissertation narrates Johnson and his peers' evolving performances of personhood and the development of Black publics through print and performance. My case studies include plays, periodicals, public dinners, and private journals. Drawing on Johnson's career, I argue that the construction of Black modern personhood in the twentieth century cannot be properly captured by focusing solely on one medium: instead, the complexities of Black personhood and of Black intellectuals' contribution to liberal thought and its embodied practices are best revealed through an interdisciplinary analysis across a number of mediums.

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Introduction

Charles S. Johnson and the Almost-Avant-Garde Art of the New Negro Movement

The promise of liberalism was famously the granting of equal rights to all individuals, destroying the old social hierarchies and establishing a new social order where everybody, as an individual, could flourish, free of “estate” membership. But the reality turned out to be the preservation, albeit on a new theoretical foundation, of old hierarchies of gender and the establishment of new hierarchies of race. Thus the struggle to realize the liberal ideal for everybody and not just a privileged minority still continues today, centuries later. If this struggle is ever to be successful, a prerequisite must be the acknowledgment of the extent to which dominant varieties of liberalism have developed so as to be complicit with rather than in opposition to social oppression. I hope that by formally identifying the ideological phenomenon of “racial liberalism” as a subject for research and critique, this book will contribute both to its analysis and its eventual dismantling, as theory and as practice.¹

Charles W. Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs* (2017)

Charles Spurgeon Johnson (July 24, 1893 – October 27, 1956) was a Black American sociologist, editor, and organizer who served with the National Urban League and founded its official organ, the journal *Opportunity* (1923-1949). In this introduction, I will first offer a quick biography for Johnson’s life before considering Johnson’s relationship to the historical avant-garde. I argue the art Johnson published within *Opportunity* can be considered almost-avant-garde because of the way it embraced certain avant-garde qualities as a tool for the New Negro movement. I then undertake a literature review of the materials surrounding Charles S. Johnson, the New Negro movement, Black American publics and publication, and modernism and the avant-garde more broadly. Lastly, I offer a roadmap for this dissertation, a quick breakdown of its chapters and its intention. The Library of Congress offers a brief biography for the underrecognized, yet foundational, member of the American New Negro movement during the

¹ Charles W. Mills. *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017, xxi.

mid-to-late 1920s.² Johnson was born in Bristol, Virginia, to a Baptist minister and his educated wife. He attended Wayland Academy and later graduated from Virginia Union University before ultimately earning a doctoral degree from the University of Chicago in 1917, where he studied alongside Dr. Robert Park, famed sociologist from the “Chicago School” of sociology, a literal and theoretical school of liberal criticism which foreground race and social actions at the turn of the twentieth century. During his doctoral work, Johnson was promoted to director of research for the Chicago Urban League. He served in France during WW1, then returned to Chicago one week before the 1919 racial unrest, spurred by recent segregation methods implemented by the Chicago Real Estate Board.³ This striking moment of violence and racial tension allowed him the perfect, if unfortunate, opportunity to complete his first noteworthy published study of race relations. He married his wife, Marie Antoinette Burgette, in 1920. In 1921, he became the director of research for the National Urban League in New York, where he founded *Opportunity* under two years later. In 1927, Johnson accepted a position as head of the Department of Research at the historically Black Fisk University in Nashville. In 1946, Johnson was chosen by

² Library of Congress. “Charles S. Johnson (1893-1956).” *Biographies*.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/n50038921/charles-s-johnson-1893-1956/>. For a longer biography of Johnson, see his unpublished autobiography or the dissertation and later biography by Patrick J. Gilpin (and Marybeth Gasman). Charles S. Johnson. “A Spiritual Autobiography.” (n.d.). Box 174, folder 26. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN; Patrick J. Gilpin. *Charles S. Johnson, an Intellectual Biography*. Vanderbilt University, 1973; and Patrick J. Gilpin, and Marybeth Gasman. *Charles S. Johnson: Leadership beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

³ Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor detail the Chicago Real Estate Board’s 1917-1920 practices, writing that the board appointed a Special Committee on Negro Housing in 1917, concerned about the “invasion of white residence districts by the Negroes.” The committee recommended a block-by-block segregation program which the Board implemented that year. In 1920, the Board also made it illegal to sell property to Black Americans on any “white” block. Adam Cohen, and Elizabeth Taylor. “A Separate World.” *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation*. Boston: Little, Brown, 2000, n.p. Archived by the *New York Times* at <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/first/c/cohen-american.html>.

its board of trustees as the university's first Black president. He died of an unfortunate, untimely heart attack en route from Nashville to New York in 1956. Beneficially, Johnson left behind an incredible archive and a unique impact on the New Negro movement.

The New Negro movement, or Negro/Harlem Renaissance, was a loosely (but decidedly) connected group of Black (and white) American artists and intellectuals committed to “racial uplift,” the self-actualization of Black individuals and increased public access and representation for Black Americans legally. The term arguably began with Hubert Harrison's (1883-1927) 1916-1917 lecture series in Harlem, in which he heralded the dawn of a new era, the “New Negro Manhood Movement,” a “race conscious, internationalist, mass-based movement for ‘political equality, social justice, civic opportunity, and economic power.’”⁴ More famously, the term was the title of both Alain Locke's edited collection *The New Negro* (1925) and his manifesto-like tract which introduced the collection. In “The New Negro” (1925), Locke decries the “Old Negro,” a “stock figure,” “more a formula than a human being—a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be ‘kept down,’ or ‘in his place,’ or ‘helped up.’”⁵ Instead, Locke argues (like Johnson and his peers in *Opportunity*), that twentieth-century Black Americans were more than capable of representing and expressing themselves artistically. Thus, the New Negro movement, as officially launched in Alain's text (and unofficially birthed, I argue, at the Civic Club Dinner on March 21, 1924), sought to realize Black Americans' “full initiation into American democracy” and to facilitate modernist Black artistic expression: “the great social gain [of the new generation of Black American artists],” Locke writes, “is [or will

⁴ Jeffrey B. Perry. *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

⁵ Alain Locke. “The New Negro.” *The New Negro*, edited by Alain Locke. New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925 (First Touchstone Edition, 1997), 3-16, at 3.

be] the releasing of our talented group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression.”⁶ Rather than continuing to argue (or be argued for) over the rights and abilities of Black Americans, Locke and Johnson believed these abilities (and thus their deservedness of equal and equitable treatment) were self-evident, already present in the talented (young) minds of the early twentieth century: Johnson and his peers need only publish it, continue to create it, and facilitate it in additional Black Americans – “it” being the inherent worth and value of Black Americans and their Blackness, especially as artistically envisioned, printed, and performed.

This dissertation highlights the life and work of Charles S. Johnson over other more-familiar figures from the New Negro movement, because his scholarship and his practices as an editor, etc. offer a unique view into the history of urban Black Americans during the formative early decades of the twentieth century. W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and Langston Hughes have served as the exemplars of the New Negro movement for generations of scholarship; with the influence of postmodern interrogation since the 1970s, the academy has also begun to extend this exhaustive treatment to more revolutionary figures such as Paul Robeson and overlooked female writers and intellectuals such as Zora Neale Hurston. However, Charles S. Johnson is relatively less represented in the academic archive, and the studies that do exist have failed to consider Johnson as the multimedia curator of modern Black identity he truly was. Failing to recognize the Harlem Renaissance as a collective movement, fueled by the individual private and public efforts and artistic expression of countless unique members, and treating the movement instead as the sporadic genius of a few individuals academically undoes the tenets *and* historical importance of the New Negro movement. The New Negro movement and the artistic value of the

⁶ Alain Locke. “The New Negro,” 16.

Harlem Renaissance does not lie exclusively in the “talented tenth” of the era, rather, figure(head)s such as Charles S. Johnson can be found in every journal, reading group, and intellectual movement from the period. Perhaps more importantly, beautiful and powerful artistic case studies from the movement also exist outside the oeuvres of Hughes and Hurston. This dissertation seeks to recapture these values of the movement in its scholarship, its methodology and its case studies, by featuring unpublished work from Johnson’s archive, underappreciated illustrations from *Opportunity*, and the personal archives of dozens of families and individuals across America.

Additionally, Charles S. Johnson’s influence on the New Negro movement was unique, as compared to his more-recognized counterparts, and this dissertation also seeks to highlight Johnson’s unique, multimedia influence. Locke and Johnson partnered notably throughout their career: the two organized the Civic Club Dinner, which Johnson promoted and Locke emceed; Johnson was published in *The New Negro* and Locke was regularly published and featured in *Opportunity* and *Ebony and Topaz*; and the two corresponded and stayed up-to-date on each other’s work until Johnson’s premature death.⁷ Locke considered himself a “midwife”⁸ to the New Negro movement, and Johnson considered himself a “sidelines activist,”⁹ and both celebrated their own facilitation of artistic production among new and increasing voices from the

⁷ For example, Johnson’s archive retains an undated letter from Alain Locke; and Locke reviewed Johnson’s *Patterns of Negro Segregation* shortly after its release in 1943. Alain Locke. “[Untitled letter to Charles S. Johnson].” Box 8, folder 1. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN; and Alain Locke. “Patterns of Negro Segregation. Charles S. Johnson.” *The American Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 1 (1943): 95–95.

⁸ See Jeffrey C. Stewart. *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2018, 335.

⁹ See Richard Robbins. *Sidelines Activist: Charles S. Johnson and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996, x.

New Negro movement and beyond. However, the difference between the pair might be best encapsulated in their respective roles during the Civic Club Dinner: Johnson organized the event, phoning and otherwise inviting its prestigious white guests and publishing magnates; Locke performed the role of Master of Ceremonies. Whereas Johnson managed from the background, Locke often placed himself front and center. Scholars have also noted Locke's sexuality and relative radicalism, which continue to delineate the pair.¹⁰ Both Johnson and Locke considered Du Bois to be a representative of the older generation: he was introduced by Locke as a "representative of the 'older school'" while attending the Civic Club Dinner.¹¹ With the deepest respect, Johnson, Locke, and their peers within *Opportunity* envisioned Du Bois as a stand-in for their immediate predecessors, the sentimental appeals of the early twentieth-century which the New Negro movement sought to distance itself from. Additionally, Du Bois's alliance with hardline Marxism in Stalinist Russia and Maoist China noticeably marked Johnson's quiet commitment to liberalism and fixing it from its roots.¹²

¹⁰ See, for example, Jeffrey C. Stewart. *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke*; Anna Pochmara. *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011; Kara Tucina Olidge. "Critical Cosmopolitanism and the Intellectual Work of Alain Locke." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2010; and Anthony Dawahare. "The Dual Nationalism of Alain Locke's *The New Negro*." *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature Between the Wars: a New Pandora's Box*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003.

¹¹ "The Debut of the Younger School of Negro Writers." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 2, no. 17 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 143-144, at 143.

¹² For more on Du Bois's relationship to Marxism, Stalin, and Mao, see, for example, W. E. B. Du Bois. "Joseph Stalin." (1953). Reprinted in *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, edited by Eric J. Sundquist. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 287-289; Murali Balaji. *The Professor and the Pupil: the Politics of W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson*. New York: Nation Books, 2007; Keisha A. Brown. "Blackness in Exile: W.E.B. Du Bois' Role in the Formation of Representations of Blackness as Conceptualized by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)." *Phylon* 53, no. 2 (2016): 20-33; and Weiyu Li. *The*

Johnson has been the focus of two books, both biographies,¹³ five dissertations¹⁴ – two by the authors of one of his biographies and all within the discipline of sociology – and one BA thesis which *does* consider Johnson’s role as a cultural curator.¹⁵ Johnson *has* inspired a small handful of articles on his life and work, some of which serve as inspiration for this dissertation, but many are written by Patrick J. Gilpin – the same author of one of the aforementioned biographies *and* dissertations. Johnson was many times Locke’s partner during the more public-facing events and publications at the height of the New Negro movement, or “Harlem Renaissance;” he filled the role of editor as well as Du Bois during his five-year tenure at the head of *Opportunity*; and his personal archive and record of service is more extensive than perhaps any figure from the era. As a premier multimedia mediator of New Negro personhood and liberal participation, Charles S. Johnson deserves to have his impact on American modernism more-prominently acknowledged.

My study begins January 1923, with the publication of the first number of *Opportunity*: the monthly journal of the National Urban League, founded and edited by Johnson, which began

Black is the New Red: Performances of Racial Blackness in the Maoist China. University of Washington, 2022.

¹³ Richard Robbins. *Sidelines Activist*; and Patrick J. Gilpin, and Marybeth Gasman. *Charles S. Johnson*.

¹⁴ Ralph Lamar Pearson. *Charles S. Johnson: The Urban League Years. A Study of Race Leadership*. John Hopkins University, 1970; Patrick J. Gilpin. *Charles S. Johnson, an Intellectual Biography*. Vanderbilt University, 1973; Marybeth Gasman. *A Renaissance in Nashville: Charles S. Johnson's Use of Philanthropy to Build Fisk University in the Post-war Period*. Indiana University, 2000; Phillip James Johnson. *Seasons in Hell: Charles S. Johnson and the 1930 Liberian Labor Crisis*. Louisiana State University, 2004; and Keith W. Berry. *Charles S. Johnson, Fisk University, and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1945–1970*. Florida State University, 2005.

¹⁵ Jonathan Sheldon Coit. *Charles S. Johnson in African American Culture and Society, 1893–1928*. Reed College, 1993.

with conversations of sociology and government best-practices but inevitably became a cornerstone of New Negro artistic and liberal identity, given Johnson's personal (if unpracticed) penchant for art and the journal's regular promotion and publication of seminal artists and creative writers such as Charles Cullen, Richard Bruce Nugent, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, and Langston Hughes. The following year, Johnson hosted his first of many dinners and public events to promote *Opportunity* and its featured artists and thinkers; the "Civic Club Dinner," held at the newly opened and NAACP-founded New York Civic Club, spurred both the continuation of events such as the yearly *Opportunity Awards Dinners* (1925-1927) and the subsequent special issue of *Survey Graphic* Johnson helped promote. Though I consider the impact of the movement thereafter, my study ends before Johnson's four-month journey to Liberia in 1930, investigating labor relations and government structures at the behest of the US Department of State; during this trip, Johnson kept his "African Journal," embodying the liberal practice of diary-keeping and ultimately catalyzing the composition of his favorite work, *Bitter Canaan* (1987), later that year.¹⁶ This also marks the traditional boundaries of the New Negro movement, beginning with the Civic Club Dinner, or the publication of *The New Negro*, and ending with the Great Depression. Within this scope, I will thus demonstrate the evolution and embodiment of Johnson's personal brand of New Negro citizenship as *he* defined and practiced it across mediums: through public-facing printed text (periodicals and books), public-facing events (dinners and conferences), and private acts of diary-keeping and thoughtful reading (his "African Diary" and *Opportunity's* bookshelf). Through these actions, Johnson left his mark on the communal concept of modern New Negro personhood and citizenship within its broader

¹⁶ Charles S. Johnson. *Bitter Canaan: the Story of the Negro Republic*. New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Books, 1987, vii.

framework of Western liberalism, while also engaging in transatlantic dialogues such as Pan-Africanism. Johnson's worldview was global and his use of technology was cutting-edge – this dissertation will follow Johnson's lead to best capture his impact on the New Negro movement, American liberal discourse, and twentieth-century modernisms.

Charles S. Johnson's oeuvre makes for an ideal entry-point into the philosophy and artistry of the New Negro movement (as it presented itself across early-twentieth-century media) because of his under-representation and because Johnson so-perfectly embodied the New Negro ideal: he was educated and well-read, he wrote *extensively* and presented himself publicly as a cultural critic across a variety of media, and he interrogated (while actively participating in) familiar structures of sentimentalism, interiority, and liberalism – while also participating in transatlantic dialogues such as Pan-Africanism, which found themselves in vogue at the time. As such, I will deservedly highlight Johnson's work as a writer and editor (and even, sometimes, as an artist)¹⁷ throughout this dissertation. Additionally, Johnson makes for an ideal grounding point because of his relentless support for and publication of the various arts, thereby offering a platform and archival footprint for lesser-known or less-privileged artists. The first ad from *Opportunity* for its recurring literary contests delineates 5 categories: "Short Story," "Poetry," "Play," "Essay," and "Personal Experience Sketch;" and Johnson regularly published

¹⁷ Johnson was known to write poetry, often "making light of it" in letters to other writers. I plan to meet with biographers of Johnson and to do my own archival digging to bring to light any such examples. Even without these primary examples, Johnson was certainly a catalyst for creativity and performance, given the many literary competitions and theatrical support within *Opportunity* during Johnson's editorship. See Phillip James Johnson. *Seasons in Hell*, 47 for more information.

contemporary artwork by studio artists such as Richard Bruce Nugent and Gwendolyn Bennett.¹⁸

I will therefore center my work around Johnson while including these promoted artists, especially their lesser-known works, such as Georgia Douglas Johnson's *Plumes* (1927), which, despite Johnson's relative renown, has been the subject of little scholarship.

I have chosen to focus the bulk of my attention on Johnson's earlier career (1923-1930), because it marks Johnson's period of greatest modernist (and "avant-garde") activity, rife with case studies for an examination such as mine: he embraced and participated in the proliferation of (mass) media and media technologies;¹⁹ he curated paragon images for a Black American vanguard, both artistic and political; and he sought to bring new voices into twentieth-century critical conversations about American (*and* African-American) citizenship.²⁰ Within this period, I am especially interested in case studies which have seen less academic attention: although *Opportunity* is well-represented in anthologies and encyclopedias, the short-running column "The Theatre," is not; the "collectanea" of *Opportunity*'s greatest works (according to Johnson), *Ebony and Topaz* (1927), is the subject of only two scholarly essays available via the University of Washington Library; and the 1925 volume of *Survey Graphic* Johnson promoted and Locke edited, "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," is far less known than Locke's 1925 anthology in

¹⁸ Sondra K. Wilson. *Opportunity Reader: Stories, Poetry, and Essays from the Urban League's Opportunity Magazine*. New York: Modern Library, 1999, xxiii.

¹⁹ One interesting case study which might warrant stepping outside my historical constraints: Charles S. Johnson's c.1951 appearance on the CBS Radio Network's show, *This I Believe*. See Charles S. Johnson. "Looking at Life Through Another's Eyes," c. 1951.

²⁰ Although this study is largely rooted in Western discourses (e.g. liberalism), as Johnson's work was – alongside others within the New Negro movement – Johnson was also active in the ongoing Pan-African conversation among Black American intellectuals (amateur and professional) during the early twentieth century. As such, these transatlantic connections will be considered in each chapter as defining cores of New Negro identity.

the same spirit, compiled a few months later. Through a consideration of Johnson's writing, artistry, and editorial work (especially that which is academically underrepresented) – alongside those artists he promoted – during this period, this dissertation should be able to demonstrate a multivocal definition and practice of modern Black American citizenship representative of the similarly stratified New Negro movement at-large.

The Limits of Liberalism and the Avant-Garde

As a Southern liberal during the 1920s and 1930s – and *especially* as a Black man – Charles S. Johnson, sociologist by trade and editor of the National Urban League's journal, *Opportunity*, from 1923-1927, was not allowed radical, revolutionary, or avant-garde action. Neither were the artists and intellectuals whom he published and promoted. Their goal was a liberal world-of-letters and public sphere open to and respectful of Black art, opinion, and public activity; and anti-liberal radicalism embodied by Black Americans would certainly not inspire sympathetic sentiment among their more privileged, empowered white neighbors. Yet Johnson, a conscious modernist, knew the power of avant-garde art and activism. As "evidence," consider briefly, if you will, the potency of the infamous tale of *Ubu Roi*'s (1896) opening night – which has incredible tenacity and is tantalizingly re-tellable (despite the rampant inaccuracies of this narrative, as scholars such as Tom Postlewait have detailed).²¹ As *Ubu Roi*'s false history demonstrates, the historical avant-garde, its styles and its stories, have incredible affective power, then and now: they "shock" and they "awe." Johnson understood this power and, although true avant-garde action was unavailable to him, his race also limited his access to

²¹ Thomas Postlewait. "Cultural Histories: The Case of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*." *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, ed. Thomas Postlewait. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 60-85.

liberal participation – inviting, in a sense, exploration beyond traditional means of expression. However, as many other scholars have also noted: the historical avant-garde is notoriously white, misogynist, authoritarian, and more than a little racially insensitive (if not outright racist). Without embracing these “aporias of the avant-garde,”²² then, and without embracing the avant-garde’s infamous anti-liberalism in the pursuit of his liberal project, Johnson published and promoted unapologetic, *almost* avant-garde artists and their work in a manner hegemonically legible and respectable: the illustrations of *Ebony and Topaz*, for instance, were created and published (purportedly) with no consideration for white tastes or white audiences, yet it was still printed in a manner understood and familiar historically. In this section, I will evaluate the relationship between the early-twentieth-century American New Negro movement and the historical avant-garde – as well as the concept of the “avant-garde” more holistically – using the subject of my dissertation, Charles S. Johnson, as a center-point. For this analysis, I will use Charles Mills’s concept of “racial liberalism” to demonstrate the racialized nature of revolution (anti-liberal, avant-garde activity), which limited Johnson and his peers’ ability to engage true avant-garde action within a liberal public sphere. Reading the art and artists of the New Negro movement through the lens of contemporary avant-garde scholarship, I argue Charles S. Johnson impactfully curated modernist representations of Black Americans within the historically, hegemonically white medium of print, thereby promoting the inherent worth and capabilities of Black Americans among both Black and white audiences, priming the public sphere and its world-of-letters for further liberal activity by Black Americans. Without embracing the avant-

²² I reference here Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s seminal chapter on the historical avant-garde. Hans Magnus Enzensberger. “The Aporias of the Avant-Garde,” *The Consciousness Industry; on Literature, Politics and the Media*. New York: Seabury Press, 1974, 16-41.

garde's anti-liberalism, Charles S. Johnson and the artists he published used *almost* avant-garde art to envision and enact a liberal futurity that could acquire utopian overtones.

The canon of the historical avant-garde began outside the academy in the nineteenth century with theorist-artists such as Charles Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier who engaged Henri de Saint-Simon's concept of the "avant-garde" as art with social purpose, art that defines utopia and creates novel practices of personhood and citizenship.²³ Thereafter, Saint-Simon's writings inspired, directly or indirectly, many (if not all) of the foundational members of the historical avant-garde in their art-making, identity creation, and curation of membership. From the 1890s to (roughly) the infamous Nazi *Degenerate Art* exhibit of 1937, the members of the historical avant-garde proliferated their art and theory, their inspired ways of living. As Mike Sell notes, by the 1950s the avant-garde had moved from the military and the arts into academia: it "got its professors, appropriately sober journals, curricula."²⁴ While pioneering thinkers such as Jose Ortega y Gasset and Walter Benjamin had offered their observations on the trends of modernism and avant-garde art contemporaneously, this academic mid-century moment catalyzed the now-canonical rush to define (and, subsequently, to argue over definitions of) the avant-garde. Scholars such as Renato Poggioli, Hans Enzensberger, Matei Călinescu, and Peter Bürger (among *many* others) have offered their definitions or defining traits of the European

²³ The first recorded use of the term "avant-garde" lies within Saint-Simon's essay, "On Social Organization" (1825), in which the author describes a utopian arrangement of society wherein "the artists, the men of imagination will open the march" "toward the well-being and happiness of all mankind," followed by the engineers and politicians who can realize and promote their vision. Quoted from the original French in Matei Călinescu. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987, 102.

²⁴ Mike Sell. "Resisting the Question, 'What Is an Avant-Garde?'" *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (2010): 753-774, at 755.

avant-garde with recurring themes of collectivism, militarism, and utopianism. This “first wave” of avant-garde studies was then challenged as too Eurocentric and romanticized by what could be called a “second wave” of avant-garde scholars: Mike Sell lists familiar names such as Sue Ellen Case, Guy Debord, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari among its members. Sell writes that this second wave challenged the supposed progressiveness of all avant-gardes and reformatted the application of the concept: “[t]he new approach was more dialectical and dexterous, informed by a more nuanced understanding of power, ideology, and institutionality.”²⁵ Previously flaunted for its revolutionary nature, the avant-garde came to be defined by its aporias, its faults: the aforementioned racism, misogyny, and (too often right-wing) authoritarianism. However, scholars such as Sell have also argued for broadened application of the concepts of the avant-garde, the evaluation of art and lived experiences *as* avant-garde not as *an* avant-garde, allowing interested folks like me to apply the tenets of the avant-garde to artists and intellectuals who do not *strictly* meet its definition(s). Reading artists and their experiences *as* avant-garde allows us as scholars to observe vanguard traits in non-avant-garde artists, to emphasize the lived experiences and theory of these artists, and to interrogate historical case studies via contemporary intersectional lenses. Despite this broadened application, however, to my knowledge, Cherene Sherrard-Johnson and Mark Whalan are the only scholars to consider members of the American New Negro movement *as* avant-garde: Rose McClendon (1884-1936) and Jean Toomer (1894-1967).²⁶ Inspired by this lacuna, my dissertation undertakes a full-length

²⁵ Mike Sell. “Resisting the Question, ‘What Is an Avant-Garde?’,” 756.

²⁶ Cherene Sherrard-Johnson. “Rose McClendon’s Playbill: The Vagabond Modernism of New Negro Theater.” *Modernism/modernity* (Baltimore, Md.) 2, no. 2 (2017): no page numbers. Hosted digitally at <https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/posts/rose-mcclendon>; and Mark Whalan. “Jean Toomer and the Avant-Garde.” *The Cambridge Companion to The Harlem Renaissance*. Edited by George Hutchinson, 2007, 71-81.

study of the New Negro movement's engagement of modernisms, the avant-garde included, in order to "add another seat at the table," and to welcome Charles S. Johnson and the artists, writers, and intellectuals with whom he worked into the burgeoning scholarly conversation on the early-twentieth-century avant-garde. Doing so positions these thinkers as predecessors of the American avant-gardes and resituates/recenters our collective academic perspective on modernism.

Perhaps the greatest aporia of the historical avant-garde, and certainly the most relevant to my work, is the racial insensitivity of these vanguard artists and intellectuals. Mike Sell and James Harding (again, among others) have interrogated the racial politics of the historical (and contemporary) avant-gardes. Sell explains that there was a racial logic intrinsic to the avant-garde and, in addition, the avant-garde has also been racialized by authorities in an attempt to discount its art and practices. He notes that the avant-garde is inherently racialized because of its "exoticism," its urge to embody the minoritarian. The earliest avant-garde artists, Sell writes, borrowed from Roma lived experience as an "ontological language with which to express popular memory, existential authenticity, cultural prerogative, and political entitlement" without debasing oneself at the level of the under-classes which were all-too-often exploited or excised by the modern West. Additionally, the avant-garde is racialized by its relationship to liberalism: because the avant-garde promotes action over discourse, because it is exclusive and authoritarian, it can be critiqued as anti-liberal (see James Harding's *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism* (2005), for instance). As liberalism is inherently racialized, per the writings of Charles W. Mills, anti-liberalism is the other side of the inherently racialized coin. As Mills notes in *Black Rights/White Wrongs* (2017), the "key terms [of liberalism] have been

written by race and the discursive logic shaped accordingly.”²⁷ Liberalism, and its practice, are mediated by one’s race, and nonwhite participants have decreased access to this practice. And so, on the opposite pole, anti-liberal avant-garde activity is also mediated by one’s race, and nonwhite artists or advocates have decreased access to its practice.

In addition to Mills, scholars such as David Carroll Cochran and Lisa Lowe²⁸ have continued this interrogation of liberalism along racial intersections. David Carroll Cochran criticizes what he calls “color-blind liberalism” in his monograph, *The Color of Freedom* (1999). Color-blind liberalism, which Cochran argues rose in popularity in America after the Second World War (and which seems to be resurging again in “post-racial America”), is a particular perspective on the realities of American liberalism which argues that “race is a morally arbitrary trait that should make no difference to one’s prospects in life,” that “[p]eople should be free to live their own lives as they individually choose with no restrictions or barriers raised against them because of their race,” and that an “individual’s race should make no difference to his or her freedom” – and, in application, that this is the reality in America.²⁹ Cochran counters this with essentially the same argument Johnson and his peers had employed nearly a century earlier: “[B]lack Americans have always faced and continue to face distinct barriers to autonomy [and liberal public access] given their membership in a historically subordinated and exploited cultural minority.”³⁰ Liberty, the root of liberalism, Cochran argues, is defined and experienced

²⁷ Charles W. Mills. *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*, xv.

²⁸ Lisa Lowe’s *Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) is referenced in more detail in the following chapter. Lisa Lowe. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

²⁹ David Carroll Cochran. *The Color of Freedom: Race and Contemporary American Liberalism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, 2-3.

³⁰ David Carroll Cochran. *The Color of Freedom: Race and Contemporary American Liberalism*, 4.

differently by Black Americans than their white peers: liberalism does not, and inherently cannot, be applied among these populations in the same way – not without some fundamental interrogation and foundational improvements. Liberal systems of government and liberal practices must first value Black Americans equally.

The tenets of liberalism (autonomy, progress, and the idea of “the good life”) describe themselves as universal, but scholarship such as this shows the application of these tenets is certainly racialized: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are aided by privilege and capital, and these have been historically less accessible to nonwhite citizens. The *practice* of liberalism, its “discursive logic,” is also racialized by its similar prerequisites: literacy, leisure, and a platform (all facilitated by that same privilege and capital). Certainly historically, and still today, nonwhite, nonmale citizens (and those limited by other intersectional identities) have not been able to express themselves publicly, to liberally engage in open critical discourse in-print or in-person, at the same level as their hegemonically empowered peers. This truth catalyzed the publication and performance practices of the American New Negro movement, especially the founding of what Charles S. Johnson then called “Negro magazines,” non-weekly periodicals by and for (largely) Black audiences of a purposefully cultural and critical nature which shaped the art and lives of Harlem and America at-large. Journals, or “magazines,” such as *The Crisis*, *The Messenger*, *Opportunity*, and the almost innumerable others, worked to provide the platform (and promote the literacy) required for Black American public activity and primed white audiences for increasing nonwhite literary discourse and cultural criticism.

Ultimately, Sell writes:

The ubiquity of “race” and racialized thinking in the avantgarde is not just a consequence of the ubiquity of racial thought and racialized power in the modern world. The avantgarde has been an agent of that ubiquity, at times altering it in

favor of the disempowered, at times working to strengthen the already empowered.³¹

The racialized nature of the historical and contemporary avant-gardes is both hegemonic and (at times) revolutionary in its force. In publishing and promoting Black American art and lived experiences, Johnson and his peers appropriated the styles and forms of the historical avant-garde, especially their captivating qualities, to represent Blackness in print and to enact changes to the structures of artistic and liberal political activity. This commitment to change, the mutual reinforcement of art and life, is perhaps the most truly “avant-garde” quality of Johnson’s editing work, though, as the title of this chapter suggests, Johnson and his peers from the New Negro movement preferred evolution to revolution, the modernist critique and improvement of the liberal paradigm. Johnson’s work one-hundred years ago echoes within Charles W. Mills’s scholarship. Unlike the avant-gardists who sought to burn traditions and replace them entirely, exemplified especially by the Futurists and Filippo Marinetti’s incendiary rhetoric, the editors of the New Negro movement had faith in American liberalism, particularly in the promise of improving it; as Mills writes: “Liberalism’s historic complicity with ruling class and male power does not... preclude retrieving it.”³² By “recognizing the historic racialization of liberalism,” Mills continues, it is possible to produce a “color-conscious, racially reflexive, anti-racist liberalism on the alert for its own inherited racial distortions.”³³ In his own writing, Johnson challenged the history and practices of American liberalism much in this way, as did other seminal figures from the movement (e.g. Alain Locke), continuing the earlier criticisms by Black intellectuals such as Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois. These editors outlined the

³¹ Mike Sell. “Bohemianism, the Cultural Turn of the Avantgarde, and Forgetting the Roma.” *TDR: Drama Review* 51, no. 2 (2007): 41-59, at 54.

³² Charles W. Mills. *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*, xiv.

³³ Charles W. Mills. *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*, xv.

trajectory of their intentions: a public sphere and world-of-letters more accessible and more accepting of nonwhite voices and bodies, a liberal paradigm more open to nonwhite citizens. And they enacted this change through print, performance, and everyday embodiment. The artists whom they published and promoted took their prescriptions for personhood one step further, by representing Blackness and the Black American experience through prints and photography and directly engaging the artistic trends of modernism and the avant-garde. Notably, two figures from my dissertation, in particular, embraced a sense of the almost-avant-garde in their practice: illustrator Charles Cullen (1887-?) and photographer-illustrator Cornelius Marion Battey (1873-1927).

Charles Cullen, the artist I focus on most in the third chapter of my dissertation (an analysis of New Negro paragon personhood represented in print) has left an understudied mark on the illustrative art of the New Negro movement (and little narrative of his life – we don’t even know the date of his death). Cullen, though white (his WWI draft card read “tall and blond with blue eyes”),³⁴ partnered with Johnson and fellow artists such as Bruce Nugent, Aaron Douglas, and Countee Cullen, to translate the Black American experience into illustration and print. Johnson’s recurring partnership with Cullen points to the interracial nature of Johnson’s project. In addition to my desire to fill gaps in our communal knowledge, I am drawn to Cullen’s underreported work because of his apparent knowledge of contemporaneous artistic trends. A review of Cullen’s oeuvre, including seven book-illustration commissions and entries in both *Opportunity* and *Ebony and Topaz*, reveals homages to multiple modernist and avant-garde art styles: especially Art Nouveau, art deco, Expressionism, Symbolism, and Futurism. The

³⁴ Julie Mellby. “Charles Cullen.” *Graphic Arts Collection* blog. Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University. <https://graphicarts.princeton.edu/2020/07/24/charles-cullen/>.

impressive Black figures Cullen illustrated in *Ebony and Topaz* recall monolithic art deco sculpture, elevating Blackness, Black bodies, and the Black experience to the level of spectacularly worthy public art. Other illustrations by Cullen (outside *Opportunity*) demonstrate his familiarity with and knowledge of avant-garde forms and his ability to wield both his relative privilege (although poor and queer, Cullen was still white) and avant-garde access in the name of the New Negro movement's liberal project. Such work by white and Black artists engaged the potency of avant-garde aesthetics without also embracing their aporias in order to secure a contemporaneous foothold for nonwhite artists, to prime future audiences for increasingly abstract or unfamiliar representations of Blackness, and to welcome additional Black citizens into the liberal public sphere and its world-of-letters.

Similarly, the photography of C. M. Battey worked in a very "avant-garde" manner to enact changes to his peer's very ways of seeing. Like other early (Black) photographers, Battey captured strikingly "real" scenes and slices of American life through the relatively new technology of photography. The ability to capture life exactly as it appeared was both thrilling and powerful: early photographs by figures such as Battey showed the grittiness of lower-class life many viewers had never taken in visually before. The new technology, an entirely new way of making art, inspired real social change by showing everyday underclass scenes, almost-next-door neighbors living in squalor. Battey's *Compensation* (1923) offers one such glimpse. These sights, especially the accumulated detail of early photography, inspired bourgeois viewers to enact quality-of-life improvements and early attempts at equity. In addition to social change, these photographs inspired change in the very act of seeing. As Maurice Wallace and Shawn Smith write in their introduction to *Pictures and Progress* (2012):

Early Black American “photographs thus did much more than simply reflect in substance and shadow the wider social, political, and material calculus of the Atlantic world. They conditioned a modern way of seeing, physically conveying the new visual code in their material circulation between persons and places as if themselves in search of an ideal philosophy and form.”³⁵

Grappling with these new sights, viewers of photography were forced to practice a new, modern way of seeing. Battey’s photography encouraged bourgeois viewers to extend the concepts of modernist humanity to even the lowest-class subjects, regardless of race.

Perhaps the most “avant-garde” trait of the New Negro movement was its beginning. By some standards, the movement began with the late-1295 publication of *The New Negro*, edited by Alain Locke, which literally launched the movement and its artists and intellectuals via publication.³⁶ However, I argue the New Negro movement began in earnest the night of March 21, 1924, when Charles S. Johnson hosted a “coming-out party” for Zora Neale Hurston and her many peers at the Civic Club on Twelfth Street (off Fifth Avenue) in Manhattan.³⁷ The idea, to introduce upstart Black writers and artists to white audiences and publishers, was the brainchild of Johnson and the Writers’ Guild to which he belonged.³⁸ Johnson captured this inspiration in a

³⁵ Maurice O. Wallace, and Shawn Michelle Smith. “Introduction.” *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012, 1-17, at 3.

³⁶ Arnold Rampersad. “The Book That Launched the Harlem Renaissance.” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 38 (2002): 87–91.

³⁷ Other writers, too, have argued the Civic Club Dinner should be understood as the true starting point of the Harlem Renaissance. See, for example, Cary D. Wintz. “Harlem and the Renaissance: 1920-1940.” In *Women Artists of the Harlem Renaissance*. University Press of Mississippi, 2014, 3-21; and Belinda Wheeler. “Gwendolyn Bennett’s ‘The Ebony Flute.’” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 128, no. 3 (2013): 744–55, at 744.

³⁸ Before Johnson was a member of the Writers’ Guild, he was a member of the “Sunday Nighters,” a group proposed by Jean Toomer and hosted by Johnson, which would meet weekly in the home of Georgia Douglas Johnson to discuss literary works. George Hutchinson lists the members as “Johnson, Alain Locke, Jean Toomer, Mary Burrill, Jessie Fauset, Lewis Alexander, Marita Bonner, May Miller, Willis Richardson, Bruce

letter to Alain Locke on March 4, 1924, writing that “something [must] be done to mark the growing self-consciousness of this newer school of writers and as a desirable time the date of the appearance of Jessie Fauset’s book was selected,” but that the event shouldn’t simply celebrate Fauset, rather: “the present purpose [is] to include as many of the new school of writers as possible.”³⁹ The objective was a deservedly grand introduction for the next generation of Black creatives, and the venue was suitably extravagant. The Civic Club, opened in 1917 by several patrons (notably many founding members of the N.A.A.C.P.), was, as Cheryl A. Wall writes, “perhaps the fanciest venue in Manhattan that catered to [B]lack and white audiences.”⁴⁰ Johnson had control of the guest list – George Hutchinson writes that he “had an idea of which white

Nugent, William Stanley Brathwaite, occasionally Langston Hughes, and others.” Richardson hails this group as “an important bridge from the Victorian respectability of the [nonwhite] aristocracy to the modernism of the new generation,” noting that the group’s modernist exploration and “spiritual expression” was opposed to “the more down-to-earth realism of the post-1926 Langston Hughes,” which is why the author began to appear less frequently. I am spurred to mention in this moment that Georgia Douglas Johnson’s home was also the site of many celebrations *and*, crucially, staged readings of anti-lynching plays. Anne Carroll. “Civic Club Dinner, 1924.” *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, 2004, 224-226, at 224; George Hutchinson. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995, 389; Gwendolyn B. Bennett. “The Ebony Flute.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 5, no. 7 (1927, Klaus Reprint 1969): 212-213, at 212; and Koritha Mitchell. “The Black Mother/Wife: Negotiating Trauma.” *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*. Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2011, 147-174. For more information on the “Sunday Nighters,” see Ronald M. Johnson. “Those Who Stayed: Washington Black Writers of the 1920’s.” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society of Washington, D.C.* 50 (1980): 484-499; George B. Hutchinson. “Jean Toomer and the ‘New Negroes’ of Washington.” *American Literature* 63, no. 4 (1991): 683-692; Jeffrey C. Stewart. “Alain Locke and Georgia Douglas Johnson, Washington Patrons of Afro-American Modernism,” *Washington Studies*, 12 (1986): 37-44; and Akasha Gloria Hull. *Color, Sex & Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

³⁹ Charles S. Johnson. *Letter to Alain Locke, March 4, 1924*. Alain Locke Papers. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. Also cited in George Hutchinson. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 390.

⁴⁰ Cheryl A. Wall. “Essay: Histories and Heresies: Engendering the Harlem Renaissance.” *Meridians (Middletown, Conn.)* 2, no. 1 (2001): 59-76, at 59.

literati to invite from the start” and lists many of the event’s guests (a total of “about 110”).⁴¹ The events of the evening were captured in broad strokes in the May 1924 issue (2.17) of *Opportunity*, in an anonymous editorial (perhaps/likely written by Johnson), “The Debut of the Younger School of Negro Writers.” “Although there was no formal, prearranged program,” the editorial explains, “the occasion provoked a surprising spontaneity of expression both from the members of the writers’ group and from the distinguished visitors present.”⁴² The evening began with Charles S. Johnson giving a “brief interpretation of the object of the [Writers’] Guild,” which inspired the event (thus, in essence, giving an unrecorded “interpretation” of the objectives of the New Negro movement).⁴³ Johnson then introduced Alain Locke as Master of Ceremonies, who then took over hosting the remainder of the evening’s events: Locke spoke of the “currents manifest in the literature of this younger school;” white publisher Horace Liveright “told about the difficulties, even yet, of marketing books of admired merit” when they also criticized the racial inequities of America; W. E. B. Du Bois, a representative of the “old school” according to Locke, “made his first public appearance and address since his return to this country from Africa,” explaining the stylistic limitations of the “pioneers” of Black American art and literature before this new generation; James Weldon Johnson was introduced; Carl Van Doren gave his speech, reprinted immediately thereafter in *Opportunity*; Walter F. White, Montgomery Gregory, and art critic Dr. Albert C. Barnes gave speeches; Jessie Fauset was honored; and, finally, Countee Cullen and Gwendolyn Bennett gave readings of their original poems –

⁴¹ George Hutchinson. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 391; and Anne Carroll. “Civic Club Dinner, 1924,” 224.

⁴² “The Debut of the Younger School of Negro Writers,” 143.

⁴³ “The Debut of the Younger School of Negro Writers,” 143.

Bennett's *To Usward* is reprinted in full within the article.⁴⁴ And so, the New Negro movement was launched, lavishly, communally, and interracially.

The organizational overtones of this event – the establishment of a vanguard set of individuals at the front of the masses and the creation of a citizenship imagined in the future in order to manifest it in the moment – can be read as avant-garde, per the scholarship of Mike Sell and his peers. Sell distills his definition of the avant-garde as such:

The avant-garde is a minority formation that challenges power in subversive, illegal, or alternative ways; in particular, by challenging the routines, assumptions, hierarchies, and/or legitimacy of cultural institutions.⁴⁵

The Civic Club Dinner inherently celebrated the minoritarian (by bridging it with the empowered majority); it challenged the inequities of this power structure through an alternative “New (Negro)” way; in particular, by challenging the routines, assumptions, hierarchies, and/or legitimacy of its cultural institutions. In all, editors like Johnson who published artists such as Cullen and Battey practiced the almost-avant-garde: they borrowed the styles and forms of the historical avant-garde and prescribed truly avant-garde inspired living to create modernist, liberal change to American society and culture. Reading these artists and these actions as avant-garde encourages us to emphasize these evolutionary-not-revolutionary intentions and to interrogate the racial politics of the historical avant-garde.

Literature Review

Most of the scholarship on Charles S. Johnson works within a sociological framework to discuss his career as a sociologist and administrator. Patrick J. Gilpin, co-author of Johnson's

⁴⁴ “The Debut of the Younger School of Negro Writers,” 143.

⁴⁵ Mike Sell. “Resisting the Question, ‘What Is an Avant-Garde?’,” 770.

most-recent biography and sole author of *much* of the remaining scholarship on Johnson, had a career as a civil rights lawyer before earning his doctorate. Unsurprisingly, Gilpin's work on Johnson promotes him as a foundational figure in American sociological practices: his biography is devoted in large parts to Johnson's relationship with his mentor and famed sociologist Robert Park and his method (and how Johnson improved upon it). Gilpin's earlier dissertation largely resembles the final product, and his other essays on Johnson largely emphasize his politics and his fine work as an administrator.⁴⁶ The other dissertations on Johnson (cited in footnote 2) take a similarly sociological look at Johnson and his career. Articles by Matthew William Dunne and Kenneth Noble consider Johnson's politics, his criticisms of liberalism, and his recommendations for administrative best-practices.⁴⁷ In all, much of the scholarship on Johnson either barely references the cultural impact of Johnson's editing and organizing work or overlooks it entirely. However, Gilpin's essay, "Charles S. Johnson: Entrepreneur of the Harlem Renaissance," discontinues this trend and has proven deeply inspirational to my undertaking; in the essay, Gilpin details Johnson's cultural efforts (within *Opportunity* and beyond) and even

⁴⁶ Patrick J. Gilpin. "Charles S. Johnson and the Race Relations Institutes at Fisk University." *Phylon* 41, no. 3 (1980): 300-11; Gilpin, Patrick J. "Charles S. Johnson and the Second Red Scare: An Episode." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1978): 76-88; Gilpin, Patrick J. "Charles S. Johnson and The Southern Educational Reporting Service." *The Journal of Negro History* 63, no. 3 (1978): 197-208; and Gilpin, Patrick J. "Charles S. Johnson: Scholar and Educator." *Negro History Bulletin* 39, no. 3 (1976): 544-48.

⁴⁷ Matthew William Dunne. "Next Steps: Charles S. Johnson and Southern Liberalism." *The Journal of African American History* 83, no. 1 (1998): 1-34; and Kenneth Noble. "'A More Meaningful Democracy than We Ourselves Possess': Charles S. Johnson and the Education Mission to Japan, 1945–1952." *History of Education Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2014): 405-28.

argues that Johnson's publication was more radical than Du Bois's *Crisis*.⁴⁸ With recent scholarship emphasizing less-privileged members of the New Negro community, Charles S. Johnson, with his bourgeois upbringing and almost white-passing, statistics-filled essays on race relations, is largely considered moderate by canonical consensus – Richard Robbins's biography on Johnson labels him a “sidelines activist”⁴⁹ – while more obtusely radical works which promoted (more exclusively) Black audiences, such as Wallace Thurman's *Fire!!* (1926), have found new life in the academy and its archives.

This dissertation seeks to add to scholarship on Charles S. Johnson's career and oeuvre by reclaiming Johnson's radicalism and emphasizing his cultural impact on the New Negro movement and American modernism. *Fire!!* has been lauded for its “queer modernisms”⁵⁰ and its intentional publication “devoted to young negro artists,”⁵¹ and it proudly featured a play by Zora Neale Hurston, multiple short stories and essays, and artwork by Richard Bruce Nugent and Aaron Douglas; its aesthetic was Blackness lifted from life, adapted through the conventions of multiple modernisms, and printed on the page. Johnson's *Ebony and Topaz* did feature white artists and writers, unlike *Fire!!*, but it *also* featured essays, stories, and poetry – like *Fire!!* – even artwork by... Richard Bruce Nugent and Aaron Douglas (as well as Charles Cullen). While Caroline Goesser has recognized and argued for the radicalism of these illustrations, the

⁴⁸ Patrick J. Gilpin. "Charles S. Johnson: Entrepreneur of the Harlem." In *Remembering the Harlem Renaissance*, 339-70. Garland, 1996, 347.

⁴⁹ “Sidelines activist” is the titular moniker Richard Robbins assigns Johnson in his biography. Johnson himself welcomed this label, but the term should not connote a de-attached, uninvested, emotionless approach. This was not the case with Johnson. Richard Robbins. *Sidelines Activist*.

⁵⁰ Matthew N. Hannah. "Desires Made Manifest," *Journal of Modern Literature* 38, no. 3 (2015): 162-80.

⁵¹ This is the quarterly's subtitle.

collectanea's entry in the *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* (though it agrees that Nugent's featured works were "some of the most striking graphic images of the Harlem Renaissance") concludes "*Ebony and Topaz* lacked the edginess and independence of *Fire!!*" and that it "may have had a negligible impact."⁵² This dissertation will argue both for Johnson's commitment to (radical) Black representation and his impact on the movement – as well as later Black artistic and philosophic frameworks such as the Black Arts Movement.

In another trend I would like to address, most scholarship on the New Negro movement constrains itself within one medium: the majority are literary studies, defining the New Negro by its textual discursive practices – although essays such as Rebecca Hewett's *do* consider the performances of New Negro actors and artists⁵³ – and, though inspiring studies such as David Krasner's *A Beautiful Pageant* (2002) and Lena Ahlin's *The "New Negro" in the Old World* (2006) consider New Negro performance (theatre, dance, and more) *and* drama, they do not extend to the farthest reaches of New Negro media – something seminal figures from the movement did on a daily basis. This dissertation, on the other hand, is grounded in its demonstration of Charles S. Johnson (among other writers, artists, and intellectuals from the New Negro movement) as *mediator*. Johnson worked across media to define, curate, and proliferate the image of the New Negro Black American citizen, publishing text and images for readers to privately digest, catalyzing performances for viewers to publicly witness, and subtly laying the framework for a daily presentation of self, befitting the modern New Negro American. This dissertation will bring a new perspective to the scholarly conversation surrounding the New Negro movement by detailing several underrepresented case studies through a study on the

⁵² "Ebony and Topaz." *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, 2004, 327.

⁵³ Rebecca Hewett. "'Looking at One's Self through the Eyes of Others'," 2010.

movement's modernist and avant-garde engagements across the wide variety of media these "Renaissance" intellectuals – such as Charles S. Johnson as primary subject – utilized in their definitions and performances of New Negro self.

Additionally, this dissertation will engage trends in contemporary scholarship on modernism and the avant-garde while broadening the definition and application of the concepts and arguing a new member of the vanguard. Rachel Farebrother has published an excellent analysis of Miguel Covarrubias's modernist illustrations for *Vanity Fair* as read through New Negro theatricality; Mark A. Sanders's entry in the *Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* readjusts the focus on American modernism from figures such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot to the many New Negro artists and writers who deserve such attention; Lisa Mendelman's 2019 monograph, *Modern Sentimentalism*, includes a chapter which undertakes a study of the New Negro movement's relationship to both modernism and sentimental interiority (as the title suggests) that is foundational for my dissertation; and, excitingly, Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, in her 2017 article in *Modernism/Modernity*, even argues that the early-twentieth-century theatre works of Rose McClendon can and should be understood as modernist and avant-garde, which has proven similarly inspiring. However, there is a great deal of work to be done applying a broadened canonical understanding of the avant-garde (as one type of modernism) to the New Negro movement and arguing that these artists deserve their seat at the metaphorical table for academic avant-garde conversation. One primary purpose for this dissertation is to do just that: engaging Mike Sell's scholarship on and around the Black Arts Movement as avant-garde, I will continue read the New Negro movement *as* avant-garde, accepting the invitation to read the texts of the New Negro movement as manifesto in chapter 2 and searching for the movement's intentional impact on the future in chapter 4. With the limits and racialized terms of

the (historical) avant-garde understood, reading the New Negro movement *as* (almost) avant-garde invites new ways of looking at the movement and its individual members, revealing new case studies and levels of understanding encouraged by the original texts and performances of self.

This dissertation works within two primary paradigms: liberal praxis, via metatextual acts of private preparation and public presentation (of self and one's ideals), and the performative ability of the word (both printed and performed). To put this into practice, I will borrow my methodology from scholars and works who(/which) have interrogated the public sphere and its prescribed performances of personhood and those which engage the word's ability to enact change and promote specific brands of identity. As referenced earlier, Habermas and his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* serve as the foundation for scholarship on Western liberal publics. In defining the public and its characteristics, Habermas writes that the public is largely bourgeois and that, by definition, it has been "from the outset... a reading public." This reading public embodies sentimental interiority, the cultivatable catalyst of public activity, which has a lengthy metatextual history – it is a world of letters inhabited by such familiar touchstones as eighteenth-century English gentry and the literary leisure class. Charles S. Johnson and his fellow intellectuals of the New Negro movement worked within this historical framework, promoting directed readership and educated discourse as staples of liberal public activity – yet Johnson and his peers also interrogated the inequalities of these activities in a manner that serves as a spiritual predecessor for scholarship on Black print (counter)publics by scholars since the early-1960s (from Nancy Fraser to Houston Baker Jr, as referenced earlier, and beyond).

Johnson himself criticized the racial insensitivity of liberal public activity before Habermas ever established his narrative of its development: especially, his “The Rise of the Negro Magazine” (1928) details the hegemonic difficulties of publishing a non-daily periodical for specifically Black audiences. Because of their more purposeful and “cultural” quality, Johnson writes that magazines and journals, unlike newspapers, require more than simply current events: they require widespread literacy (of course), but also relative political calm and an institutional atmosphere of uplift – folks and the government must be willing and in a position to support self-actualization, economically and educationally.⁵⁴ Like Baker Jr half a century later, Johnson also acknowledges that these prerequisites are inherently more difficult for subjects within subaltern communities – his entire career was devoted to addressing these problems. Additionally, Johnson’s language in the essay anachronistically appears to embrace Fraser’s “counterpublic” terminology:

Finally, one of the greatest discouragements to Negro magazines was in the fact that the more direct the appeals to Negroes, the less the support from that necessary outside group of subscribers and contributors. Compromise positions lessened Negro support and subsequently readers, and by the same gesture reduced outside interest in supporting something that was not read or was without influence. In either case, they were doomed.⁵⁵

Although Johnson then presents the history of Black American magazines in an attempt to demonstrate that the racial attitude of the country had shifted in a way that supported more widespread Black readership and a greater willingness among white audiences to accept authentically Black content, a careful curation of New Negro identity for potential white audiences and readers (especially those in positions of power) was a constant complexity of

⁵⁴ Charles S. Johnson. “The Rise of the Negro Magazine.” *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1928, pp. 7–21, at 8.

⁵⁵ Charles S. Johnson. “The Rise of the Negro Magazine,” 9.

Johnson's career. As the immediate collapse of *Fire!!* after the publication of its only issue in 1926 demonstrated, Johnson's mediation was a tightrope walk: a proud Black man, he had to commit fully to racial uplift and the representation of authentic Blackness in print culture while also courting white donors and enticing white audiences (all while working within a public sphere dominated by white hegemonies). My evaluation of Johnson's evolving definition of Black American personhood and citizenship during the 1920s will pay special attention to these racial aporias and the manners in which Johnson balanced his intentions with the realities of public engagement.

This dissertation will also rely on scholarship which details the dimensions of public activity, across print and into performance. In her introduction to *New World Drama* (2014), Elizabeth Maddock Dillon develops the idea of a *performative commons*. Working within a contemporary Habermasian framework, Dillon observes the historical trend of audiences going to the theatre not simply to see but to be seen – “rather, they sought to display and represent themselves *in* public and represent themselves *as* a public.”⁵⁶ Theatre audiences of the early-modern period and beyond, Dillon writes, embraced rising popular sovereignty and the concept of the *commons* to perform their collective opinion in the theatres and playing spaces of their eras. Schechnerian performance studies invites us to consider the performative commons' existence outside official theatre spaces; and Derrick Spires previously quoted scholarship encourages us to consider the discursive practices, the textual and metatextual performances (acts of reading, writing, and book-buying, etc.), outside these communal events. As such, in this dissertation, I will unpack Johnson's public performances of New Negro identity (also among

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Maddock Dillon. *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004, 5.

those of the intellectuals whom he promoted and with whom he worked) across mediums: at public events with his peers, in public-facing plays and periodicals, and even in his private diary-keeping.

This dissertation will also borrow its approach from contemporary criticisms of editing as a liberal practice. Scholars of the editing process historically have already laid a framework for understanding and appreciating the ways in which curating texts can manifest identity signifiers. Scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century, by writers such as Valerie Wayne and Laurie Maguire, counteracts the long-held “neutrality” of the editing process, engaging Marshall McLuhan’s seminal concept that “the medium is the message.”⁵⁷ Maguire, in “Feminist Editing and the Body of the Text,” concludes plainly that, “[i]n the past, we bought Shakespeare’s text (or thought we did); now we know we are buying the editor’s.”⁵⁸ This is because, as Maguire argues, “editing, we now realize, is subjective in part and political in total” – from “the choice of author” to the simple frontmatter such as the *dramatis personae* or introduction, to commentary and the layout of the page.⁵⁹ Acts of editing, such as those by Charles S. Johnson to select and present paragon examples of New Negro artistic and socio-political identity, must be understood as an act of curation, a separate “presentation of self” from the original artistic creation, and Johnson’s selected works can thus be considered representative of his personal brand of New Negro identity – the development of which this dissertation seeks to demonstrate from 1923-1930. Additionally, in “The Gendered Text and Its Labour,” Wayne mirrors Dillon’s aforementioned focus on female labor and stretches our understanding of the text, proverbially,

⁵⁷ Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, 7.

⁵⁸ Laurie E. Maguire. “Feminist Editing and the Body of the Text.” In *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2016, 75-97, at 78.

⁵⁹ Laurie E. Maguire “Feminist Editing and the Body of the Text,” 78.

and the editing process, practically. Wayne quotes Ann Thompson's statement in "Feminist Theory and the Editing of Shakespeare" (2001) that "the editors are frequently more sexist than the text, both in what they discuss and in what they fail to discuss" and concludes that this can be applied to other identity intersections, such as race, as well.⁶⁰ This reinforces the notion that Johnson, even more than the artists he promoted and published, may have been even more racially conscious in his decision-making: arguably, his acts of editing and anthologizing can be read as more intentional acts racial identity-definition, delineating New Negro American citizenship through print and performance.

Scholarship on the "little magazine" matches this intentional tone of publication, which can similarly be applied to Charles S. Johnson's editing career. Reed Whittemore's 1963 pamphlet, *Little Magazines*, borrows Theodore Peterson's terminology from *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (1964) and labels these short-running, deeply cultural magazines "serious" – as opposed to the less-serious commercial endeavors of mainstream magazines; these magazines, to Whittemore, are more interested in utopia than the everyday experiences of the lay-public.⁶¹ This foundational understanding has carried over into much scholarship since: Renato Poggioli refers to little magazines as noncommercial, with the goal of publishing "proclamations and programs or a series of manifestos, announcing the foundation of a new movement, explicating and elaborating its doctrine, categorically and polemically;"⁶² Peter Brooker and Andrew

⁶⁰ Valerie Wayne. "The Gendered Text and Its Labour." In *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment*, Vol. 1. Oxford Handbooks. Oxford University Press, 2016, 549-68, at 556.

⁶¹ Whittemore Reed. *Little Magazines*. University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers; No. 32. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1963, 7-8.

⁶² Renato Poggioli. *The Theory of the Avant-garde*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968, 22.

Thacker in their general introduction to their three-volume *Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* center the study in a collection of editors who felt “they would make a difference” with their publications;⁶³ and Sophie Seita, in her 2019 monograph *Provisional Avant-Gardes*, continues Poggioli’s trend of reading little magazine activity through the avant garde: these acts of cultural curation, she writes, “capture and create provisional and heterogeneous communities” in a very avant-garde sense.⁶⁴ By engaging the methodology of the long-running scholarly conversation on little magazines, this dissertation will evidence the ways in which Charles S. Johnson sought to make change in the world, create communities of liberal subjects with specific artistic and socio-political boundaries, and imagine utopia – thereby continuing the argument that Johnson (and his peers from the New Negro movement) can be considered a fully-fledged avant-garde.

Bridging the boundaries between text and performance and embracing this theory of publication as change-maker, my analysis of early-twentieth-century Black American print culture will unpack Charles S. Johnson’s (again, among others) *performative* definitions of New Negro identity and citizenship and his *theatrical* acts of imagining and embodying these definitions per Martin Puchner’s synthesis of textual studies on the manifesto with J L Austin’s “How to Do Things with Words” (1962). Puchner’s scholarship offers an ideal lens by which to read Johnson’s volumes of *Opportunity*, as well as lesser-known examples such as *Ebony and Topaz* and “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro,” because it engages Johnson as an avant-garde

⁶³ Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker. “General Introduction.” *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2009, 1-26, at 1.

⁶⁴ Sophie Seita. *Provisional Avant-gardes: Little Magazine Communities from Dada to Digital*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019, 2.

mediator (again, per Sell's scholarship), insofar as he printed and published in order to portray a specific utopia and utopian citizen.

Roadmap

This dissertation is delineated into four chapters. The first chapter, "Personhood: Liberalism, Sentimentalism, and the Cultural Memory of the New Negro Movement" distills the prescriptions for personal practice and personal values within the writings of Charles S. Johnson and his peers within and surrounding *Opportunity*. I thematically demonstrate the tenets of the New Negro movement as they appear in the recommended metatextual acts surrounding the journal. Importantly and intentionally, these tenets of the New Negro movement employ recognizable and legible values from earlier iterations of liberal-sentimental citizenship and personhood. As such, the art from the New Negro movement, as well as its embodied practices recommended for everyday life, employed tropes within the cultural memory of the New Negro movement and its individual members. Similarly, Johnson's approach to sociological problems resonates with contemporaneous academic advancements within the profession. This chapter will establish Johnson's (and his peers') rightful place in the development of American sociological thinking, African American art, and Black American criticisms of liberalism's inequities: Johnson and his peers within *Opportunity*, I argue, carefully engaged the tenets and practices of liberalism and, more distantly, sentimentalism, distancing themselves from previous sentimental appeals and invoking earlier Enlightenment liberal values to conjecture that Black Americans deserved equal rights and representation not because of their ability to suffer, but because of their trained and equivalent ability to reason.

The second chapter, "Print: The Texts and Art of the New Negro Movement as Manifesto," ceases the centrality of print to the New Negro movement (reading, writing, cultural

criticism, and acts of publication) as inspiration and evaluates the acts of print surrounding *Opportunity* as acts of personhood. Specifically, I employ Martin Puchner's scholarship on the historical avant-garde manifesto as lens. I argue that, as printed documents which *performatively* defined an ideal future citizenry and *theatrically* imagined a future in which that citizenry existed in order to grant itself an artificial ethos, the authority to create the future citizens it envisioned, the issues of *Opportunity* can be read as manifestos. Especially, the journal's collectanea of its finest work, *Ebony and Topaz*, offered its artists and intellectuals the opportunity to perform their Blackness in print without the concern of pleasing or convincing a white audience. As a result, a novel concept/aesthetic of Blackness emerges: repeated modernist abstraction of Black American life and persons which treat their subjects with the same lofty respect seen first in early realism and then in twentieth-century modern and avant-garde art. In this chapter, I highlight the underappreciated work of illustrator Charles Cullen (1887-?) and photographer Cornelius Marion Battey (1873-1927) for their role in *performatively* defining and *theatrically* imagining the Blackness and personhood of the New Negro movement.

In the third chapter, "Performance: A Comparative Reading of New Negro Personhood within the Drama and Theatre of *Opportunity*'s Literary Contests (1924-1927)," I continue to evaluate the art of the New Negro movement for the prescriptions of modern personhood therein – here interrogating the drama and performance from *Opportunity*, especially the literary contests the journal hosted for three years. I detail the values and ideals performed by several texts and some photographed productions within the journal. I heed the journal's call to emphasize the impact of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920) on the movement and especially its approach to theatre and drama. I then thematically distill the three prize-winning plays from *Opportunity*'s contests, *Frances* (1925) by G. D. Lipscomb, *Sugar Cain* (1926) by

Frank H. Wilson, and *Plumes* (1927) by Georgia Douglas Johnson before undertaking a comparative analysis and reading of three unpublished plays from the 1925 contest (kept for years unseen in Johnson's personal archive at Fisk University): *The Deep Regret* by Claude Reymond (pseudonym), *The Cuss'd Thing* by May Miller, and *Scion* by Jesse C. Stubbs. Though they were not awarded for their superlative achievements or qualities, these plays *do* offer individual iterations for the definitions of New Negro personhood worthy of recognition: dramatizations of the internal struggle experienced by good people in violent moments which test one's liberal duty and one's (sometimes anti-liberal) personal responsibilities; the staged schism between liberal rationalism and the alternative, Black, often-womanly ways of knowing which were debated within the New Negro's modernist paradigm; and a powerfully visceral criticism of the limitations of anti-lynching performance which refuses to stage the inhuman act itself.

The final chapter, "Photography: Searching for the Significance of the New Negro Movement in Photo Portraiture," takes a short look at the impact the New Negro movement *might* have had on several pieces of American photography from archives across the country. I offer a foundational history of photographic technology and then evaluate individual presentations-of-self captured within photographs and portraits. Tapping the photographic archives of the Cleveland Public Library Special Collections; the African American Museum and Library at Oakland Special Collections; and the Special Collections at California State University, Dominguez Hills; I promote several unique and personal performances of liberal-sentimental values featured in these case studies. I argue the presentations-of-self captured in these photos engage the history of "whiteface minstrelsy," of embodying hegemonically "white" activities or values, Black Americans have practiced for centuries. I unpack this racialized

relationship to leisure using Marvin McAllister's scholarship on the African Grove pleasure garden as lens. In all, I contend these photographs depict performances of personhood with values akin to the New Negro movement and the liberal-sentiment traditions before them – possibly suggesting the transcontinental significance of the New Negro movement Charles S. Johnson suggested in his thirty-year retrospective.

Through an appropriately multimedia investigation of his work against a background of modernist New Negro activity, this dissertation narrates Charles S. Johnson and his peers' evolving performances of personhood and the development of Black publics through print and performance. My case studies include plays, periodicals, public dinners, and private manuscripts. Drawing on Johnson's career, I argue that the construction of Black modern personhood in the twentieth century cannot be properly captured by focusing solely on one medium: instead, the complexities of Black personhood and of Black intellectuals' contribution to liberal thought and its embodied practices are best revealed through an interdisciplinary analysis across multiple mediums: print, performance, and photography. In so doing, I hope to alter and add to the scholarly discourse surrounding the New Negro movement, to draw its attention and public awareness away from a few canonical individuals and toward the lived efforts of countless Black Americans, artistically representing themselves and their liberal values across mediums in the early decades of the twentieth century. These unknown or underappreciated Americans – C. M. Battey and Charles Cullen, the Roberts and Montjoy families, and the unnamed and/or yet-unearthed artists, intellectuals, and members of the movement – have created art, performance, and theory worthy and deserving of attention, analysis, and praise. By drawing attention to understudied passages, publishing new archival material, and fostering an atmosphere of further exploration and platforming, I look to do my part in promoting awareness and appreciation.

Chapter 1: Personhood

Liberalism, Sentimentalism, and the Cultural Memory of the New Negro Movement

As editor of *Opportunity*, Charles S. Johnson engaged centuries of liberal print-culture traditions and continued generations of Black-authored criticism of that tradition. Though liberalism was rife with inequities, as discussed from a contemporary perspective in the introduction, Johnson and his peers believed the paradigm could be improved, and the editor and the aggregate New Negro movement to which he belonged (though not necessarily all its individual members) embraced liberalism – even as they criticized it – for its legitimating ethos. Johnson and his peers argued legible liberal activity by Black Americans would better garner respect from white witnesses and better facilitate increased access and public participation for and by nonwhite populations. *Opportunity* modeled this ideal practice and offered Black Americans an outlet for guided practices of their own. As editor of *Opportunity*, Charles S. Johnson partook liberally in the print public sphere, as did the peers he published. Unfortunately, as editor of *Opportunity*, as head and the public face of one of the most popular Black periodicals of the early-twentieth-century, Johnson also subjected himself to the realities of liberal participation for any Black or otherwise minoritarian American – realities which would sometimes include violently anti-liberal responses to such participation. This is also true for the writers and intellectuals and lay Black individuals he published. *Opportunity* modeled New Negro personhood and defined it by familiar liberal(-sentimental) values, among other influences and inspirations; and, as such, New Negro person was complicated and contained contradictions, caught in the tension between respectable methods for self-actualization on a social level and the oppressive traditions behind those methods.

Because they modeled best-practices⁶⁵ for New Negro individuals, the acts of print and performance by Charles S. Johnson and his peers, those investigated in the following chapters of this dissertation, can and should be read as enactments, definitions, and practices of personhood – New Negro personhood, intentionally designed by its practitioners to criticize Western and American liberal citizenship and the hegemonies of its racialized, embodied practice. I employ the term “personhood” here because of its winding, intricate relationship to Western liberalism. After the initial development of liberal, Enlightenment thinking, eighteenth-century scholars such as Kant are seminal for their deliberations on ontological personhood – the specific delineation of innate qualities which make a being human. Kant famously developed his “Formula of Humanity,” the liberal rule that “humanity” must be “used” or acknowledged/valued “in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end,

⁶⁵ I use the term “best-practices” multiple times in this chapter and throughout this dissertation. In a sense, this dissertation broadly and this chapter specifically are about detailing the dimensions of those best-practices, both in terms of personhood (or one’s daily lived experience) and multimedia artistic expression. However, a working definition for the best-practices for personhood, which might be used as those dimensions are detailed, may be developed from Johnson’s favorite Goethe reference (quoted in full on page 48), which he cited multiple times throughout his career: “The full value of experience is in seeing the significance of what has happened. Without this awareness we do not really live. Life lives us.” The best-practices for personhood, as Johnson saw them and as they appeared in *Opportunity* under his editorship (roughly, with obvious individual difference), then, are those private and public actions which best prepare one to understand the significance of one’s own lived experience. Specifically: actions such as educating oneself, taking (or making) the time to be well-read, connecting oneself with other educated individuals who might inspire meaningful conversation and/or action and one’s continued growth, (inter)racial tolerance cooperation, and, broadly, the modernist and liberal embrace of new technologies and individual sovereignty/capability. These themes and values are reiterated throughout Johnson’s personal writings and the first six volumes of *Opportunity*. Charles S. Johnson. “Literature and the Practice of Living” (1950), 3. Box 165, folder 13. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

never merely as a means.”⁶⁶ Kant had liberally laid the groundwork for the inherent “humanity” of all persons. In classical liberalism, humanity and personhood are inexorably linked. However, nonwhite humans have had their socialized *personhood* challenged with the hegemonically white power structure of America since its inception. As Charles W. Mills notes in *Black Rights/White Wrongs* (2017), the concept of race, as a social construct, “is originally the demarcator of full and diminished personhood.”⁶⁷ Western, American understandings of race have delimited one’s personhood by the color of their skin. Lisa Lowe, too, argues in *Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) that “the modern distinction between definitions of the human and those to whom such definitions extend” is not “the particular exception” to the liberal paradigm, but rather “the condition” of its inequities.⁶⁸ Western liberalism, Lowe writes, defined the human and its universal application by the European man as standard, and delimited its application among those who were otherwise “unhuman” by such a standard.⁶⁹ The Black American liberal project since the abolitionist movement – and that certainly continued by the New Negro movement – was one of reclaiming *personhood*, the social recognition of Black American humanity. This term has also resonated within popular Black American scholarship. In *All That She Carried* (2021), Tiya Miles, too, uses the term “personhood” in her powerful recapturing of the humanizing act of property-keeping undertaken by “Rose,” grandmother of Ruth Middleton, when the enslaved mother gave her daughter a small sack of possessions (a tattered dress, three handfuls of pecans, and a braid of her own hair), before she was to be sold. As an enslaved woman, Miles writes that Rose “demonstrated her personhood” in her possession of stuff,

⁶⁶ Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 38.

⁶⁷ Charles W. Mills. *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017, 8.

⁶⁸ Lisa Lowe. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 3.

⁶⁹ Lisa Lowe. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 6.

“reflecting dignity inwardly to [herself] and outwardly to others.”⁷⁰ Black Americans have long practiced liberal values in the racial reclamation of their social personhood, and Johnson’s emphasis on liberalism makes usage of the term appropriate: Johnson wanted to emphasize not just Black American’s sentimental, suffering *humanity*, but their rational, higher-facultied *personhood*.

In addition to the inherent liberalism behind the concept of personhood, Charles S. Johnson placed himself tangentially within the paradigm of Western liberal-sentimentalism⁷¹ in defining the New Negro movement by its metatextual acts,⁷² acts of reading, writing, book-

⁷⁰ Tiya Miles. *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley’s Sack, a Black Family Keepsake*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2021, 110.

⁷¹ I use the term “liberal-sentimentalism” here to encapsulate the combined history of the socio-political and cultural values of liberalism and sentimentalism. This connection will be detailed further throughout this chapter, but several scholars have linked the trend of sentimentalism in literature, art, and common consciousness to the tenets and practice of liberalism historically, especially Lauren Berlant in “Poor Eliza” (1998). Lauren Berlant. “Poor Eliza.” *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (1998): 635-668. For examples not especially considered in this dissertation, see: Markman Ellis. *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996; Elizabeth Barnes. *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997; and Kristin Boudreau. *Sympathy in American Literature: American Sentiments from Jefferson to the Jameses*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002.

⁷² I call these “metatextual” acts, because of their encircling connection to pieces of text: acts of reading, writing, book-buying, note-taking, etc. I am inspired in my usage of this term by the Greek etymology of the English “meta”: “μετά,” the Greek preposition often meaning “among, with, together with.” “Metatextual” acts, or simply “metatexts,” then, are the things that come “together with” a text (such as acts of reading, writing, editing, selling, etc.). This term relates to Gérard Genette’s concept of the “paratext,” but it is not the same. To Genette, paratexts are

those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader: titles, forewords, epigraphs, and publishers’ jacket copy are part of a book’s private and public history.

Paratexts are the threshold between a text and its audience, and, although they exist within *and* without the text, the term “metatextual” I apply emphasizes the action, the performance, of one’s relationship to a textual object. Anne Groton. *From Alpha to*

buying, note-taking, etc., engaging the cultural memory of (Black) American media before him. Johnson's sociological theory also presupposed the "presentation of self" that catalyzed the theatrical turn in sociology during the 1950s and 1960s.⁷³ In this chapter, I will first situate Johnson's calculated use of liberal-sentimental values and traditions and clarify his relative positioning within the developmental timelines of the liberal and sentimental traditions as well as twentieth-century sociological theory. Johnson's relationship to liberalism and, more distantly, sentimentalism was educated, interrogated, and intentional. Johnson understood the historical and twentieth-century dimensions of liberalism (and sentimentalism), he criticized the lack of opportunity for nonwhite participants provided by America's liberal paradigm in writing, and (like the practices of the historical avant-garde discussed in the introduction) Johnson wisely took from each only what he needed to realize the New Negro movement and *Opportunity's* goal of racial uplift on an institutional and individual level. After specifying Johnson's relationship to and use of liberal(-sentimental) and sociological traditions, I will then define the values of and prescriptions for New Negro personhood within *Opportunity* in tangentially liberal terms. Johnson and his peers intended the metatextual acts of reading, writing, and publishing which defined the New Negro paragon and paradigm – embodied in the example of *Opportunity* and *Ebony and Topaz* – to be the ideal vessel for the reclamation of public and social respect for Black Americans (in a predominantly white public print sphere). In so doing, Johnson and his peers continued the best-practices of generations of Black public criticism by predecessors such

Omega: A Beginning Course in Classical Greek, Fourth Edition, Focus Publishing, 2013, 500; and Gérard Genette. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, quoted from an excerpt on the book's unnumbered first page.

⁷³ This "theatrical turn," the shift in sociological theory toward an understanding of human activity as curated and, specifically, *performed*, occurring after the publication of Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1962), is discussed at-length later in this chapter.

as Frederick Douglass (1817/8-1895) while also legibly presenting a respectable public façade. Finally, I will undertake a semiotic reading of the themes of two plays which would have likely resonated within the cultural memory of the New Negro movement, a reading which will prove foundational for the analyses of this dissertation's later chapters. *Rachel* (1916) by Angelina Weld Grimké and *Mine Eyes Have Seen* (1920) by Alice Dunbar Nelson, popular and immediate predecessors to New Negro artistry, served as thematic touchstones for the artists and intellectuals of the New Negro movement, offering them both iterations of personhood to reference, and artistic styles to emulate. Potently, these plays also emphasize the inherent dangers of public participation for Black Americans in the 1920s. This reading will necessarily contextualize the metatextual acts Johnson and his peers prescribed and performed and centralize the racial inequities inherent within any liberal system. Ultimately, in editing *Opportunity*, Charles S. Johnson created a textual embodiment of the New Negro paragon for personhood, one he believed worth recreating on an individual level through the embodied actions of Black Americans across the country. This paragon/personhood was decidedly (yet critically) liberal, despite the complications of such a paradigm, and it disembarked from sentimental traditions in favor of a reasoned, yet expressive, approach. This chapter will define this paragon for personhood, so that I may then distill representations of such personhood within the multimedia artistic production from *Opportunity* in this dissertation's following chapters.

Charles S. Johnson and the Liberal, Sentimental, and Sociological Traditions

In publishing his prescriptions for personhood in *Opportunity*, Charles S. Johnson placed himself within the developmental timelines of American liberalism and Western sociological theory. This section will demonstrate Johnson's position on these timelines; it will also serve as something of a continued literature review, summarizing the discourses Johnson engaged

(liberalism, sentimentalism, and sociological theory) and describing how Johnson positioned himself relative to these seminal discourses. Most immediately, Johnson aided the development of what Erving Goffman (1922-1982) would famously call “the presentation of self in everyday life,” or “dramaturgical action;”⁷⁴ and Johnson’s contributions to this predominant sociological conversation ought to be recognized. In introducing their “dramaturgical sourcebook,” editors Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley praise Goffman as the “Grandfather of Dramaturgy” and progenitor of a “most ubiquitous form of scholarship.”⁷⁵ The editors also acknowledge that Goffman wasn’t the first to engage this line of thinking, and they trace his bibliographic lineage to George Herbert Mead’s (1863-1931) concept of the “social act.”⁷⁶ However, Mead *also* was not the first to engage this line of thinking. The concept of a “social act” can similarly be traced

⁷⁴ Erving Goffman created something of a theatrical turn in American sociology with the delivery and eventual publication of his first monograph, “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life” (1959, first American edition). In the one-page preface to the first edition, published in Scotland in 1956, Goffman writes that the principles of his monograph “are dramaturgical ones.” He continues:

I shall consider the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them.

“Dramaturgical action,” then is any self-conscious presentation of self with a set objective. This concept has since become foundational for much of performance studies and significant portions of sociological theory since. See Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, monograph no. 2. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956, np. Hosted digitally by Monoskop at https://monoskop.org/images/1/19/Goffman_Erving_The_Presentation_of_Self_in_Everyday_Life.pdf.

⁷⁵ Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley. “The Dramaturgical Perspective.” *Life as Theater*. Routledge, 1990, 1.

⁷⁶ Brissett and Edgley quote Mead’s *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934) in defining a “social act”: “Meaning... should be conceived objectively as having its existence entirely within the field itself. The response of one organism to the gesture of another in any given *social act* is the meaning of that gesture” (emphasis theirs). “Dramaturgy,” they conclude “is interested [in ‘social acts’]... a concern with understanding the forces that move human behavior.” Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley. “The Dramaturgical Perspective,” 2.

to the earlier German scholarship of Max Weber, a figure now renowned for *his* contributions to the development of sociological theory. Thirteen years before Mead published *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), Max Weber published *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (“*Economy and Society*,” 1921), in which he defines sociology by its focus on what he also called “social actions”:

Sociology... is a science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action and thereby by a causal explanation of its course and consequences. We shall speak of “action” insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior – be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence.⁷⁷

Max Weber was one of the first to define sociology and this type of curated action, behaviors to which “subjective meaning” are attached in order to encourage/ensure specific responses by observers. Pieces of Weber’s work were first published in English in 1930 when Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) translated *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (“*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,” 1905), but it wasn’t until Parsons published *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) that America was widely introduced to a Weberian understanding of social action – *Economy and Society* wasn’t translated into English until 1968. It is possible Mead knew of Weber’s earlier work (through Parsons or otherwise),⁷⁸ but I don’t

⁷⁷ Max Weber. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, 4.

⁷⁸ Mead’s coworker (also Charles S. Johnson’s research advisor) at the University of Chicago, Robert E. Park (discussed more later this chapter), studied under Georg Simmel (1858-1918) in Berlin for a semester during the 1899-1900 academic year before undertaking doctoral work in sociology at the University of Heidelberg and matriculating in 1904. As such, Park was academically fluent in German and familiar with the early-twentieth century developments among German sociologists. It is possible Park knew of Weber’s work before Parsons proliferated it, and Park could have served as another outlet for influence. More importantly, Park’s tutelage under Simmel and Johnson’s tutelage under Park creates a meaningful lineage between Simmel, one of the most influential thinkers on culture, and Johnson, a man who put that theory into action. This generational connection between Johnson and mainstream sociological theory should also be acknowledged. James Horwitz. *An Analysis of Selected Sociological Writings of Robert Ezra Park*, 1950, 9-10.

mean to imply any causal relationship: this was a conversation in which many sociological theorists were actively participating, Charles S. Johnson included. Johnson's unpublished essay, "Social Assimilation Defined," cited in the following section, includes a reference to a contemporaneous text by Bronisław Malinowski, an influential sociologist and notable representative of structural functionalism, a theory which held a mechanical, holistic view of society, and a theory which Weber criticized.⁷⁹ Johnson, too, implicitly criticized the tenets of structural functionalism in his life and work. Because of its emphasis on unity and the whole, structural functionalism does not allow much space for difference or the individual, two values Johnson held very dear. Although Johnson had a knack for surveying and distilling large data sets, he, like Weber, emphasized the individual implications of social life, the small-scale ability of anyone to incite change and facilitate new sentiments in others.

Johnson's perspective here can be traced to his lineage within the Chicago School of sociology. Charles S. Johnson finished his undergraduate education at Virginia Union University in three years, graduating in 1916 before serving in WW1 during 1918; in 1919, Johnson moved to Chicago to undertake graduate research at the University of Chicago under Dr Robert Park."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ The Oxford *Dictionary of Social Research Methods* defines "structural functionalism" as: [a] model of society in which a 'culture' is seen as a coherent, bounded whole, likened to a machine or a body in which each part contributes in a specific way to the successful functioning of the whole. On this model, social institutions and cultural phenomena can be studied by identifying their function and how they relate to each other in maintaining the working of the whole. The biggest problem with this model is that it is difficult to accommodate social change within it. Any change to social institutions or adoption of elements from other cultures appears as a deviation from the coherence of the whole.

See Mark Elliot, et. al. "Structural Functionalism." *A Dictionary of Social Research Methods*, 2016, A Dictionary of Social Research Methods, 2016.

⁸⁰ Patrick J Gilpin. *Charles S. Johnson: An Intellectual Biography*, 1973, 7-11; and Phillip James Johnson. *Seasons in Hell: Charles S. Johnson and the 1930 Liberian Labor Crisis*, 2004, 5.

Park was a leading force at the University of Chicago, where George Herbert Mead also taught, and the department quickly became a hub for liberal critics of structural functionalism, such as Florian Znaniecki (1882-1958) and later even Erving Goffman himself. Park's influence on Johnson is central in Gilpin's biography and it can be seen throughout the Johnson's archive at Fisk: Johnson kept a copy of the obituary for Park he published in *Negro Digest*, "The Most Genuine Person I Ever Met: My Favorite White Person – Dr. Robert E. Park (1944)."⁸¹ Johnson's superlative term of endearment here exemplifies their close relationship and Park's lasting impact on Johnson's theory, life, and work. Charles S. Johnson, like his advisor and like his peers of the Chicago School, like Weber in Germany in the 1920s and Mead famously in the 1930s, believed in self-curation and social action which could guide external opinion. This personal value and theory was catalyzing for *Opportunity* and the personhood he prescribed in the journal.

Importantly, the values Charles S. Johnson held and the personhood he promoted in *Opportunity* also position him within (though purposefully at the edges) a liberal(-sentimental) paradigm. Johnson purposefully engaged the liberal-sentimental tradition, borrowing ethos from its legitimacy and taking from its practices what he could, while continuing to refine Black American best-practices in his ongoing criticisms of liberal-sentimental inequities. Serving as a foundation for Johnson's later cultural action and at least partially as an explanation for these actions, Johnson's education at the University of Chicago primed him to work to right the inequitable wrongs of American liberal practice, as the Chicago School rooted itself in liberal criticism. Dennis Smith has argued that "the writings of the Chicago sociologists provide a rich

⁸¹ Charles S. Johnson. "The Most Genuine Person I Ever Met: My Favorite White Person – Dr. Robert E. Park" (1944). Box 166, folder 12. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

source of materials within which to explore not only the inherent tensions of American liberalism but also the problems of adapting this tradition to the modern world.”⁸² As critics of liberalism, Robert Park, Charles S. Johnson, and other members of the Chicago School understood the faults of the system and sought to fix them. Unlike avant-garde revolutionaries who sought to burn the system and replace it with something utopian, Johnson and his peers agreed with the tenets of liberalism and believed it could be improved, its inequities resolved. As such, Johnson promoted legible liberal activity by Black (and other nonwhite) Americans in order to reform the public sphere to a more accessible point, a public more welcoming of more “illegible” Blackness, that which is not hegemonically empowered or understood. Johnson encouraged Black Americans to occupy traditionally white public spaces (both physical and textual) to facilitate further public, liberal activity by Black (and other nonwhite) Americans, unchecked by hegemonic gatekeepers.

Liberalism has a long and branching history; and, by the time its tenets were employed by Charles S. Johnson and other intellectuals of the New Negro movement, it had developed multiple (classical *and* modern) connotations. Tracing its way from the Enlightenment to the twentieth century, liberalism became a (perhaps *the*) cornerstone for much of transatlantic society, politics, and culture, ultimately founding the world of letters in which Johnson and his circle operated, determining both who was allowed a voice within the public sphere and how they were allowed to act. Merriam-Webster define liberalism as “a political philosophy based on belief in progress, the essential goodness of the human race, and the autonomy of the individual and standing for the protection of political and civil liberties.”⁸³ This definition is useful for

⁸² Dennis Smith. *The Chicago School: A Liberal Critique of Capitalism*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Education, 1988, 34.

⁸³ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Liberalism.” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liberalism>.

identifying the lowest common denominators of liberalism: progress, goodness, and autonomy. Contextually, these ideals stretch back to the concept's Enlightenment origins. John Locke, the "father of liberalism," in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), defines the natural equality of humankind (or, more specifically, *men*) and lauds their learned, social success over a more-primitive state of war, wherein men have unjust power over certain others, thereby decreasing their *liberty* unduly. Through the development and cultivation of reason, Locke writes, we as humans are able to guide ourselves toward just laws and governance, for "[t]o turn him loose to an unrestrained liberty, before he has reason to guide him, is not the allowing him the privilege of his nature to be free; but to thrust him out amongst brutes, and abandon him to a state as wretched, and as much beneath that of a man, as theirs."⁸⁴ Uneducated, "unrestrained" liberty is unbecoming of a humanity guided by reason to Locke – civil society can only exist wherever "any number of men are so united into one society, as to quit every one his executive power of the law of nature, and to resign it to the public."⁸⁵ Locke, like Thomas Hobbes and John Milton before/with him, promoted the consent of the governed and the power of the public; and the influence of this enlightened liberalism can be read within touchstone texts on liberty since: the United States' Constitution and John Stuart Mills's *On Liberty*, for instance, both notably include the consent of "we the people" as prerequisite to (and the best method of achieving) life, liberty, and happiness.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ John Locke. *Second Treatise of Government*, 1690, Section 63. Hosted digitally by Project Gutenberg at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7370/7370-h/7370-h.htm>.

⁸⁵ John Locke. *Second Treatise of Government*, 1690, Section 89.

⁸⁶ The Preamble to the US Constitution is ubiquitous in its Austinian speech act, "establish[ing] Justice" and "form[ing] a more perfect Union" through the power of We the People. See US Constitution. Preamble, 1787. Hosted online by Congress at <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution>, as needed. Similarly, in *On Liberty* John Stuart Mills begins his consideration of the limits of social authority over the individual

This notion of a “public” has resonated with contemporary narratives of liberal history. Jürgen Habermas is (in)famous for kick-starting an entire discourse with *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), which describes and defines Western liberal activity historically within a “public” and “private” framework; the text delineates “private” acts of reading and writing from the “public” acts of critical conversation (especially in early-modern coffeehouses) that they facilitate. Habermas’s short book offers one narrative for the development of the public sphere in the West during the European Enlightenment, a time of rampant privatization of land and capital – both of which are prerequisite to access to the public sphere.⁸⁷ “Publicity,” Habermas writes, is “one of [the] central categories” of liberalism and perhaps the best vehicle for understanding it.⁸⁸ To Habermas, modern liberalism relies upon public discussion and criticism of legal action and culture. These public acts create and define the public sphere and separate the modern public sphere of public activity by private individuals from pre-modern, state-controlled publicity. Whereas that which was “public” was once royal presentation of power to be witnessed by subjects, the eighteenth century saw the reclamation of publicity by private (property-owning, bourgeois) individuals and the creation of the “world of letters” within which these educated individuals could offer their criticism and demonstrate their

by detailing society’s journey from tyranny to “constitutional checks” to full consent of the governed: “A time, however, came, in the progress of human affairs, when men ceased to think it a necessity of nature that their governors should be an independent power, opposed in interest to themselves. It appeared to them much better that the various magistrates of the State should be their tenants or delegates, revocable at their pleasure.” John Stuart Mills. *On Liberty*, 1859, 4. Hosted digitally by Project Gutenberg at <https://gutenberg.org/files/34901/34901-h/34901-h.htm>.

⁸⁷ Multiple times in section 3 of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas writes that “property and education” are the two prerequisites for public access and activity – and neither would be possessable without capital. See, for example, Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989, 87.

⁸⁸ Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 4.

privately prepared personhood.⁸⁹ Incidentally, this level of distance between the individual and their publicly presented letters created a level of access not traditionally allowed to women and other underprivileged citizens.⁹⁰ This Habermasian concept of the public sphere, though imperfect and rightfully criticized, reveals an important dimension to the liberal, public activities of Charles S. Johnson and his peers within the New Negro movement: Western, American liberalism within the twentieth century was the domain of privileged citizens, a domain of literature and criticism whose gates were sometimes circumvented or replaced entirely by those not allowed access. The actions and personhood embodied by Johnson and his peers had to be legible to and respected by privileged white readers (the traditional audience of the public sphere), and they also had to invite further participation by Black individuals at all levels of hegemonic legibility.

Scholars since have added many iterations to this theory of the public sphere. Michael Freeden opens his entry in the *Very Short Introduction* series on liberalism with a similar conclusion about the centrality of public activity to liberalism:

[E]ver since the term ‘liberales’ was coined in Spain two hundred years ago to represent a political party, liberalism has been positioned squarely on the public stage: as a rallying cry for individuals desiring space to be free from unjustifiable limitations, and as a set of fundamental institutional arrangements meant to legitimate and civilize the practices of politics.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 51-2.

⁹⁰ Habermas writes that “[w]omen and dependents were factually and legally excluded from the political public sphere, whereas female readers as well as apprentices and servants often took a more active part in the literary public sphere than the owners of private property and family heads themselves.” Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 56.

⁹¹ Michael Freeden. *Liberalism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2015, 1.

Liberalism cannot exist without the fuel that is public participation, witnessable presentation of opinions and criticisms. Similarly, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has written two monographs tackling this public-private dichotomy in transatlantic culture. Her first, *The Gender of Freedom* (2004), introduces Dillon's argument that the private work of women is "crucial to the structure and meaning of [public] liberalism," and that this work largely goes unnoticed, *especially* in the public sphere.⁹² Although the public is given preference in the liberal sphere and its world of letters, Dillon in *The Gender of Freedom* promotes the prerequisite nature of private digestion and the cultivation of interiority to the development of public opinion and presentation-of-self, adding a necessary layer to our understanding of liberal public activity: just as these public acts of discussion and criticism are "central" to liberalism, private preparation and the veritable creation of the public self are central to liberalism, for without this cultivation and self-creation, the public subject would have no personhood to portray, perform, embody. As such, the acts of reading, diary-keeping, and deliberation done by twentieth-century Black Americans connected to the New Negro movement can read as liberal activity – and the intellectuals of the New Negro movement intended for this relationship to be legible, relying on liberalism for authority. In her second monograph, *New World Drama* (2014), Dillon observes the historical practice of eighteenth-century English-speaking, transatlantic audiences going to the theatre not simply to see but to be seen – "rather, they sought to display and represent themselves *in* public and represent themselves *as* a public."⁹³ She defines this performative commonality, fittingly, as the *performative commons*. Theatre audiences of the early-modern period and beyond, Dillon writes,

⁹² Elizabeth Maddock Dillon. *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004, 3.

⁹³ Elizabeth Maddock Dillon. *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649-1849*. New Americanists. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, 5.

embraced rising popular sovereignty and the concept of the *commons* to perform their collective opinion in the theatres and playing spaces of their eras. Dillon's narrative of the historical development of the public in the West, like Habermas's, suggests the same centrality of public activity (and the private preparation preceding it) to the liberal paradigm; and her scholarship continues beyond Habermas to promote the power of *a* public, a performative commons. In keeping with the Enlightenment thinking of Locke, Hobbes, and Milton, contemporary scholars such as Dillon, Freedon, and Habermas before them acknowledge consent of the people as necessary to any liberal government or system.

However, both liberalism and the notion of a public (especially Habermas's narrative for its development) have been rightfully criticized for their hegemonic tendencies, a reliance on property, capital, literacy, leisure – inequitable aporias inherent in the liberal model. Charles S. Johnson and his peers within the New Negro movement certainly engaged in their own brand of criticism (case studies for the remainder of this chapter), and these sentiments resemble more contemporary, postcolonial evaluations, effectively placing Johnson and his circle as important links in the development of theory recognizable today. Postmodern scholarship began to reevaluate and reconsider Habermas's notion of the public sphere in the early 1990s, most famously through the work of Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner. Fraser's seminal essay, "Rethinking the Public Sphere" first appeared in *Social Text*, volume 8, number 3, in 1990 and was promptly reprinted in Craig Calhoun's edited collection, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, in 1992. Fraser begins her essay by first acknowledging the undeniable usefulness of Habermas's concept of the public sphere and the dimensions of its activity:

It designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive

interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state... it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling. This, this concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory.⁹⁴

Fraser, like Charles S. Johnson before her and those who have heard her call for criticism since, understood (and continues to understand) the power of the public sphere – it is the platform of open discourse, it creates and informs popular opinion, and it allows for individuals to politically participate without official title or position. However, Fraser spends the remainder of her seminal essay interrogating the shortcomings of Habermas's theory. She highlights how then-recent work by Joan Landes, Geoff Eley, and Mary Ryan highlights the inequities of Habermas's model: French Republicanism actively oppressed salon culture which was decidedly more welcoming to women; French, English, and German governments (and their respective public spheres) explicitly excluded along lines of class and gender; and American women and citizens of color were forced to construct alternate routes to public activity.⁹⁵ Fraser was the first to combine contemporary scholarship into the narrative of "publics" and "counterpublics,"⁹⁶ especially along lines of gender, and scholars since have continued to criticize Western, specifically American, notions of liberalism along racial intersections.

⁹⁴ Nancy Fraser. "Rethinking the Public Sphere." *Social Text*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1990, pp. 56-80, at 57.

⁹⁵ Fraser references *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (1988) by Joan Landes; "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures" (1987) by Geoff Eley; and *Women in Public* (1990) by Mary P Ryan, respectively.

⁹⁶ I borrow here all the intricacies of Nancy Fraser's conception of the term: "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs." Nancy Fraser. "Rethinking the Public Sphere." *Social Text*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1990, pp. 56-80, at 67.

Michael Warner's essay-cum-edited-collection, *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), continued to conceptualize the public sphere and its implications. Notably, Warner interrogated the praxis of public activity:

The discourse of a public is a linguistic form from which the social conditions of its own possibility are in large part derived. The magic by which discourse conjures a public into being, however, remains imperfect because of how much it must presuppose. And because many of the defining elements in the self-understanding of publics are to some extent always contradicted by practice, the sorcerer must continually cast spells against the darkness.⁹⁷

Here, Warner emphasizes what many scholars since Fraser had come to realize: the ideals of the public sphere are all-too-often “contradicted” by the realities of its practice. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's scholarship highlights the public's prerequisite private preparation (which inequitably allowed men greater public access than women because of the gendered perception of “public” and “private” domains, because women were expected to provide private support which facilitated male public activity). Similarly, like Nancy Fraser before him, Houston Baker Jr challenges Habermas's idealized, impossible heterogenous public, especially for its reliance on privileged prerequisites such as property and literacy – inequities that gatekept public activity along racial intersections. In concluding the analysis of his lens, before applying it to Martin Luther King Jr's treatment by (largely white) audiences, Baker decries these truths, questioning “how can [B]lack Americans, who like many others have traditionally been excluded from these domains of modernity, endorse Habermas's beautiful idea?”⁹⁸ Yet only two paragraphs later, Baker Jr borrows Habermas's language and concedes that many Black Americans are “attracted to” Habermas's idealized and, again, impossible “‘better time’ of reason,” despite their

⁹⁷ Michael Warner. “Publics and Counterpublics.” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 49-90, at 75.

⁹⁸ Houston A. Baker. “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere.” *Public Culture*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1994, pp. 3–33, at 9.

awareness of its history and hegemonies, because “[t]hey are drawn to the possibilities of structurally and affectively transforming the founding notion of the bourgeois public sphere into an expressive and empowering self-fashioning.”⁹⁹ Because the liberal world had failed them in its promises of liberty and representation, Black Americans (and those subaltern populations otherwise not afforded access), Baker Jr writes, have been drawn to the “Platonic” ideal for that liberal world as a tool for changing the faulty world in which they currently reside and counterpublicly partake. Baker Jr, alongside his fellow authors from volume seven, number one of *Public Culture* (1988), subtitled “The Black Public Sphere,” introduce the notion and defining characteristics of this “Black public sphere.” The editors of the volume place modernism at the center of the Black public sphere’s foundation and, most notably, they write that the “Black public sphere puts engagement, competition and exchange in the place of resistance, and uses performativity to capture audiences, Black and White, for things fashioned through Black experience.”¹⁰⁰ In responding to modernism and its shortcomings, Black American writers of the early twentieth century promoted and performed an idealized liberal exchange of information among a Black populace, perhaps resembling the Habermasian print public, but solidly founded in its (subaltern) counterpublic nature.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Houston A. Baker. “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere,” 9.

¹⁰⁰ Arjun Appadurai, et al. “Editorial Comment: On Thinking the Black Public Sphere.” *Public Culture*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1994, pp. xi-xiv, at xii.

¹⁰¹ Additionally, Baker Jr’s scholarship resonates with what others have written since on the citizen-making of Black print publics. In 2013, George Hutchinson and John K. Young edited the collection *Publishing Blackness*, which “responds to recent trends in both textual and African Americanist scholarship, with the hopes of relocating this emerging dialogue away from the margins of each field.” Because the Black public sphere is founded in challenging the white dominance of print production and the inequities of (print) public access, Hutchinson and Young write, scholarship on it has the ability (and arguably the duty) to shift academia powerfully in new directions. Scholars since have

In an unpublished speech delivered to the Southern Conference of Human Welfare (November 20-23, 1938), Johnson defines and historicizes the concept of liberalism, triangulating his position within the paradigm.¹⁰² Johnson himself acknowledges the winding history and amorphous definition of liberalism this chapter has outlined in brief: Liberalism (especially in the South), Johnson writes, is a “curiously mixed body,” “an aggregate of specific liberal views, some of which are mutually contradictory.”¹⁰³ Liberalism is both a set of values (and the aporias therein) and the set of individuals who embrace it, it is both an ideal and the practice of these ideals. At times, those ideals and individuals can conflict one another. For instance, Johnson writes that:

In the South it is a form of liberalism, for example, to ignore the romantic tradition and face realistically the existence of a vast and backward peasantry... Similarly, it is a form of southern liberalism to advocate economic independence of the financial North and East, but not the same type that recognizes the necessity for wiping out racial differentials in industry and education.¹⁰⁴

taken up the call. In his aptly titled monograph, Eric Gardner unpacks the historical influence of *The Christian Recorder* (1852-) as representative of many such “unbound” periodicals, which proliferated among Black audiences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but leave little comparative archival footprint – such missing pieces of history, Gardner rightly argues, deserve more attention. Edlie Wong, too, offers a deeply inspirational evaluation of Pauline Hopkins’s (1859-1930) work on small twentieth-century Black magazines in her essay for *American Literary History* 32.4. These authors, like Baker Jr before them, offer compelling evidence for the rich history of Black print discourse which engages publication in order to challenge its whiteness and to define new paragons of Blackness. George Hutchinson, et al. “Introduction.” *Publishing Blackness Textual Constructions of Race since 1850*. University of Michigan Press, 2013, 1-17, at 4; Eric Gardner. *Black Print Unbound: the Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2015; and Edlie Wong. “An Unexpected Direction: Pauline Hopkins, S. E. F. C. C. Hamedoe, and ‘The Dark Races of the Twentieth Century’.” *American Literary History*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2020, pp. 723–754.

¹⁰² Charles S. Johnson. “Liberalism” (1938). Box 165, folder 9. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

¹⁰³ Charles S. Johnson. “Liberalism,” 1.

¹⁰⁴ Charles S. Johnson. “Liberalism,” 2.

American liberalism and liberals defined themselves by their commitment to “wiping out racial differentials in industry and education,” but many liberals (especially in the South), Johnson says, held beliefs or practiced values which inherently contradicted these tenets of liberalism. In his eight-page speech, Johnson clearly historicizes both (American) liberal practice and his place within the tradition as a Southern liberal. He also offers a working definition for liberalism: “If liberalism means anything at all,” Johnson writes, “it implies a willingness to subordinate personal prejudices and relax traditional sanctions where necessary in the interest of constructive social change.”¹⁰⁵ We can see from his definition that liberalism has evolved between the Enlightenment and Johnson’s twentieth-century application. Liberalism, to Johnson, emphasized collectivism to ultimately benefit the individual and ensure their equal (or equitable) ability to liberally self-actualize. Johnson’s language here resembles Locke’s referenced earlier in this chapter: civil society can only exist wherever “any number of men are so united into one society, as to quit every one his executive power of the law of nature, and to resign it to the public.”¹⁰⁶ Liberalism, Johnson emphasizes, somewhat ironically requires restraints to individual liberty, willingly offered, to ensure equitable public access – the requisite engine of liberalism.

Ultimately, Johnson charges:

If [Black Americans] are to be most effective in the new strategy [to reduce the inequities within industry and education] it will be necessary for more of them to be able to speak with knowledge and authority on issues other than the race problem. For they can never be presumed to speak wisely, or other than as special wards seeking group protection, unless they are known to be acquainted with the total structures of southern life and the confusing inter-relationship of all of its problems.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Charles S. Johnson. “Liberalism,” 1.

¹⁰⁶ John Locke. *Second Treatise of Government*, 1690, Section 89.

¹⁰⁷ Charles S. Johnson. “Liberalism,” 8.

This, then, is Johnson's personal prescription for individual self-actualization, his plan to employ liberal(-sentimentalism), encapsulated.¹⁰⁸ Supplementing (or rather facilitating) the change in white opinion required to ensure increased liberal public access for Black and other non-white Americans, Black Americans, to Johnson, should then have modeled ideal, informed citizenship and the ability to "speak wisely," to present oneself knowledgeably in the public sphere.

Invoking Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's aforementioned scholarship, this is the private preparation required for public representation, the digestion of cultural and scientific information before one publicly demonstrates and defends their position on the digested material. What Johnson models here is the cultivation of Black Americans' interiority, white-legible metatextual self-actualization by Black Americans to prepare themselves for public practice.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ As an additional resource, Matthew William Dunne's "Next Steps: Charles S. Johnson and Southern Liberalism" (1998) offers the most exhaustive examination of Johnson's archival conclusions on the topic. Matthew William Dunne. "Next Steps: Charles S. Johnson and Southern Liberalism." *The Journal of Negro History* 83, no. 1 (1998): 1–34.

¹⁰⁹ Despite the sentimental overtones implied by the concept of interiority, this shift can be considered Johnson's departure from (most of) sentimentalism and his commitment to more classically liberal values. Whereas sentimentalism was used by abolitionists to argue for the humanity of Black individuals by virtue of their suffering (and base ability to suffer), Johnson appealed to older, Enlightenment tenets: he argued Black Americans deserved public access and proper representation *because of their equal ability to reason*. For more on Black Americans' cultivation of their interiority, see Kevin Quashie's *The Sovereignty of Quiet* (2012), in which he agrees the "interior could be understood as the source of human action" and argues that Black Americans tapped into this internal sovereignty and cultivated their interiority specifically to recapture the internal sovereignty which was stolen through the creation of what Du Bois calls "double consciousness." Quashie writes that, because Black Americans are forced, as Du Bois writes, to constantly see themselves through the eyes of the dominant class (to which they can never measure up in subjective eyes), Black American interiority has been "under the command of rejection that comes from the outside." Black Americans occupying and reclaiming this interiority was an act of self-creation and advocacy. Kevin Quashie. *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*. The Sovereignty of Quiet. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2012, 8, 13.

Johnson's individual conclusions on liberalism above and his embrace of interiority here importantly bridge his relationship between liberalism and sentimentalism – one cultural branch of liberalism famously prevalent in the literature of (early) eighteenth-century England.¹¹⁰ I will detail the form's history and introduce the scholarship on the subject, as I did with liberalism above, but Johnson here proverbially begs us to address the schism between liberalism and sentimentalism his "Liberalism" article calls to our attention. Crucially, this schism also highlights the tactical separation between Johnson and *Opportunity* and their immediate predecessors. Liberalism's emphasis on individual rights and autonomy inherently conflicts (at their boundaries) with the limits of socialized life and *its* emphasis on the greater good. In liberal terms, this is the innate conflict between positive (essentially individual) and negative (essentially public) rights.¹¹¹ Liberal philosophers and scholars have attempted to reconcile this

¹¹⁰ In *Hard Facts*, Philip Fisher foundationally writes:

[F]rom roughly 1740 to 1860 sentimentality was a crucial tactic of politically radical representation throughout western culture. Until it was replaced by the strategies of literary naturalism, class struggle, anger, and counterforce in the last third of the 19th century, the liberal humanism of sentimentality was the primary radical methodology within culture.

Sentimentalism, in its earliest iterations, was used to radically apply liberal values to individuals and populations overlooked or inequitably treated under liberal systems. American authors claimed this sentimentality during the abolitionist movement, and some members of the New Negro movement even appropriated this sentimental affectivity to sway their audiences. The New Negro movement's specific relationship to sentimentalism is deciphered in greater detail in the following section. Philip Fisher. *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, 92.

¹¹¹ The *Encyclopedia of Human Rights in the United States* defines "positive" and "negative" rights through the following analogy:

An example of a human right which can be both positive and negative is freedom of expression. The positive aspect of this right says, "I have the right to say x." That is a positive right to say something. The negative aspect of that right is the right not to have to express something: "I have a right not to reply to that question." [...] Positive rights give a person freedom to do something. [...] Some rights are considered negative, either in allowing a person not to have to do something, or in prohibiting the state from doing something to someone...

definitive duplicity since John Locke himself; and sentimentalism, as a style and philosophy and paradigm for personal practice, was designed to render these feuding philosophies finally compatible. Necessarily continuing the scholarship of Philip Fisher, who seminally noted sentimentalism's liberal intentions in the 1980s, Margaret Cohen highlights the schism between liberalism's private and negative values and sentimentalism's designs to resolve the aporia. In her article "Sentimental Communities," Cohen argues sentimentalism created what Benedict Anderson would famously label an "imagined community" in its Victorian readers. She confirms these contradictions inherent in the liberal paradigm and explains that, in "sentimental suffering, the protagonist painfully plays out the practical ramifications of these contradictions."¹¹² In sentimentalism, Cohen argues, is the answer to the dilemma: "In the imagined communities of sentimentality, individuals may exercise their own freedom without impinging on the freedom of their fellows."¹¹³ Because sentimental novels stage "idealized instances of the liberal public sphere," they allow readers and writers to perform their judgment of particular social issues without any immediate impact which might impair the rights of others.¹¹⁴ Sentimentalism was used, very indirectly, to suggestively propose progressive changes in its audience's attitudes on certain social issues, most notably slavery; and sentimental standard-bearers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) are even connoted to have caused real change (or at

A "positive" right is the liberal insistence that an individual has the human privilege to do what is best for them or what they innately deserve by virtue of their humanity. A "negative" right is the *also* liberal affirmation that no positive right shall infringe upon the rights of other members of society. H. Victor Condé, and Charles F. Gelsinger. *Encyclopedia of Human Rights in the United States*. Amenia, NY: Grey House Publishing, 2017, 43.

¹¹² Margaret Cohen. "Sentimental Communities." *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel*, edited by Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever. Princeton University Press, 2009, 106-132, at 108.

¹¹³ Margaret Cohen. "Sentimental Communities," 114.

¹¹⁴ Margaret Cohen. "Sentimental Communities," 114.

least real conflicts). However, though Johnson's language identifies a similar schism within liberalism, the artists and intellectuals of the New Negro movement, Johnson himself included, had a newly modern tactic for manifesting the socio-political change they demanded.

As seen in his article on liberalism, Johnson advocated a much more practical (both individual and state-sanctioned) solution to the positive-negative duality within the liberal paradigm: "If liberalism means anything at all, it implies a willingness to subordinate personal prejudices and relax traditional sanctions where necessary in the interest of constructive social change."¹¹⁵ As dictated here and embodied in *Opportunity* (and its metatexts) as a whole, Johnson believed that individuals should relinquish their prejudices (and, implicitly, make liberal-sentimental, social sacrifices) in the name of "constructive social change" – and that governments ought to support this. In the instance of the New Negro movement, this constructive social change was increased public access and opportunities for artistic self-representation for Black Americans. Applying this rule to the public sphere, equitable (if not *overly* equitable) space must be made for Black expression. Individual readers should seek such cultural input and artists, intellectuals and (most importantly) publishers should provide such pieces of culture. Continuing, governments *should* ensure Black Americans are in proper position to take advantage of these opportunities, by ensuring all citizens, *especially* nonwhite citizens, have equally sufficient access to liberal participation's prerequisites. Johnson and his peers embraced the ability of sentimental novels and especially their theatrical adaptations to make small-scale change in American homes, churches, and (eventually) halls of government, but these artists, intellectuals, *sociologists* worked to influence state and federal actions directly. Johnson's emphasis on textual sources of change, coupled with his straightforward and practical

¹¹⁵ Charles S. Johnson. "Liberalism," 1.

professionally lobbying, fully embraced liberal values and practice and more-measuredly used sentimental tactics to proverbially pave the way for future generations of Black American artistic expression and public participation.

Sentimentalism, a set of personal and artistic values originating in eighteenth century English literature and liberal circles, “prioritizes feeling” as a means of knowing or understanding, especially through the conscious acknowledgement, the co-feeling, of the suffering of others.¹¹⁶ It is the artistic expression of decidedly liberal ideals.¹¹⁷ What’s more, sentimentalism was coopted to spread liberal values. Ralph Normand Schmidt writes in his 1975 dissertation on sentimentalism’s origins within eighteenth century British liberalism:

The eighteenth-century sentimental view of life branches off from Augustan elitism, when common meant simply “non-private,” and begins to take on a sense of active public commitment to the Glorious Revolutionary Settlement... Sentimentalism provided the unconscious social-psychological cohesion to glue the more conscious attitudes and activities of many men together in order to form a cultural whole [emphasis Schmidt’s].¹¹⁸

In his analysis of Oliver Goldsmith’s (1728-1774) famous *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) and less-famous *The Good-Natur’d Man* (1768), Schmidt details how sentimentalism was appropriated to spread a “cohesion” within the “attitudes and activities” of the many increasingly-empowered individuals after the Glorious Revolution, one of the most historically

¹¹⁶ Joyce Warren. “Sentimentalism.” *American History Through Literature 1820-1870* 3 (2006): 1059-1065, at 1059.

¹¹⁷ In addition to the scholars referenced in footnote 2, sentimentalism is associated with liberalism via the relationship of their canonical progenitors: Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and John Locke, respectively. Shaftesbury was a student of Locke’s, and the literature of both promote recognizably liberal ideals and practices.

¹¹⁸ Ralph Normand Schmidt. *Uncommon Common Sense: An Intellectual History and Literary Study of Sentimentalism, Oliver Goldsmith and “She Stoops to Conquer” Within the Original British Liberalism of the Third Quarter of the Eighteenth Century*, Dissertation, 1975, 273.

liberal moments in the development of the English public.¹¹⁹ This was a type of liberalism that would become especially useful in nineteenth-century America. Sentimentalism, like liberalism, also has a winding history. It is perhaps most immediately associated with the English Sentimental novel of the eighteenth century (especially those by Samuel Richardson (1689-176))¹²⁰ and accompanying Augustan literature, such as the “comedy of manners” plays Goldsmith revived.¹²¹ The concept, its values, and its application were criticized, redefined, and reembodyed in later nineteenth-century literature by authors such as Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë.¹²² Reclaiming the virtue from “silent” female characters and women, interiority came to

¹¹⁹ After suspending the English and Scottish Parliaments in 1685, and spurred especially by the anti-Catholic riots of 1688 after James’s *Declaration for Liberty of Conscience* (1687) and the subsequent trial of seven bishops from the Church of England, James II (1633-1701) was deposed and replaced by William III (1650-1702) and Mary II (1662-1694) of Orange. The *Bill of Rights* (1689) which crowned the pair King and Queen of England famously enacted the legal powers of the English public and commons.

¹²⁰ Geoffrey Sill’s entry in the *Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel* offers an excellent introductory timeline for the development of the eighteenth-century English Sentimental novel. Geoffrey Sill. “Developments in Sentimental Fiction.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, edited by Alan Downie. Oxford University Press, 2016, 426-439.

¹²¹ Though more associated with the “comedy of manners” style in theatre history, Sentimentalism left a deep mark on Goldsmith’s work, as detailed in Schmidt’s dissertation. For instance: “The Kate Hardcastle who stoops [in *She Stoops to Conquer*],” Schmidt concludes, “lives in the highest possible realm of the sentimental universe.” Ralph Normand Schmidt. *Uncommon Common Sense*, 258.

¹²² Hina Nazar argues against the “anti-sentimentalist” label canonically applied to Austen in seminal studies by Ian Watts (*The Rise of the Novel* (1957)) and Marilyn Butler (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975)) in *Enlightened Sentiments* (2012). Nazar writes: I take sentimentalism itself to pivot around the capacious motif of judgment rather than the narrower one of sensibility. Judgment is a key concern in all of Austen’s six major novels, in which young women learn to become increasingly judicious observers of their own and other people’s actions and motives. Refuting the definition of “anti-sentimentalist” Watts and Butler apply, Nazar argues that Austen founds her work on the “motif of judgment,” which has a sentimental genealogy and is the center of its own “sentimentalist discourses.” See Hina Nazar. *Enlightened Sentiments: Judgment and Autonomy in the Age of Sensibility*. 1st ed. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012, 119 and 121. Other scholars have also argued for Austen’s avowal of sentimentalist tropes or paradigms, despite her canonically critical

be exemplified in the nineteenth century by well-read women with dexterous fingers (for writing and playing music, and later for textile production) and actively noble sensibilities.

In the United States, sentimentalism is traditionally associated with mid-nineteenth-century literature, especially that with abolitionist intent (most famously Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851) or that which promoted early feminist causes.¹²³ The form was employed, predominantly by women authors, often to educate or to "serve social justice."¹²⁴ Mary G De Jong writes in her introduction to *Sentimentalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (2013) that "for all its slipperiness as a discourse of compassion and reform, sentimentality did work effectively to bring about much progressive social change, especially for middle-class white women."¹²⁵ She continues:

Drawing on sentimentality's alliance with domestic ideology – in particular, the latter's emphasis on women's virtue and their capacity to feel – female reformers like [Lydia Maria] Child [(1802-1880)] and Stowe claimed their right to help alleviate human suffering in society at large. For them and other reform-minded women, domesticity's privileging of women's putative natural morality and piety validated their participation, if only by writing, in the public sphere. Addressing this sphere, these women called for the rehabilitation of prostitutes, besieged Congress over Cherokee removal, and advocated for despised minorities... Unable to dictate public policy, women, through their gift for emotional suasion, influenced it, working at the local level for their own benevolent concerns but

relationship to the style. See Amy J. Pawl. "Fanny Price and the Sentimental Genealogy of Mansfield Park." *Eighteenth-century Fiction* 16, no. 2 (2004): 287-315; Anna Dodson Saikin. "Revising Sympathetic Silence in Jane Austen's Domestic Fiction." *Silence, Sentimentalism, and the British Romantic Novel, 1789-1824*, 2015, 133-182; and Valerie Purton. *Dickens and the Sentimental Tradition*. London: NBN International, 2012, 64.

¹²³ Joyce Warren. "Sentimentalism," 1060-2.

¹²⁴ Mary G. De Jong. "Introduction." *Sentimentalism in Nineteenth-century America Literary and Cultural Practices*, edited by Mary G. De Jong and Paula Bernat Bennett. Madison: Lanham, Md.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Co-published with The Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Group, 2013, 8-18, at 9.

¹²⁵ Mary G. De Jong. "Introduction," 10.

also, as Sarah Josepha Hale [(1788-1879)] urged, to meet the nation's needs as well.¹²⁶

De Jong here emphasizes both the racialized, gendered nature of mid-nineteenth-century American sentimentalist activity and the efficacy of this action. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, originally written as a serial novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1851 and adapted to the stage famously by George Aiken the following year (after the novel's full publication, in 1852), was the most popular play in nineteenth-century America: during an era of rampant anti-theatricalism, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was being played in church basements. The effect of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the American psyche has been the subject of a one-hundred-and-fifty-year conversation (which in itself ought to suggest the ultimate effect); certainly though, even with its hegemonies, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* influenced nineteenth-century American's understandings of race, Black Americans, and the proverbial "other." This abolitionist power, forever etched onto both the American psyche and American theatre history, was appropriated in the twentieth century by (Black) American women who sought to employ a sentimental modernism to dissuade the practice of lynching, a particularly Reconstructionist "service to society." Anti-lynching plays, such as *Rachel* and *Mine Eyes Have Seen* (which will be discussed shortly), as well as the unpublished *Scion* (c. 1925) (which will be discussed in chapter 3), deeply influenced the artists of the New Negro movement and, as such, the sentimentalist paradigm of Charles S. Johnson and his peers.

Contemporary scholarship on the history of sentimentalism as a style and set of values began in 1977 with the publication of Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Mary G. De Jong. "Introduction," 10.

¹²⁷ Douglas's seminal monograph begins with a chapter on "The Meaning of Little Eva." Thus is the power, potency, and lasting impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Douglas is infamous today for her searing, critical take on sentimentalism's impact on American culture, which opens, in part, by equating "Little Eva" from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with consumerism.¹²⁸ Douglas continues her introduction by belittling the women-and-children-focused work of the Victorian era, championing instead Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), Herman Melville (1819-1891), and Walt Whitman (1819-1892), who "wrote about men engaged in economically and ecologically significant activities."¹²⁹ Douglas was herself engaged in a line of criticism ongoing since shortly after the rise of sentimentalism itself.¹³⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), who happens to feature in Douglas's list of commendable nineteenth-century authors, famously raved in a letter to his publisher in 1855,

America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed¹³¹

Hawthorne's words here more colorfully capture the distinction between "elite and mass cultures" Douglas highlights in her critique. Sentimentalism was largely reviled by critics (yet still popular) throughout the late nineteenth century, and its influences can be seen in early-

¹²⁸ Ann Douglas. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977, 4-5.

¹²⁹ Ann Douglas. *The Feminization of American Culture*, 6.

¹³⁰ Outside Hawthorne, there are many notable criticisms of sentimentalism, both historical and contemporary. Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) is cited by Luc Boltanski as "one of the principal sources for criticism of sentimentalism," an "ironical deconstruction of the sentimental novel" in his *Distant Suffering* (1999), itself a contemporary criticism of the genre. Luc Boltanski. "The Critique of Sentimentalism." In *Distant Suffering*. Cambridge University Press, 1999, 96–113, at 97. See also Herbert Ross Brown. *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1940; and Arthur M. Schlesinger. *The Vital Center; the Politics of Freedom*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1949.

¹³¹ This segment of Hawthorne's 1855 letter to William D Ticknor is published in John T. Frederick. "Hawthorne's 'Scribbling Women.'" *The New England Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (1975): 231–240, at 231.

twentieth-century art, as well (as demonstrated in the following section) until critical texts such as Douglas's became the standard in academic conversation.

However, a notable shift in academic *sentiment* began in the mid-1980s with the publication of Jane Tompkin's *Sensational Designs* (1985), which positioned itself as a direct attack on Douglas's pessimistic conclusions on sentimentalism's achievements. Several scholars, many feminist, began laying the foundation for a respectful academic analysis of sentimentalism. Lauren Berlant engaged *Uncle Tom's Cabin* position of sentimental authority in their reclamation piece, "Poor Eliza" (1998), in which they reread both the original play and the pageant version within *The King and I* (1949) to establish the bridging power of sentimentalism and sentimental characters/plots. Since, several texts have become seminal: Suzanne Clark's *Sentimental Modernism* (1991), Richard Brodhead's *Cultures of Letters* (1993); and other more contemporary investigations have proven especially inspirational for this project: Jennifer Williamson's *Twentieth-Century Sentimentalisms* (2013) and especially Lisa Mendelman's *Modern Sentimentalism* (2020). In all, sentimental scholarship since the mid-1980s has done invaluable work for scholarship such as mine, advocating for the meaningfulness of popular culture, women's emotions, and the ability of sentiment to make real change.

These histories of liberalism and sentimentalism resonate within the brand of personhood Charles S. Johnson promoted (and practiced) throughout his editorship of *Opportunity*. The liberal values of self-ownership and private property can be seen espoused in Johnson's own values and his prescriptions for personal practice. Notably, Johnson employed both paradigms specifically, and *only*, as needed for *Opportunity* and the New Negro movement. He understood that Black Americans held its prerequisite humanity and ability of reason and, as such, deserved liberal public access. Similarly, he understood that sentimentalism had historically been used

successfully to convince white readers and audiences to see this humanity; though it also connoted a certain anti-rationality that delimited his liberal endeavors – so he borrowed sentimentalism’s most liberal features (its metatextual acts) and left its melodramatic empathetic appeals. Because of his careful curation of both liberalism and sentimentalism, Johnson himself ought to be recognized as a notable theorist in the development of both concepts, and both concepts can be seen applied in Johnson’s paragon and paradigm for New Negro identity.

The Metatextual Acts of the New Negro Movement as a Tool for Self-Actualization on a Social Scale

1923

As another year is measured off we are conscious that there should accompany it a corresponding measure of progress. Each year in passing leaves a residuum of new difficulties and old ones yet unsettled. The weary struggle of the Negro population for status thru self-improvement and recognition, aided by their friends, goes on, however, marking we hope some advance in the right direction.

The season is an appropriate one for the inauguration of a new effort, inspired by the necessity as well as the desire to approach those new problems with an increased technique for dealing with them. Facing the new year with such hope as always inheres in the future, “Opportunity” greets its readers.¹³²

The opening editorial of the first issue of *Opportunity* (cited above) and the journal’s inaugural article, “Cooperation and Opportunity” by National Urban League Executive Secretary Eugene Kinckle Jones, place *Opportunity* alongside other Black American periodicals from the New Negro movement¹³³ as a prescriptive piece, reading material meant to inform a specific type of action in its readership. Johnson believed in the power of curated, “cultural” periodicals to

¹³² “Editorial.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 1 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 3.

¹³³ Alain Locke’s seminal *The New Negro* (1925) includes a dedication “to the younger generation” in its front matter, and the single-issue magazine *Fire!!* (1926) carried the similar subtitle: “Devoted to Younger Negro Artists.” Such dedications suggest the educational, prescriptive nature of these magazines – they were meant to be read and their materials practiced by its readership.

carry representations of Black American life to Black and white audiences, to inspire future acts of self-representation by Black Americans and to prime white Americans to treat such liberal public activity with welcoming respect. Johnson's tactic, the founding of *Opportunity* to create opportunity for Black artistic and intellectual self-representation, leaned upon the legitimacy of liberal-sentimental and Black American publication practices for centuries in order to bridge the expectations of white audiences with the demands of authentic Black American expression. In this section, I quote both Charles S. Johnson and Alain Locke, as well as contemporary scholarship, in order to centrally position acts of reading and writing at the heart of the New Negro movement. Specifically, Johnson and his peers argued these familiar liberal-sentimental practices would best ensure Black respect among white neighbors and lawmakers and ultimately ensure equitable public access for and participation by Black Americans. These practices are genealogically connected to generations of Black periodical publication – practiced notably by Frederick Douglass – which Johnson himself studied, praised, and upon which he built. In this section, I hope to detail the (sometimes conflicting) complications of New Negro identity and the ways in which Johnson and his peers embraced liberalism and moved on slightly from previous sentimental tropes, before capturing these tropes and Johnson's distance from them more practically in my analysis in the final section.

In his opening remarks at the helm of the newfound journal, Charles S. Johnson devotes his succinct entry to the “self-improvement and recognition” of his peers and indeed all Black Americans. Johnson also acknowledges the “friendly” support necessary for such an endeavor, promoting his personal interracial philosophy and his commitment to American liberalism as best-practice and best paradigm – though not without its own faults (as interrogated in part in this dissertation's introduction and with historical criticism detailed later in this chapter). Johnson

sought to interrogate and improve these faults in his pursuit to increase Black American activity in the liberal world-of-letters. Eugene Kinckle Jones (1885-1954), then Executive Secretary of the National Urban League and later presidential advisor on race relations to Franklin D. Roosevelt, supports this endeavor in christening *Opportunity* in its first article (relevant portions of which I have cited below):

The National Urban League for nearly twelve years has sought to merit a reputation as a doer of things worth while in the interest of the relations between the Negro and the white races in America. Its field work has in the main consisted of efforts to raise the standards of living among Negroes. Its slogan has been "Not Alms, but Opportunity." It has sought to make its contribution towards elevating the Negro in the social scale, the motive being to make it easier for the Negro to assimilate¹³⁴ the cultural advantages of American civilization and to aid more Negroes of capacity and talent to emerge from the mass of their fellows of less promise...

The Urban League feels that the Negro, as a group, must be brought up to a higher social plane so that he can accept his rightful place in society as his opportunities come...

In the past this service has been promoted and publicity on achievements has been secured in a desultory, hit-or-miss fashion. Experiences have been exchanged between communities through correspondence and an occasional conference where representatives of various organizations have met to exchange ideas. The first method – that of correspondence – is a slow process. The second, that of occasional conferences – is inadequate because only a very few representatives from each organization get the direct benefit... The League therefore has launched on a new venture which should have the whole-hearted support and encouragement of all white and colored people who are interested in the scientific treatment of "the problem" and who wish to see more "cooperation" between the races.¹³⁵

This first official treatise echoes Johnson's values and commitments. The National Urban League and *Opportunity* as its official organ devoted themselves to interracial communication

¹³⁴ Jones's reference to assimilation here may carry negative connotations today, but its usage here reinforces *Opportunity's* (and the New Negro movement's) commitment to legibly embodied liberal practice as tactic for claiming equal treatment under the law.

¹³⁵ Eugene Kinckle Jones. "Cooperation and Opportunity." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 1 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 4-5.

and understanding in hopes of “rais[ing] the standards of living” for Black Americans and “elevating” individuals and communities in hopes of ultimately ensuring that Black Americans have the opportunity to “accept [their] rightful place in society.” The notion of assimilation is explicit and implicit in these introductory texts as the goal of *Opportunity*, what both Jones and Johnson label “self-improvement” or the “bringing up” of Black Americans.

An unpublished essay by Johnson within his prolific archives at Fisk University crucially contextualizes this commentary. Johnson’s essay, “Social Assimilation Defined” (c. 1928),¹³⁶ is an eleven-page analysis of the historical social treatment of Black Americans after the abolition of slavery. In it, Johnson offers a three-part working definition for assimilation which captures his personal activist editorial practices in actionable terms. Johnson concludes that assimilation requires more than simply “blending in,” although apparent racial differences certainly can impede assimilation, he admits;¹³⁷ a citizen is truly “assimilated not merely when [they have] learned to use the language, customs, and institutions of [their] adopted country, but only when [they have] been able to make them in some more thoroughgoing way than mere use implies, his own.”¹³⁸ “Fundamentally,” Johnson continues, “assimilation takes place when, in the natural course, things come to have for the adopted peoples the same meanings that they have for the native population... [P]eoples are, for practical purposes, assimilated not merely when they use the same language, but when, in regard to matters of common concern, they are in the same

¹³⁶ The essay is undated, but in it, Johnson references both W. H. R. Rivers’s *The History of Melanesian Society* (1914) and Bronisław Malinowski’s “The Life of Culture” (1926). Johnson references “The Life of Culture” as a “recent discussion.” Charles S. Johnson. “Social Assimilation Defined” (1928). Box 173, folder 25. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

¹³⁷ Johnson writes that “It is notorious that... immigrant peoples who bear a distinctive racial mark do not easily mix with the native populations.” Charles S. Johnson. “Social Assimilation Defined” (1928), 4.

¹³⁸ Charles S. Johnson. “Social Assimilation Defined” (1928), 9.

universe of discourse.”¹³⁹ Assimilation is more than mere fluency or literacy; discourse must be universally open, and the language of that discourse must “have the same meanings” for all people involved. Extrapolated further, the *act* of discourse must carry the same meaning for all citizens: the stakes must be the same, the structures and practices of public engagement must be equally (or equitably) accessible to all members of the population, and the consequences of such public action must be similarly equal. “The ordinary test of such assimilation...,” Johnson concludes, “depends upon the ability of individuals to participate freely and without prejudice in the common life of the community and of the nation.”¹⁴⁰ True assimilation for Johnson was defined by the opportunity for equal participation in the life of one’s community and nation, regardless of one’s socio-political standing – and the true obstacle for this equity wasn’t Black literacy or capital, it was white opinion. Johnson believed journals such as *Opportunity* were the ideal tool in this quest for affecting white opinion.

Applying Johnson’s own definition of social assimilation to the opening charges of *Opportunity*, it becomes clear that the elevation of Black Americans relies more on the opening of white eyes than what Johnson labels “self-improvement” among Black communities. Although Johnson does recommend behavior by Black Americans which would be legible and respectable to white audiences, *Opportunity* (and especially the exemplary collection *Ebony and Topaz* (1927)) was created to celebrate the already-exceptional work and embodied experience of all Black Americans, already worthy of celebration – and to prove this worth to interracial audiences. *Opportunity* sought to bring due attention to this excellence, to encourage white Americans to witness the self-improvement that had already occurred among Black Americans

¹³⁹ Charles S. Johnson. “Social Assimilation Defined” (1928), 9.

¹⁴⁰ Charles S. Johnson. “Social Assimilation Defined” (1928), 11.

since emancipation and Reconstruction. This sentiment is captured in these earliest statements by and within the journal, which was founded, according to Jones, to facilitate the exchange of experience(s) “between communities.” The nonwhite artists and intellectuals of modern America were creating world-class literature, drama, and visual art and debating contemporary theories among themselves and in print; white Americans need only open their eyes to see it. Or, more appropriately for Johnson, Black Americans need only make these accomplishments more visible. Johnson, an accomplished reader and published sociologist, turned, in part, to print and monthly publications (what he called “magazines”) to increase visibility for his peers and Black Americans at-large, to facilitate the exchange between racial communities. This, then, was the project of *Opportunity*, to present Black American culture legibly and respectably for white audiences and to model methods of self-actualization and artistic self-expression for Black audiences.

Charles S. Johnson emphasizes the cultural capacity of periodicals such as *Opportunity* (“magazines”) in his essay, “The Rise of the Negro Magazine” (1929), published in *The Journal of Negro History*. After outlining the history and social impact of various Black-authored magazines (particularly in contrast to their contemporary newspapers), Johnson concludes:

Broadly considered, newspapers are expected to be informative, magazines cultural.... Mere literacy will not support a magazine, although it does more for a newspaper. A mellowed literacy is required for the appreciation and support of the Negro magazine.¹⁴¹

Unlike daily or weekly newspapers, monthly “magazines” require more than “mere literacy” of their audiences. The “mellowed literacy” that was required, was readership for liberal self-

¹⁴¹ Charles S. Johnson. “The Rise of the Negro Magazine.” *The Journal of Negro History* 13, no. 1, (1928): 7–21, at 21.

actualization: a desire to digest culture, rather than a simple need for gossip or information. A community's mass need for such information sustains more-frequent periodicals, but magazines, to Johnson, had a loftier endeavor: there's was the realm of making and changing culture and opinion – especially white opinion, in the name of Johnson's brand of assimilation discussed above. *Opportunity* created and shifted culture in its exemplification of Black (and white) art, publishing striking examples of American modernism captured across mediums. In addition to bolstering visibility, Johnson, as editor, increased the legibility of these exemplary pieces of culture. The magazine, the journal, was an understood means of expression, and the concept and practices of print culture were familiar to white readers. By collecting Black art, Black stories, Black *experience(s)* and presenting them in this familiar form, Johnson both brought these pieces of culture to a wider audience and made them more palatable for a specifically white subsection of its audience.

In the essay, Johnson grounds his publication practices at the helm of *Opportunity* within many generations of Black American print. Johnson traces *Opportunity's* lineage back to *Freedom Journal* (1827-1829), which he identifies as the first Black American periodical of any true substance, devoting only a small part of its pages to daily news, instead largely pamphleteering for the cause of abolition and delivering cultural entertainment to beleaguered readers.¹⁴² Johnson continues to draw ethos from touchstone publications such as *Voice of the Negro* (1904-1907) and *The Crisis* (1910-) and the dozens of other journals and magazines he references deeply or in passing. He also references Frederick Douglass, his newspapers (the *North Star* (1847-1851) and *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (1851-1859)), and the later *Douglass' Monthly* (1859-1863) which succeeded his daily publications. Before these periodicals, Douglass

¹⁴² Charles S. Johnson. "The Rise of the Negro Magazine," 7.

was brought into public life by William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879), American journalist and arguably the most famous abolitionist publisher – perhaps inequitably so – who “discovered” Douglass in 1841 in New Bedford, MA, after Douglass had moved to the city to escape slavery and employed him as an anti-abolition ambassador in Boston.¹⁴³ Garrison was the influential editor of *The Liberator* (1831-1865), the abolitionist journal for which Douglass wrote for years until he and Garrison publicly split in 1851.¹⁴⁴ Frederick Douglass was a staunchly liberal point of reference for Johnson and *Opportunity*, a figure to reference when truing the movement’s navigation and to invoke in claims of respectable legitimacy.¹⁴⁵ Johnson drew upon the successes of Douglass and other Black American publishers to continue carving out space in the American public sphere for the creative productions of nonwhite Americans; in doing so, he aimed to spark an acknowledgement of Black humanity in more and more white Americans. However, Johnson also delineated his work on *Opportunity* from these predecessors: *Opportunity* and especially *Ebony and Topaz* were meant for *creative* Black expression. Douglass and his peers had earned the proper humanity of Black Americans. Although they still did not have full political and

¹⁴³ Robert K. Wallace. “Finding His Voice on the Road, in the Lecture Hall, and in His Newspaper: Frederick Douglass in Cincinnati in 1852.” *New North Star* 1 (2019): 18–33, at 18.

¹⁴⁴ See Tyrone Tillery. “The Inevitability of the Douglass-Garrison Conflict.” *Phylon* 37, no. 2 (1976): 137-49; and Fred Guyette. “Garrison Versus Douglass on the Abolition of Slavery: An Ethics of Conviction Versus an Ethics of Responsibility.” *Max Weber Studies* 13, no. 2 (2013): 254-63.

¹⁴⁵ Nicholas Buccola has a monograph-length dissection of Frederick Douglass’s liberalism. In an address he delivered in St. Louis, MO, on January 13, 1873, Douglass argued slavery is “the greatest injury this side of death” because such is to “blot out [their] personality, degrade [their] manhood [or *personhood*].” Douglass valued and based his abolitionist arguments on this liberal ideal of self-ownership. Buccola also details how Douglass embraced liberal’s “core commitments” in chapter 3. Nicholas Buccola. *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In Pursuit of American Liberty*. The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In Pursuit of American Liberty. New York: NYU Press, 2012.

public access, Johnson and his peers felt it was time for the proper modernization of Black expression; as such, as editor he celebrated increasingly expressive representations of Black life.

Importantly, this ongoing act of promotion and transliteration applied and extended to all levels of Black American cultural creation. Nineteen months after founding *Opportunity*, Charles S. Johnson launched the “*Opportunity* Literary Prize Contest,” which “hope[d] to stimulate and encourage creative literary effort among” Black Americans.¹⁴⁶ The contest promised both publication and monetary prizes for its winners, and would go on to run for three consecutive years under Johnson’s leadership (ultimately ending in 1927 after Johnson noted the “success” of the program and the general “improvement” of that year’s submission over those before).¹⁴⁷ On a more cultural level, the contest hoped to spur the creation of plays and poetry and essays, stories which dramatized commendable Black American experiences for white audiences and reminded Black audiences of their own merit. This would aid in the assimilation process as Johnson understood it. In introducing the contest, Johnson wrote:

¹⁴⁶ Charles S. Johnson. “An Opportunity for Negro Writers.” *Opportunity* 2, no. 21 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 258.

¹⁴⁷ Johnson abruptly announced the cancellation of 1927’s contest in *Opportunity* 5, no. 21, writing that he wished to give more time and consideration to the entries than currently available and that he hoped to continue the contest in 1928. This never happened. However, Johnson took time to celebrate the success of the program and its entries, writing: “The *Opportunity* contests have aimed to stimulate not merely an interest in Negro life and in the work of the artists of the race, but work of a character which stands firmly and without apology along with that of any other race. The success of its prize entries is satisfying evidence that some of the hopes in this direction have materialized. And for the same reason that these contests to stir Negro writers to their best efforts and give aid in presenting this work to the world, were begun in a field theoretically open but practically barred, we feel it important that the years shall show development, both in better work and new voices, proportionate with the opportunities revealed.” Charles S. Johnson. “The *Opportunity* Contest.” *Opportunity* 5, no. 9 (1927, Klaus Reprint 1969): 254.

[The *Opportunity* Literary Contest] hopes to stimulate and encourage creative literary effort among Negroes; to locate and orient Negro writers of ability; to stimulate and encourage interest in the serious development of a body of literature about Negro life, drawing deeply upon these tremendously rich sources; to encourage the reading of literature both by Negro authors and about Negro life, not merely because they are Negro authors but because what they write is literature and because the literature is interesting; to foster a market for Negro writers and for literature by and about Negroes; to bring these writers into contact with the general world of letters to which they have been for the most part timid and articulate strangers; to stimulate and foster a type of writing by Negroes which shakes itself free of deliberate propaganda and protest.¹⁴⁸

Johnson sought to publish amateur materials in order to “bring these writers into contact with the general world of letters” that had previously overlooked them “because what they write is literature and because the literature is interesting.” In opening *Opportunity* to the masses, Johnson reassured all Black Americans that their stories are worth telling, that they have the ability to tell these stories with great artistry and conviction, and that white audiences should and truly *do* want to hear these stories. *Opportunity* as a whole worked to bring Black experiences to mainstream white audiences so that Black Americans could take their “rightful place in society,”¹⁴⁹ and the *Opportunity* Literary Prize Contests brought due attention and representation to select members of the most pedestrian levels of Black American life.¹⁵⁰

As demonstrated by its contests and its conviction to publish promising new voices, *Opportunity* was both a platform and a prescription, an outlet for Black expression *and* a model for that expression; and Johnson and his peers walked the metaphorical tight rope between

¹⁴⁸ Charles S. Johnson. “An Opportunity for Negro Writers.” *Opportunity* 2, no. 21 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 258.

¹⁴⁹ Eugene Kinckle Jones. “Cooperation and Opportunity,” 5.

¹⁵⁰ Of course, *Opportunity* couldn’t publish *all* its submissions, so (as suggested by its nature as a contest) a certain level of meritocracy applied. As such, I am especially proud to do what I can to give the unpublished plays from Johnson’s private collection the attention they inherently deserve, to continue the tenets of the New Negro movement in this small way. See chapter 3 and the appendix for my analysis of these plays and the scripts in their entirety.

authentic Blackness and tolerable difference. The pages of *Opportunity* and Charles S. Johnsons oeuvre hold implicit and explicit recommendations for the best-practices of Black American citizens near the beginning of the twentieth century, practices both legible to white observers *and* true to the practitioners lived experience. These best-practices are largely rooted in metatextual acts: self-actualization and curated self-representation through reading, writing, and the public digestion of cultural materials. Shawn Christian Anthony has devoted an entire book-length study to the reading practices of and central importance of print culture to the members of the New Negro movement. The subtitle of Anthony's introduction, borrowed from a 1919 entry in the Chicago *Half-Century* (1916-25), succinctly and plainly states it best: "The New Negro is Reading."¹⁵¹ Anthony references the anonymous entry, possibly written by editor Kathryn Williams-Irwin, to set a stage filled with an increasing number of Black readers, increasingly more aware and hungry for (Black) cultural capital – and to define the New Negro by texts and metatexts: the New Negro is, *by definition*, reading. Anthony and our unknown author paint a New Negro identity which is defined by its relationship to and reliance on print culture – troublingly, a print culture that has (and especially had) been dominated by white authors, hegemonies, and culture at-large. The dominant-culture roots of the acts of reading, writing, and public discussion that the New Negro movement engaged as tools for manifesting white respect and their increased public access have (and had) very real implications for the lived, embodied identity of these Black Americans (sometimes fatal implications dramatized by the plays analyzed in this chapter's final section). Despite this tension, members at all levels of the New

¹⁵¹ Shawn Anthony Christian. "Introduction: The New Negro is Reading." *The Harlem Renaissance and the Idea of a New Negro Reader*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2016, 1-15.

Negro movement believed that embodying (truly, occupying) these legible sensibilities, would serve them well in their pursuit of social self-actualization.

Doubly, this ideal New Negro paragon, the brand of citizenship promoted through many twentieth-century Black periodicals such as *Opportunity*, was a reader *and* a writer (or at least a critical conversationalist) with a public face. Anthony references Elizabeth McHenry's notion that those among the New Negro movement promoted critical analysis of cultural works, "whether orally or in writing," as necessary for nation-building.¹⁵² In all, Anthony stages a scene in which the Black journals of the New Negro movement, cultural agents shaping the Black intelligentsia to which they advertised, proliferated among a heterogenous early-twentieth-century African-American audience, promoting a subject who critically digests artistic and academic diets (reads) and responds publicly, ideally in a similarly interior manner (writes). Looking backwards, print culture may have been *the* defining core of New Negro identity; and Anthony's conclusion can be seen reflected in the New Negro movement's contemporaneous attempts to performatively define itself. Metatextual acts, those acts surrounding a book (buying, keeping, reading, talking about it), were central to New Negro identity because of their ability to bridge dominant white and fledgling liberal Black public participants. The New Negro paragon was a reader and a writer, a modernist who believed in the power of metatextual acts to improve oneself and change white opinion; and *Opportunity* was designed, like many Black periodicals before it, to serve as a model for these metatextual acts and an outlet for their practice. *Opportunity* defined, modeled, and embodied New Negro personhood – at least as Charles S. Johnson and his peers imagined it – and the journal, like the New Negro movement at-large, wanted its readers to act (metatextually) along specific, identarian lines.

¹⁵² Shawn Anthony Christian. "Introduction," 10.

Although Charles S. Johnson is central to this dissertation, it is perhaps impossible to argue anyone is more central to the concept of the “New Negro” and its practices of personhood than Alain Locke (1885-1954). As such, a tangential incorporation of Locke’s prescriptions for New Negro personhood bear consideration here. Beneficially, Locke’s writings (and scholarship on Locke) reify the centrality of metatextual acts to the New Negro movement and reinforce the benefits of their use as means of social change. Locke was one of the first Black American writers to take up Booker T. Washington’s term, the “New Negro,” and to begin to define and perform the identity in his metatextual acts of reading and writing, reinforcing the centrality of these values and practices to the New Negro paragon and paradigm. In particular, his anthology, *The New Negro* (1925), one of the earliest collections of exemplary scholarship and art from the era, is definitive (as its title may suggest). In the anthology’s opening essay, Locke champions “favorable” interracial activity, the “reopening” of intellectual conversation between Americans of all races, and, especially, “truer self-expression” and “constructive participation” by the New Negro – the type which undoes social segregation and defines a new modern American (uniquely by its Blackness, or at least the possibility that it *could* be Black, for the first time).¹⁵³ Here, Locke unifies an ongoing conversation into a sort of manifesto and most famously institutionalized the act of defining the New Negro in writing – although such acts and conversations had been published in periodicals and other texts for nearly one hundred years. Yet Locke, in his ubiquity, can serve as an ideal point-of-contact for our understanding.

Jeffrey Stewart opens the first section of the *Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance* (2007) with his essay “The New Negro as Citizen,” in which he contextualizes and

¹⁵³ Alain Locke. “The New Negro.” *The New Negro*. First Touchstone ed., Simon & Schuster, 1997, 30-40.

evaluates Locke's work defining the New Negro, specifically its print culture foundations.

Importantly, Stewart embraces the New Negro identity as something multi-faceted, a living, growing conversation with many voices – a conversation in which Locke's voice has been heard perhaps the loudest by historians. However, Stewart does acknowledge one commonality:

“Citizenship... for the Negro has never been a given, but rather an unprotected right to be seized again and again.”¹⁵⁴ This need for cultural engagement (“self-determination”) as citizen-maker is especially apparent in Locke's philosophy. Stewart writes that, “[f]or Locke, there were two New Negroes – the poor [B]lack masses changing the geography of American citizenship, and the young [B]lack writers reflecting that energy in literature” and that Locke “[linked] middle-class [B]lack writers to the agency of the [B]lack working class” in order to enact change.¹⁵⁵ In Locke's definition, New Negro identity had a dual nature: it was both the lived experience of poor, working-class Black Americans and the middle-class Black representations of this experience in literature. Amending Anthony's earlier definition of the New Negro as reader and writer somewhat, Locke here reminds us that the New Negro must first *live* before they can read and write and participate in print public culture. Of that participation specifically, Stewart writes that the metaphor of the melting pot, of “absorption into the mainstream” as Black best-practice, was “a part of the 1920s New Negro literature” – literature such as Claude McKay's poems “Mulatto” (1925) and “White House” (1922) which famously were not included in Locke's anthology.¹⁵⁶ Stewart unpacks this decision nicely, writing that Locke rejected the notion “that the Negro could only be whole by being allowed in to a form of Americanism that the Negro

¹⁵⁴ Jeffrey Stewart. “The New Negro as Citizen.” *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by George Hutchinson. Cambridge University Press, 2007, 13-27, at 15.

¹⁵⁵ Jeffrey Stewart “The New Negro as Citizen,” 15 and 16.

¹⁵⁶ Jeffrey Stewart. “The New Negro as Citizen,” 16.

knew already was corrupt,” seemingly embracing the perceived rising liberalism of the modernist moment.¹⁵⁷ In conclusion, Locke determines that:

What was revolutionary about the politics of the migrating [B]lack masses was that they had stopped trying to force their way into a South that did not want them. Instead, they had gone within themselves, and found within the [B]lack experience a folk culture, a sense of self-respect, and an independent vision of what they should do... Because political citizenship had failed African Americans, Locke and other New Negro intellectuals invented a cultural citizenship that promised a new kind of American identity defined by culture instead of politics.¹⁵⁸

Here we see yet another intriguing duality of New Negro identity as Locke and Johnson and their peers embraced it. While at once acknowledging the dominant hegemonies of print culture, history, and technology, the New Negro citizen also believed in the ability of print (texts and metatexts) to enact change and Black equity – just as that New Negro citizen had to be definitively Black while also exercising largely white-coded acts of public participation in a manner that also did not encourage white-washing through the simple act of “absorption into the mainstream.” New Negro identity was rife with complicated aporias – complications which will be discussed in greater length later in this chapter.

In all, as demonstrated by the writings of Johnson, Locke, and others within *Opportunity*, reading and writing were definitively central to the New Negro paragon and identity. The private act of reading and the materials digested could fuel the liberal (Black) subject; and the public act of writing or verbal discussion reified the definition of the ideal self, prescribed best-practices for self-actualization, and (ideally) promoted the New Negro cause among hesitant (possibly violent) white neighbors. Reading and writing were centrally important to the Harlem Renaissance – however, the connection of these activities to (white, dominant) sentimentalism and the

¹⁵⁷ Jeffrey Stewart. “The New Negro as Citizen,” 16.

¹⁵⁸ Jeffrey Stewart. “The New Negro as Citizen,” 16-17.

Enlightenment concept of interiority¹⁵⁹ (an eighteenth-century concept that preceded nineteenth-century psychological terms such as the *subconscious* and the *unconscious*, but referenced a similarly tappable – in this case cultivatable – internal human sense of self) had very real, sometimes life-threatening implications for Black readers and writers. The value of interiority and its cultivation was racialized as white, and the Black members of the New Negro movement were occupying these white-coded practices and concepts uninvited, sometimes dangerously.

Johnson himself embraced the values of interiority (if implicitly): he later reinforced the centrality of both reading *and* embodied action to New Negro identity in an unpublished speech given at Yale University on January 7, 1950, commemorating the opening of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection. The speech, entitled “Literature and the Practice of Living,” memorializes Johnson’s impact on the New Negro movement alongside Carl Van Vechten and

¹⁵⁹ Gillen D’Arcy Wood captures the complexities of sentimental interiority in his chapter, “Austen’s Accomplishment,” within *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*, which he reads as embodied both in Jane Austen’s personal practices *and* the themes/values of her literature. Wood writes that Austen’s literary disapproval of virtuosity (seen, for instance, in the character of Marianne Dashwood’s “anti-social,” “self-[absorbed]” pianism (in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)), notably contradicts her own prolific personal musical practices. Austen was an avid pianist, regularly playing for guests and owning nearly fifteen hundred pages of sheet music at the time of her death. Wood argues the pianoforte “fulfilled a range of roles” in the lives of early-nineteenth-century English gentry:

as an emblem of newly leisured statuses, a magnet for sociability organized around the performance of fashionable songs, and a lightning rod of subjective desires in which the paradox of bourgeois individualism – both market bound and “free” – was daily played out.

As Austen herself encapsulates: sentimental interiority was both public and private, emblematic of leisure status, “fashionable” by demand, and “free,” yet bound to the rules of capitalism and other foundational values. Complicating the demands for (upper-class) women’s sentimental self-actualization, such virtuosity was often attacked by powerful figures, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, who famously preferred intellectual and moral “virtues” over such trivial musical “accomplishments,” which proved relatively empty in substance and meaning compared to more liberal pursuits such as reading and writing. Gillen D’Arcy Wood. *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770-1840: Virtue and Virtuosity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 155 then 153.

other renowned figures, writers whose materials filled the new collection. In praising Johnson, Charles S. Johnson references Goethe's diary, in which he "[points] out that his life was as much worth studying as his work."¹⁶⁰ Johnson continues the quote:

The secret of creative living consists in relating the rough and tumble of our contact with the world outside ourselves to the work which our minds put in on this stuff of experience. The full value of experience is in seeing the significance of what has happened. Without this awareness we do not really live. Life lives us.¹⁶¹

Reflecting on one's contact with the world makes meaning of one's lived experience. The lives of Black Americans (and appraisals of life by Black Americans), Johnson writes separately, had "shifted" during and after the New Negro movement: race consciousness "[had] been transmuted into less race-conscious scholarship."¹⁶² Increasingly more Black Americans had gained and were continuing to gain a specific type of "race consciousness," an understanding of the racial inequities inherent in the American paradigm; and this criticism was making its way into increasingly more pedestrian circles. Through the higher-level awareness facilitated, in part, by journals such as *Opportunity*, larger numbers of Black Americans were participating liberally: reading and coming to understand the ways in which Black Americans were treated unequally socially and under the law, and later criticizing this publicly, in conversations and print. James Weldon Johnson, Johnson concludes, was exemplary "both in literature and action."¹⁶³ This call to lead a meaningful life centered around acts of reading and writing was foundational for the

¹⁶⁰ Charles S. Johnson. "Literature and the Practice of Living." This notion of Goethe's "life [being] as much worth studying as his work" and the true meaning of lived experience resonated with Johnson. He references this diary passage in another untitled, undated, unpublished writing on the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance. Charles S. Johnson. "[Negro Renaissance, Spirit of, n.d]." Box 168, folder 6. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

¹⁶¹ Charles S. Johnson. "Literature and the Practice of Living," 3.

¹⁶² Charles S. Johnson. "[Negro Renaissance, Spirit of, n.d.]," 1.

¹⁶³ Charles S. Johnson. "Literature and the Practice of Living," 6.

specific brand of citizenship and personhood Johnson prescribed. *Opportunity*, like *The Crisis* and *The New Negro*, publicized a New Negro paragon which read extensively, critically engaged those texts, and then embodied its response (both in writing and living). Charles S. Johnson, an editor *and* sociologist, promoted the practice of informed personal curation, a conscious “presentation of self.” *Opportunity* was both the platform and the guide for this act of self-representation, a vessel for carrying Black works into the mostly white world-of-letters and a tool that helped Black Americans ensure their continued access to this public sphere.

The Cultural Memory of the New Negro Movement

The metatextual acts of reading, writing, and self-representation in the public sphere and the cultural world of letters prescribed and embodied by Charles S. Johnson and his peers evoked the tenets and practices of liberal-sentimentalism *and* the recent collective memory of Black Americans: the cultural memory of the New Negro movement. As a final step in delineating the dimensions of (Johnson’s personal brand of) New Negro personhood, I will now detail the semiotics of sentimentalism (and their limits) within three cultural case studies: two anti-lynching plays originally printed within *The Crisis* (1910-) and an accompanying article from the magazine. These materials from *The Crisis* serve as immediate predecessors to the theatrical representation of the New Negro movement, especially that within *Opportunity*. In detailing the representations of sentimentalism within these plays and this article, I will demonstrate how previous iterations of personhood evoked liberal-sentimentalism in their definitions and proverbially set the stage for further representations within and surrounding *Opportunity* – representations which, again, employed liberal-sentimental tropes in the informed, curated manner Johnson and his peers prescribed by practicing metatextual acts while also criticizing (and hopefully fixing) their inequities.

During the act-one climax of *Rachel* by Angelina Weld Grimké (1880-1958), we learn that the titular character's father and older half-brother were lynched ten years prior; her mother, Mary, believes it her duty to tell her children the story and to annually incur them to remember their late, lynched relatives. In her striking narrative of the event and its catalysts, Mary reveals that her husband, Rachel's (unnamed) father, was an increasingly outspoken editor of a journal for (primarily) Black audiences – one of many such “Black journals”¹⁶⁴ of the early-twentieth century. At one point he was reasonably respected and mostly left alone by critical white audience-members – “he was too important to the community”¹⁶⁵ – until one evening when an innocent Black man from his neighborhood was lynched in the place of a white perpetrator. As Mary tells Rachel, she “never saw [her] father so wrought up over anything: he couldn't eat; he couldn't sleep; he brooded night and day over it;”¹⁶⁶ filled with frustration (and possibly rage), Rachel's father dutifully chose to publish a stern denunciation of the un-Christian act. Violently negative sentiment began to simmer in his otherwise passively critical white audience until, finally, Rachel's father published *another* “white-hot, searing”¹⁶⁷ arraignment. This pushed the local masses into a fury: that night, “some dozen masked men”¹⁶⁸ broke down the family's front door and eventually over-powered and seized Mary's husband during a bloody firefight; when George, Mary's seventeen-year-old son interfered, the crowd seized him as well. The two men were hatefully hanged on a nearby tree, their bodies left as an unwanted responsibility and a memento of her trauma. This moment introduces Rachel's climactic arc and the aporias of Black

¹⁶⁴ I use the term “Black journal” here to reference what Charles S. Johnson referred to as “Negro magazines” in “The Rise of the Negro Magazine”: periodicals with less frequency than a daily newspaper, which have a more “deliberate and cultural quality.” Charles S. Johnson. “The Rise of the Negro Magazine,” 8.

¹⁶⁵ Angelina Weld Grimké. *Rachel: a Play in Three Acts*. Cornhill Co., 1920, 24.

¹⁶⁶ Angelina Weld Grimké. *Rachel*, 24.

¹⁶⁷ Angelina Weld Grimké. *Rachel*, 25.

¹⁶⁸ Angelina Weld Grimké. *Rachel*, 25.

motherhood as Grimké saw them – and it introduces me, as a white reader, writer, and spectator, to the realities of early-twentieth-century Black readership, editorship/authorship, and spectatorship: the perhaps-fatal consequences of such public actions. Defining this experience, these stakes, is a necessary first step for my inquiry. Therefore, in this section I will reference primary sources and contemporary scholarship in order to lay bare some of the implications of reading and writing (and, to a lesser extent, seeing) for Black Americans during the early-twentieth century and eventually the New Negro movement. I will undertake an investigation of three case studies, Grimké’s *Rachel* alongside Alice Dunbar Nelson’s *Mine Eyes Have Seen* and the very next issue of its host publication, *The Crisis* volume sixteen, number one (1918). These publications, as printed responses to lynching (and/or the pervading fear of such retaliation), engage contemporaneous artistic trends (realism, sentimentalism, modernism) to paint a picture of Black readership and authorship defined by liberalism which constantly interrogated its foundation – as the private and public acts that informed such liberalism were the sites of apparent inequity and very real danger. Reading and writing were centrally important to the Harlem Renaissance – however, as we see in *Rachel*, engaging in such necessary acts had been inherently dangerous for the Black countercultural intellectual historically and continued to be at the turn of the twentieth century.

As such, the realities of readership for those among the New Negro movement must include these threatening truths. In opening her introductory entry to the seminal collection on plays on lynching, *Strange Fruit* (1998), editor Kathy A Perkins quotes a nightmarish 1918 news entry about the dual-lunching of an innocent Black man, Hayes Turner, and his eight-months-pregnant wife, Mary Turner – an entry Perkins simply (horrifyingly) calls “common” among Black periodicals of the twentieth century. Unsurprisingly, then, Perkins insists “lynching

remained one of the most pressing issues within the African American community;”¹⁶⁹ and plays on the topic, like those journal entries, became relatively “common.” True to the New Negro ideal, these prototypical plays (and journal entries) were exemplary written responses to the realities of the twentieth-century Black lived experience: they sought to bring wide attention to visceral murders, engage an empathetic response in a heterogenous audience, and (if effective) inspire real socio-political change. To borrow the titular terminology from Koritha Mitchell’s 2011 monograph, these Black Americans were “living with lynching,” or learning to – developing an understanding of the dominant society which surrounded them and strategies for survival.¹⁷⁰ Notably, as Mitchell writes in her introduction, most plays about lynching “refused to feature physical violence; their scripts spotlight instead the [B]lack home and the impact that the mob’s outdoor activities have on the family.”¹⁷¹ In the following analysis, I’ll engage this trend (and one notable subversion) to continue evincing the implications of Black readership during the early-twentieth century. The threat of lynching was a reality for any publicly and critically engaged Black American at the time; and many writers responded to and sought to affect this reality through publication. The writers, artists, and intellectuals of the New Negro movement are *also* forced to live with lynching. As such, they inevitably referenced these previous tactics in their liberal (less-sentimental) approach to manifesting equity for Black Americans.

Important for this investigation: lynching was *deeply* anti-liberal – by design. The advancements achieved by Black Americans after Emancipation were humanizing. Reparations

¹⁶⁹ Kathy A. Perkins. “The Impact of Lynching on the Art of African American Women.” *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women*, edited by Perkins and Judith L. Stevens. Indiana University Press, 1998, 15-20.

¹⁷⁰ Koritha Mitchell. *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*. University of Illinois Press, 2011.

¹⁷¹ Koritha Mitchell. *Living with Lynching*, 2.

and Reconstruction after the Civil War, as well as self-actualization on an individual level, restored the alienated inalienable rights stripped of Black Americans and better prepared Black Americans to represent themselves publicly and politically. Black Americans were finally being liberally humanized on the state level. And prejudiced people in traditional positions of power met this humanization with the most *dehumanizing* act imaginable: murder. Lynching. Lynching was dominant America's most violent weapon for undoing the liberal progress of emancipation. This threat and anti-liberal response originated with Black Americans' earliest attempts at abolition. In the first years after Frederick Douglass had joined William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist ensemble, his advocacy was repeatedly met with physical retaliation. During a Garrisonian tour of the West and Midwest in 1843, known as the "One Hundred Conventions," Douglass was almost killed by a mob in Pendleton, Indiana, after being driven off the stage and beaten by a crowd armed with clubs and bricks.¹⁷² Douglass himself was left in a heap on the ground, unconscious, his right hand broken. The moment was traumatic for Douglass, scarring him physically and psychically for years. On that same tour, threats of violence kept Douglass from visiting Cincinnati, Ohio, and this regret similarly haunted the abolitionist: feeling such fear of one's own kind, Douglass later wrote, is something no human should have to suffer.¹⁷³ It wasn't until he was able to visit Cincinnati seven years later, as a free man and notable literary figure, that he says truly felt free from this dehumanizing fear – such was the power of the threat of lynching.¹⁷⁴ As such, publishers since Douglass himself have attacked lynching literally. Du Bois regularly denounced lynching in *The Crisis*, and the artists and intellectuals of *Opportunity*

¹⁷² Robert K. Wallace. "Finding His Voice on the Road, in the Lecture Hall, and in His Newspaper," 18.

¹⁷³ Frederick Douglass. "Letter from the Editor, Cincinnati, July 5, 1850." *North Star*, July 18, 1850, n.p.

¹⁷⁴ Frederick Douglass. "Letter from the Editor, Cincinnati, July 5, 1850," n.p.

were similarly committed to ousting the practice at its root. From its first issue, *Opportunity* regularly featured editorials, articles, even art designed to proliferate anti-lynching sentiment and action.¹⁷⁵ And before Du Bois and Johnson, sentimentalism was drawing public attention to lynching through print media. Margaret Cohen argues that sentimentalism was a unique tool in the abolitionist arsenal. Cohen defines sentimentalism by the centrality of suffering to its plots, writing that “a spectacle of suffering that solicits the spectator’s sympathy” is definitive of the genre.¹⁷⁶ Knowing this, playwrights such as Angelina Weld Grimké evoked suffering in their plays – especially the suffering of the families of lynching victims – to demonstrate the humanity of early-twentieth-century Black Americans in an attempt to discontinue the practice. Conversely, journals such as *The Crisis* sometimes photographically staged the suffering of the lynching victim themselves in *their* attack on lynching.

Grimké’s *Rachel* is deeply sentimental. Its characters are respectable and (at least relatively) refined, with trained interiorities: Rachel avidly reads and plays the piano, Mrs. Loving (and later Rachel, too) diligently puts her dexterous fingers to work as a seamstress, and Tom’s face is always in a newspaper. The values of the play, at least at first, promote traditional femininity and a classical education. And, perhaps most importantly, it makes its readers (or audiences) *feel* something. I cried in reading the second act. *My partner cried* when I told her about the second act. Insofar as it promotes emotion as a means of understanding and building connection (per that Mendelman quote earlier), *Rachel* is a modernist piece of sentimentalism: it makes you cry, and in so doing develop a relationship with these “Others” (perhaps only

¹⁷⁵ In “The American Negro and the World Wide Conflict of Color” (1923), the third article published in the first issue of *Opportunity*, Samuel Parkes Cadman (1864-1936) equates lynching with “barbarism” and “butchery.” S. Parkes Cadman. “The American Negro and the World Wide Conflict of Color.” *Opportunity* 1, no. 1 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 10.

¹⁷⁶ Margaret Cohen. “Sentimental Communities,” 108.

figuratively) on-stage. Importantly, the medium of the play reinforces these affects. The dramatis personae of the play introduces us to the characters of the play, labeling them quickly by their almost-archetypal roles (e.g., “a widow,” “her daughter,” “a friend of the family”), before noting in the final line: “All of the characters are colored.”¹⁷⁷ Experientially, textually, this had the effect (on me) of welcoming me to get to know these characters by their role and/or position in society *before* I knew their race. Perhaps, this may subtly coerce a relatively unwilling white audience member or reader to begin to relate to characters with whom they would otherwise refuse – a sneaky way to deliver the medicine underneath a layer of sugar. *Rachel*, as the (canonically) prototypical play about lynching, sets the standard from which Fauset later deviated: it embraces realism – the first two pages of the script list every piece of mise-en-scene on-stage – in order to depict *real* suffering; and it borrows a sentimental paradigm in order to evoke pity in its audiences. Rachel, the character, reads as a *raisonneur*, Grimké herself in the text: she discovers a tragedy and, over years, processes the effects/affects. *Rachel*, the play, then, offers us one, striking take on the realities of Black readership and authorship; such public activity can prove deadly, spurring writers such as Grimké to tell their tales in the press in an attempt to garner sympathy and sentiment if not votes and legislation.

The iconoclasm/schism between *Mine Eyes Have Seen* and the following issue of its host publication, *The Crisis* 16.1, offers a compelling second take on these print responses to lynching and the realities of Black readership/authorship. *Mine Eyes Have Seen*,¹⁷⁸ by Alice Dunbar Nelson, first printed in the final issue of *The Crisis*, volume fifteen, is like *Rachel* and the other “strange fruit” in its refusal to stage the trauma of lynching; instead, the domestic drama focuses

¹⁷⁷ Angelina Weld Grimké. *Rachel*, i.

¹⁷⁸ Alice Dunbar Nelson. “Mine Eyes Have Seen.” *The Crisis*, vol. 15, no. 6, 1918, pp. 271-5.

on the survivors of tragedy, Dan, Chris, and Lucy, three siblings who fled their homes after their father was lynched and who recently lost their mother to pneumonia. The three siblings discuss their traumas, the reality of their impoverished situation, and the means by which they might escape squalor (Chris has been drafted, a source of livelihood but also a thread to one's life). The play, again like *Rachel* before it, encourages a sentimental response to the very *real(istic)* suffering of our three subjects during the fallout after the initial event. Scholars and theatre-makers have found a sort of humanizing "agency" in this refusal to stage the lynching event itself. However, *The Crisis*, like those many periodicals in which lynching depictions were all too "common," did not take such a gentle approach in the following issue. One month after Nelson refused to stage (or describe) the lynched body in *The Crisis* 15.6 (April 1918), Du Bois as editor of the following issue included the graphic image of a lynched Black man, George McNeel, alongside the disturbingly detailed description of another torture.¹⁷⁹ The publication of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* had done nothing to prevent George McNeel's death. Though the play must certainly have made its readers *feel* and sympathize for the siblings and their plight, especially Chris being drafted on top of the difficulties of their lives generally, that sympathy did not save George McNeel or the thousands of Black men (and women) who were extra-judiciously killed, and it did not appear to be the tool for saving other going forward. Sentimentalism had reached its limit of straightforward application for Black Americans, according to the tenets of the New Negro movement; as such, its artists and intellectuals sought other, liberal, modernist means of expression which might better manifest their objectives.

¹⁷⁹ "The Burning of Jim McIlherron: An N.A.A.C.P. Investigation." *The Crisis*, vol 16, no. 1, 1918, pp. 16-20.

Certainly, the reality for New Negro readers and writers was more complicated and threatening than I can properly comprehend; however, this closer structural look has demonstrated the pervasive, real fear in the hearts of many Black Americans of the early-twentieth century, that the foundational acts of liberalism we white subjects too-easily take for granted could have been, still can be, and often were/are the sites of great personal consequence, sometimes even torturous death. Lynching plays, “strange fruit,” such as *Rachel* and *Mine Eyes Have Seen* sat with that fear and encouraged their audiences and readers to embody it through domestic dramas rife with deeply emotional conversations: when Rachel struggles internally and relationally between her innate maternity and the horrors of Black life, I felt for her; when we hear that Ethel Lane loved her blind dog because she was afraid a seeing dog wouldn’t love her, I cried for her. This personal relationship I developed with these characters, this close connection I feel to their suffering is a deeply powerful motivator, a tool for building understanding and cross-cultural connection. But, as seen only one month after *Mine Eyes Have Seen*’s publication, the connection I felt to these characters does nothing for the real victims of lynching across American histories. These plays have bridged my understanding to certain early-twentieth century Black experiences of readership and authorship. Once again using Mitchell’s terminology, the readers and writers of the New Negro movement were “living with lynching,” and *Rachel* and *Mine Eyes Have Seen* both demonstrate the ways in which modernism and sentimentalism can be merged in print and performance to affect an audience and effect change in the world. Charles S. Johnson and his peers knew of this efficacy, but they also knew of sentimentalism’s shortcomings. As such, these cultural predecessors certainly guided the representations of personhood that will be detailed throughout this dissertation, in letting the

artists of the New Negro movement know both how to affect change in white sentiment and how *not* to.

The New Negro approach to self-representation in the name of self-actualization was not identical to these earlier representations within *The Crisis*. Notably, New Negro artists appropriated and distanced themselves from sentimental appeals to humanity as they moved toward more liberal, more artistically valuable self-expression. Whereas earlier Black American writers often sought to demonstrate their humanity by engaging latent sentimentalism, the artists of the New Negro movement engaged sentimentalism methodically. As Lisa Mendelman argues, many modernist writers (especially women) – New Negro writers included – utilized an amalgamated “modern sentimentalism”¹⁸⁰ in their art in order to evoke some of the long-held values of sentimentalism while also promoting the new styles, techniques, and viewpoints of modernism. She argues that the women authors of the New Negro movement, especially Jessie Redmon Fauset, engaged sentimentalist tropes – albeit ironically and invertedly – to comment on societal expectations for women.¹⁸¹ Notably, Mendelman engages Du Bois’s concept of “double consciousness” in unpacking the doubly (no, triply) critical lens by which Fauset offered her

¹⁸⁰ In applying sentimentalism to the New Negro movement, Mendelman isolates the “sentimental” as that which “emphasizes feeling as a primary source of knowledge,”¹⁸⁰ and defines the “modern sentimental” via a variety of conventions: for instance, “a femininity that alternately demands sincere feeling and ironic intelligence, chastity and sexual exploration, marriage and independence, and, especially for non-white women, autonomy and racial responsibility.” Jennifer A Williamson has also found certain sentimentalist trends among modernist artists. Lisa Mendelman. *Modern Sentimentalism*. Oxford University Press, 2019, 2 and 3. Jennifer A. Williamson. *Twentieth-Century Sentimentalism*. Rutgers University Press, 2013.

¹⁸¹ See Lisa Mendelman. “Modern Sentimentalism and the New Negro.” *Modern Sentimentalism*. Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 121-148. In this chapter, Mendelman argues against the commonly held conception that modern writing must have been devoid of sentimentalism and that Fauset used it ironically in her “incisive dramatization of femininity’s double binds” (122).

commentary and the ways in which Fauset used modern sentimentalism to usurp the traditional models of femininity, the woman who appears as “beautiful, educated, middle class, and usually engaged in a charitable, conscientious trade such as nursing, library science, or teaching.”¹⁸²

Demonstrably, some artists from the New Negro movement *did* engage sentimentalism, however tactically, in their writing.

However, much of the New Negro movement moved on from sentimentalism after the successes of the abolitionist movement. Sentimentalism had worked for abolitionists to prove the humanity of Black Americans to some white readers and audiences. Though, the modernist goal of the New Negro movement was now to lift Black Americans to the same status as white Americans – not merely the same humanity. As such, New Negro artists and intellectuals sought to demonstrate their rational and artistic capabilities to warrant their equitable inclusion in the public sphere with its liberal prerequisites. Much of the celebrated art from *Opportunity*, across mediums but especially the drama, is realist in style: it chooses to highlight the value of Black American life exactly as it existed to reinforce the worth of such stories and their subjects. Other examples, especially prominent pieces of studio art, abstract the Black subject to reinforce their worth by applying the same artistic valuation of Black life that white artists had recently been applying to white subjects. These more expressive iterations lifted Black subjects to the upper echelon of artistic subjecthood, seating them beside those demigods and goddesses, kings and heroes who traditionally find themselves the subjects of such adoration. No matter their stylization, these New Negro practices of artistic self-representation, in print and performance and the burgeoning new mass medias of the 1920s, were liberal in their lineage and their

¹⁸² Cherene Sherrard-Johnson is quoted in Lisa Mendelman. *Modern Sentimentalism*, 123-124.

intention, and they embraced sentimentalism, as appropriate, in promoting publication as the best vessel for (almost) avant-garde artistic and social advancements into the future.

New Negro personhood, especially as Johnson and his peers defined it within *Opportunity*, allied itself with Enlightenment liberal values which were themselves experiencing something of a Renaissance under modernism,¹⁸³ recommending its individual members publicly and privately embody familiar liberal(-sentimental) practices in the name of self-actualization and in order to gain increased white respect and (eventually, hopefully) increased public access and representation for Black Americans. This New Negro personhood was defined by its metatextual acts, its acts of reading and writing especially, employed as a tool for what Johnson called true social or cultural assimilation for minoritarian citizens and immigrants: completely unrestrained and, in essence, unracialized access to all forms of discourse. Johnson believed Black Americans could only ensure respect and representation by demonstrating their well-rounded knowledge on (Black) American life and its web of syntheses (i.e. its history, global context and connotations, and mores in addition to its governance and best-practices); and he

¹⁸³ Liberalism, largely, was embraced during the modern period: as the modernist movement sought to emphasize the “new,” it also began the century(/ies?)-long process of questioning the equity of liberal paradigms historically and ensuring these liberal values are properly enacted among “new” or illiberally treated populations. I refer to this as a “Renaissance” or “rebirth” of liberalism, because the concept was attacked politically and ideologically early in the twentieth century. In “The Crisis of Liberalism and the Politics of Modernism,” Janice Ho describes what she calls a “crisis of liberalism” in this period, exemplified, she argues, in three acts: “the First World War between 1914 and 1918; the 1917 Russian Revolution; and Adolf Hitler’s ascension to power in 1933.” Additionally, Ho notes that modernist figures, themselves, questioned the validity or potential of liberalism: infamously, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound attacked the concept and its application repeatedly. In the face of this “crisis” or death of liberalism, many artists and intellectuals (among them, the members of the New Negro movement at-large) recommitted themselves to liberalism – *after* requisite reformations. Janice Ho. “The Crisis of Liberalism and the Politics of Modernism: Liberalism and Modernism.” *Literature Compass* 8, no. 1 (2011): 47–65, 49 and 50-51.

believed Black-authored periodicals such as *Opportunity* could best facilitate the cultivation of such Black American interiority through the presentation of factual information and cultural case studies worth digesting. However, the application of these values and embodiment of these practices was not straightforward for Johnson or other Black Americans in the 1920s (or now), nor was it without its dangers – and Johnson and his peers knew this. *Opportunity* and its individual writers (and, presumably, its readers) criticized and actively sought to improve the faults of the American liberal paradigm as they also celebrated its finer qualities. As with the movement itself, New Negro personhood was necessarily individual: as its liberal values required, each member of the movement must delineate the dimensions of their New Negro identity. However, the movement was also necessarily communal – mirroring the schism between liberalism and sentimentalism themselves – forcing these individual members into a collective and a conversation in order to better combat white supremacy.

New Negro personhood, while amorphous, was critically liberal, yet minoritarian and underprivileged; it employed metatextual acts while it interrogated the practice; it was proudly Black, even though the reception of that Blackness was, at times, its greatest obstacle – but also its greatest support. Black modern (liberal) personhood was necessarily explorational and inventive in the face of these clashing identities and the lack of any proper foundational liberal guide, as the Constitution and its amendments actively suppressed the nonwhite vote and these individuals' humanity. These aporias within the American liberal paradigm created a vacuum of antiliberal mistreatment within a country supposedly defined by the values of freedom, representation, and equality, and necessitated the construction of the foundations for a Black American public sphere. New Negro personhood wrestled these apparent contradictions into a sensible sense of self (or at least tried to), and each member of the movement wrestled these

tenets into a practicable, performable sense of self to be displayed for other Americans daily during their artistically and intellectually informed lives. I will search for this resilience and this tension in the individual iterations of New Negro personhood in the print and performance of *Opportunity* in the following chapters. In each of these chapters, I undertake not only a semiotic and/or media theory analysis of the multimedia artistic case studies; I consider these artefacts as examples of performance: performance of self through material culture, insofar as these case studies have the ability – in their values, subjects, and means of expression – *perform* or stand in for the individuals who made them, *their* values, themselves, and their preferred means of expression.

Chapter 2: Print
The Texts and Art of the New Negro Movement as Manifesto

Since performance merged with sociology in Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), performance theorists and scholars of the human condition have considered identity to be a social construct, sometimes enacted, *performed*; as Goffman writes:

when the individual is in the immediate presence of others, [their] activity will have a promissory character... Sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing [them]self a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response [they are] concerned to obtain. Sometimes the individual will be calculating in [their] activity but be relatively unaware that this is the case.¹⁸⁴

Consciously or not, Goffman argues that we humans present (perform) ourselves differently to different audiences in order to be perceived in the way we prefer: like human signifiers, our embodied actions around others carry meaning for those who witness them – with these working semiotically on multiple levels (what we intend, how they are perceived). During the “interpretive turn”¹⁸⁵ in critical theory of the 1970s, identities became understood as

¹⁸⁴ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, monograph no. 2. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956, 2. Hosted by Monoskop at https://monoskop.org/images/1/19/Goffman_Erving_The_Presentation_of_Self_in_Everyday_Life.pdf.

¹⁸⁵ The *Oxford Dictionary of Media & Communication*, second edition, simply defines the interpretive turn as a “growth of social constructionism within disciplinary discourses in the social sciences in the early 1970s.” Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan edited the collection, *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, in 1979 to “present to a wide audience... a carefully selected group of papers exemplary of the interpretive or hermeneutic approach to the study of human society,” an approach Rabinow and Sullivan define by its determination to criticize “positivist, structuralist, and neo-Marxist positions.” Also in 1979, Burrell Gibson and Gareth Morgan observationally defined the surging trend in sociological thought as a paradigm

informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action.

intersectional, and gender and race (among others) came to be understood to be similarly embodied, performed. Feminist (and later post-structuralist, phenomenologist) scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler famously espoused the notion that “one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman,”¹⁸⁶ cementing the concept of gender in contemporary scholarship as “the cultural meaning and form that [the] body acquires,”¹⁸⁷ something acculturated, performed, and received by a witness. Race, too, began to be conceptualized in a similar way. Kimberlé Crenshaw seminally bridged race and gender by coining the concept of “intersectionality” in 1989.¹⁸⁸ Her legal critique, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” powerfully denounces historical trends and practices and emphasizes the experience of the marginalized individual – namely, Black women, doubly burdened publicly by their race and gender.¹⁸⁹ Judith Butler herself explored the intersection between race and gender in chapter 6 of *Bodies That Matter* (1993), in her examination of Nella Larsen’s (1891-1964) two novels, which Butler

The interpretive turn, then, rejects the notion that a grand, singular truth is understandable through reason and logic and instead argues for a subjective, situated conception of knowledge. Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday. “Interpretive Turn.” *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*. Oxford University Press, 2016, n.p.; Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan. “Introduction: The Interpretive Turn: Emergence of an Approach.” In *Interpretive Social Science: a Reader*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, 1; and Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan. *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis: Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life*. London: Heinemann, 1979, 28.

¹⁸⁶ Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books, 1973, 301. Butler quotes de Beauvoir multiple times in essays such as “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” (1988) and “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*” (1986).

¹⁸⁷ Judith Butler. “Sex and Gender in Simone De Beauvoir's *Second Sex*.” *Yale French Studies*, vol. 72, no. 72, 1986, pp. 35–49, at 35.

¹⁸⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1, 1989, 139-167. It is worth noting here that Crenshaw was influenced her work by the Combahee River Collective Statement from 1977. See *The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties*. Albany, NY: Kitchen Table, 1986.

¹⁸⁹ See also Kimberlé Crenshaw. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–1299.

argues narrate “the dangers of public exposure of both color and desire.”¹⁹⁰ In 1994, Michael Omi and Howard Winant defined race as a “concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interest referring to different types of human bodies”¹⁹¹ – the rhetorical similarities between this definition and Butler’s definition of gender above are apparent. While Omi and Winant’s claims have been challenged academically over the decades,¹⁹² the concept of race as something performed has resonated in recent scholarship: Houston A. Baker Jr in 1994, Harry Elam Jr in 2001, E. Patrick Johnson in 2003, and several others since have engaged working definitions of a malleable embodied understanding of race and, specifically, Blackness.¹⁹³ I find Elam Jr’s use of Lorraine Hansberry’s *Les Blancs* (1969) in constructing his definition especially effective. Elam Jr quotes Tshembe in saying that “[r]ace is a device,” that “the meanings of race are conditional, that the illusion of race becomes reality through its application.”¹⁹⁴ In short, race

¹⁹⁰ Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: on the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* New York: Routledge, 1993, 169.

¹⁹¹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 1994, 55.

¹⁹² *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century* (2012), a critical collection edited by Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido, effectively summarizes the trends in criticism since Omi and Winant first published *Racial Formation in the United States* in 1994: the pair’s early thesis required necessary intersectional interrogation. Authors in the collection apply lenses of gender, indigeneity, national identity, and colonialization to Omi and Winant’s initial concept of racial formation. Omi and Winant have since republished *Racial Formation in the United States* in a second and third updated editions in order to incorporate such criticism into their concept. Daniel HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido. *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012; and Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. Third edition. New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2015. See also, for example, Ralina L. Joseph. *Postracial Resistance: Black Women, Media, and the Uses of Strategic Ambiguity*. Vol. 27. NYU Press, 2018.

¹⁹³ Houston A. Baker. “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere.” *Public Culture*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1994, pp. 3–33; Harry Elam Jr. “The Device of Race: An Introduction” in *African-American Performance and Theater History: a Critical Reader*. Oxford University Press, 2001, 3-16; and E. Patrick Johnson. *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*. Duke University Press, 2003.

¹⁹⁴ Harry Elam Jr. “The Device of Race,” 5.

and Blackness are performed insofar as they are embodied and they semiotically transmit culturally situated information and meaning. Importantly, these conversations hearken back to earlier twentieth-century discourses on race and Blackness, for which W. E. B. Du Bois and later Frantz Fanon serve as cornerstones. In chapter five of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1951), Fanon speaks powerfully of his experiences of being seen and labeled by/as a dehumanizing slur; he writes that, after the shouts of this stranger, he was trapped in the threatening gaze of those around him: “the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye.”¹⁹⁵ For Du Bois, too, the lived experience of a Black American is rooted in perception; in “Strivings of the Negro People” he famously defined “double-consciousness” as the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”¹⁹⁶ For Du Bois and Fanon, just as for contemporary “interpretive” scholars, Blackness carries both intentional and unintentional levels of meaning through the act of self-presentation or simply being seen by an other – it is, again, based in performance and optics.

More recently, scholars have begun to apply these seminal notions of Blackness-as-construct to text and our relationship to text into order to read print culture and print as performance.¹⁹⁷ Most striking, I have found, is Derrick Spires’s recent work on Black print histories as engines and vessels for Black citizenship. Spires argues “[e]arly Black writing offers

¹⁹⁵ Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pluto Press, 1986, 109. Hosted by Monoskop at https://monoskop.org/images/a/a5/Fanon_Frantz_Black_Skin_White_Masks_1986.pdf.

¹⁹⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois. “Strivings of the Negro People.” *The Atlantic Monthly* (1857), vol. 80, no. 478, 1897, p. 194.

¹⁹⁷ Todd Vogel. *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*. Rutgers University Press, 2001; Eric Gardner. *Black Print Unbound: the Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2015; and Derrick R. Spires. *The Practice of Citizenship*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.

as supple and sophisticated an analysis of antiblack racism and the lives, and afterlives, of enslavement” and that Black “[e]ditorship adds yet another dimension... insofar as editors created voices for publications through their writing – attributed and unattributed – as well as their curating of others’ writing and images.”¹⁹⁸ His first monograph, *The Practice of Citizenship* (2019), his work as editor on the recent special issue of *American Literary History*, and his upcoming book project on Black periodical literature in the long nineteenth century all support this claim. Most exhaustively, *The Practice of Citizenship* “tells a story about how [B]lack writers theorized and practiced citizenship in the early United States through a robust print culture” and about “the processes by which [B]lack citizens used print to articulate and enact the citizenship they theorized.”¹⁹⁹ Like Houston Baker Jr (discussed at-length in chapter 1), Spires suggests nineteenth-century Black Americans engaged a print counterpublic to comment on liberalism (and later modernism)²⁰⁰ and to define best-practices for their communal citizenry. To Spires, these American writers usurped liberal definitions of citizenship which were (supposedly)

¹⁹⁸ Derrick R. Spires. “Genealogies of Black Modernities.” *American Literary History*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2020, pp. 611–622, at 613 and 616.

¹⁹⁹ Derrick R. Spires. *The Practice of Citizenship*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019, 2 and 3.

²⁰⁰ In his *Very Short Introduction*, Christopher Butler defines *modernism* as a period and style of art which flourished from 1909-1939 and which produces artistic objects “of a provoking new idea [and/or] of an original technique.” Ian Buchanan summarizes the movement in his entry in *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* with statements by Arthur Rimbaud and Ezra Pound, concluding modernism “enjoin[ed] artists to jettison tradition and experiment with the possibilities inherent in every medium, regardless of the apparent senselessness or indeed ugliness of the outcome.” Modernism is not *modernity*, which Butler defines by the increasing loss of religious belief since the Enlightenment, a rising dependence on technology, the expansion of market capitalism and bureaucracy, and the growth of mass culture and its influence. Rather, modernism is the emphasis on the new, new artistic subjects or practices, and a celebration of stylistic freedom. Butler argues that “[d]iversity of style is liberal democracy in art,” cementing modernism’s commitment to the liberal project. Christopher Butler. *Modernism: a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 4, 1-2, and 12; and Ian Buchanan. “Modernism.” *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2018, n.p.

ensured to all by warrant of their very humanity (and which recurrently proved insufficient) in favor of a citizenship not “determined by who one is but rather by what one does.”²⁰¹

Importantly for this study, Spires references Diana Taylor’s *Archive and Repertoire* (2003) in his assertion that the embodied enactments of citizenship which he studies can be read as performance:

Though the texts [B]lack writers produced are an archive insofar as they record thoughts, events, and proceedings, [B]lack print culture – the creation, circulation, and consumption of these texts – constitutes an ongoing performance that we can read as a repertoire. Insofar as the [B]lack state conventions were a performance, to say with this one example, this performance extended beyond the meetings themselves to include conversations about the conventions in print and in local gatherings, the choreographed presentation of convention documents to the public in the form of proceedings, and the ongoing discussion of the convention and its documents, again, in print and in local gatherings.²⁰²

Here, Spires demonstrates that representative pieces of text can be read as performance and that our metatextual relationship to and usage of these texts are also performance. Spires situates “[B]lack theorizing as a practice depending on both embodied expression and print,”²⁰³ arguing that metatextual acts are foundational to historical Black performances of public criticism and the development of Black intellectualism as a whole. Additionally, Spires argues that Black Americans during the nineteenth century “conceptualized print as a site of knowledge production and a site of resistance that could destabilize white supremacist citizenship.”²⁰⁴ Spires’s scholarship is foundational for my study, because his work invites us to read the twentieth-century acts of print by Charles S. Johnson and his peers as performance – sites of

²⁰¹ Derrick R. Spires. *The Practice of Citizenship*, 3.

²⁰² Derrick R. Spires. *The Practice of Citizenship*, 10-11.

²⁰³ Derrick R. Spires. *The Practice of Citizenship*, 11.

²⁰⁴ Derrick R. Spires. *The Practice of Citizenship*, 11.

performance meant to prescribe best-practices for New Negro personhood and to “destabilize white supremacist citizenship.”

Continuing our semiotic, sociological terminology from earlier, these texts and metatexts (or metatextual acts) carry acculturated meaning and, in their connection to us, inform our identity in the minds of witnesses. Inspired by Spires’s scholarship and the generations of discourse upon which it builds, though similarly motivated by my background as a performance scholar, I will now read the metatextual acts of Charles S. Johnson and his circle as performances of self, presentations of the values and ideals one holds true and dear. Just as the Black Americans in Spires’s scholarship presented and performed their individual identities at these nineteenth-century conferences – *and*, crucially, in the metatexts surrounding the event – Charles S. Johnson and his peers imbued the texts they published, the art they made with the values of the New Negro movement and a strong sense of Black American identity. As true modernists, Johnson and the artists he published engaged twentieth-century artistic trends and international styles (especially photographic realism and Art Nouveau abstraction) to aid their expression, to connote definitions of personhood, and to demonstrate the innate worth of Black American life. In this chapter, I will continue to read the New Negro movement *as* (almost) avant-garde by applying Martin Puchner’s scholarship on the manifesto, documents which imagine future citizenship and enact real change in the world, to the metatexts of *Opportunity*. I will defend my use of Puchner’s scholarship via a necessary racial interrogation and define Puchner’s terms before demonstrating how *Opportunity* and its metatexts *performatively* define ideal citizenship and *theatrically* imagine it artistically and textually. Especially, I will draw due attention to the expressive representations of Blackness by two understudied artists, photographer Cornelius

Marion Battey (1873-1927) and illustrator Charles Cullen (1887-?), both of whom Johnson published regularly to define and perform New Negro personhood in its manifestos.

Before defining and applying Puchner's lens to the New Negro movement, it must be qualified. Puchner, a white German-American, writes about the historical avant-garde, a largely white, right-wing, racially insensitive (or racist) subset of modern artistry and citizenship – as discussed in the introduction. As such, Puchner's lens does not seamlessly apply to the New Negro movement or the writings and print artistry of Johnson and his peers. However, influenced by Mike Sell, I have been inspired to read the New Negro movement (and Johnson and his peers' activity within it) *as* avant-garde, to apply what I can to the movement to unearth new revelations. Crucially, this urge has emanated from the movement and Johnson's actions themselves: Johnson's organizational definition of the group and careful curation of its membership and image, the art of Charles Cullen, the movement's forward-looking, authority-seeking behavior all resemble similar qualities seen and studied in movements from the historical avant-garde. Similarly, many texts within *Opportunity* and *Ebony and Topaz* prescribe stylized artistic action and planned personal practice among its readers and members of the New Negro movement. The art of these publications, too, borrowed tools of expression from modernist, avant-garde styles such as Art Nouveau, Symbolism, and even Futurism, to depict Black Americans and Black American life in new ways. For these reasons, the case studies themselves yearn for such treatment. As I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, and truly this dissertation as a whole, reading the New Negro movement and specifically its texts *as* avant-garde reveals new dimensions to the movement. I believe the benefits of this lens thus outweigh the inconsistencies of its application, especially after proper interrogation and the acknowledgement of this distance between the subject and method.

In chapter 2 of *Poetry of the Revolution* (2005), Martin Puchner discusses what he labels “Marxian Speech Acts,” unpacking the manifesto’s dual nature of performativity and theatricality in (a rather one-sided) dialogue with J. L. Austin’s famous colloquium-cum-collection, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). As Puchner bases his definition largely on the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) and references it liberally, I will here be basing the performative and theatrical nature of New Negro “manifestos” in relation to Marx’s paragon. Puchner writes that, because the *Manifesto* defines its ideal audience in the moment of its publication/reception, it is “thus addressed to a recipient who does not yet fully exist” and, as such, it “performatively creates its addressee as agent” in this moment.²⁰⁵ The *Manifesto*, any manifesto, is performative in the same manner as Austin’s “performative utterances,” which “do things with words” – “the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of a transformative action.”²⁰⁶ Continuing to define the performativity of a manifesto, Puchner writes:

The Manifesto is not content with simply being a proxy of the proletariat in the same, simple way. Rather, it needs to create, performatively, the proletariat as a self-conscious agent, and for this reason it must also show the proletariat who and what it is by creating a figure, the figure of the proletariat, just as *The Prince* had created the figure of the prince.²⁰⁷

Manifestos perform (in an Austinian sense) the act of creation; they create their future audience, ideal citizens of a specific sort, by defining them in the present. In Puchner’s words, manifestos “[project] and [theorize] the political agent that will help realize its [political] vision.”²⁰⁸ To clarify this act of creation, consider the *Communist Manifesto*. It is *performative*, Puchner argues, because it defines communism and then it defines what *exactly* a communist – a party

²⁰⁵ Martin Puchner. *Poetry of the Revolution : Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 31.

²⁰⁶ J. L. Austin. *How to Do Things with Words*. Clarendon Press, 1962, 5.

²⁰⁷ Martin Puchner. *Poetry of the Revolution*, 31.

²⁰⁸ Martin Puchner. *Poetry of the Revolution*, 29.

member – is. Communism cannot exist without communists. As such, Marx *performatively* created communists as he created communism in his *Manifesto*. *The Prince* (1532), too, defined the qualities of Machiavelli's ideal prince in the same moment it created a theoretical set of aspiring rulers to fill these expectations. I argue the many documents published in the name of New Negro citizenship, *Opportunity* included, are similarly performative: they “performatively create” the figure of the New Negro paragon “just as *The Prince* had created the figure of the prince.”

Puchner continues by describing the manifesto as *theatrical* because “its speech acts occur in an unauthorized and unauthorizing context”²⁰⁹ – because the manifesto is inherently exclusive, or countercultural, or minoritarian (or all three at the same time), it lacks the *ethos*, the authority to enact its performative utterances – and it must counteract this lack of authority/authorization by imagining, presupposing, and/or enacting its own future authority.²¹⁰ Puchner writes that, “[s]ince the manifesto speaks from a position of weakness, it must hope that the presumption of future authority... will have effects and consequences” and it must exploit this hope “without yet knowing whether the project of usurping power will work out.”²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Martin Puchner. *Poetry of the Revolution*, 25.

²¹⁰ For this reason, Puchner argues the performativity and theatricality of the manifesto are necessarily intertwined and complimentary to one another – as opposed to Austen's conception of the two as opposites. Puchner explains that Austen argued speech acts had to *overcome* theatricality (not rely upon it) because, in the theatre, speech acts “are not backed up by authority and a properly authorizing context.” Speech acts that occur in the theatre do not function as normal: an actor playing an officiant cannot change reality and name two people married, as they do not have the legal authority. Puchner, on the other hand, argues that theatricality, in itself, creates a future sense of authority required to a manifesto's performative definitions of citizenship or personhood. Martin Puchner. *Poetry of the Revolution*, 24-25.

²¹¹ Martin Puchner. *Poetry of the Revolution*, 26.

“Without theatricality...” Puchner argues, “there would be no manifesto.”²¹² The manifesto’s *theatrical* imaginations of the citizenship it *performatively* defines (and creates) are inherently subaltern. They carry traits not hegemonically empowered or privileged, they espouse a minoritarian personhood. Explaining his definition again with the *Communist Manifesto*, Puchner continues:

Since the *Manifesto* wants to speak from the position of the proletariat, and since it alone knows what the self-consciousness of the proletariat should look like, it must take, preemptively, the place of the proletariat, anticipating and enacting the proletariat in the manner that is, for the time being, theatrical.²¹³

Just as the *Manifesto* alone knows the ideal self-consciousness of the proletariat which it is only then creating, only these twentieth-century manifestos by authors like Johnson can “know,” or define and create, the specific intricacies of ideal New Negro identity. Johnson and his compatriots theatricalized this identity both in imaging it for publication and embodying it in their acts of reading, writing, and public discussion. In summation, then, Marxian speech acts are defined by their performative enactments of communal identity and their theatrical imagination/embodiment of such identity and its defining characteristics. And, as such, Johnson’s publications, his writing and editing, and the metatextual performances by his peers – as well as those by other New Negro writers and readers – can be read as Marxian speech acts, both performative and theatrical. Excitingly, Puchner’s scholarship also allows us to read any of the identity-forging texts of the New Negro movement *as* manifestos, documents which performatively create their audiences and theatrically embody them. In the following analyses, I will first define the Puchnerian performativity of *Opportunity* and its metatexts as manifestos, drawing special attention to C. M. Battey’s photographic definitions of New Negro values,

²¹² Martin Puchner. *Poetry of the Revolution*, 25.

²¹³ Martin Puchner. *Poetry of the Revolution*, 31.

before evaluating Charles Cullen's illustrated theatrical imaginations of New Negro personhood, which reinforced these values and the very value of Black American life through its respectful abstraction. Puchner's lens uniquely draws our attention to the countercultural conundrum experienced by the New Negro movement and its necessarily future-looking solution: Charles S. Johnson and the New Negro movement sought to make change in the present, but they lacked the state and federal authority to do so; as such, Johnson and the artists he published envisioned a more-beautiful future in which Black Americans *could* and *would* have the authority to ensure equal representation. Puchner's lens, reading the art and text of the New Negro movement as manifesto, centers this obstacle and the members' resilience in working to overcome it.

Performativity

First, I will analyze Johnson's performativity, the ways in which his utterances create and define his audience. The New Negro ideal, as Johnson imagined it, was defined by its metatextual acts, its commitment to liberalism, and its modernism. The centrality of readership and writing to the New Negro movement has been discussed in the previous chapter, but it bears repeating here: metatextual acts were centrally definitive of the New Negro paragon and paradigm. Johnson personally upheld and defended this valuation within his own written prescriptions. In addition to his delivered speech, "Literature and the Practice of Living" (1950), discussed in chapter 1, several pieces within his personal archive reiterate Johnson's commitment to proper public readership. Johnson owned several issues of *The Crisis* and *The American Magazine of Art* (1916-), as well as *multiple* copies each issue of the *Liberian Weekly Mirror* from May 1934 to February 1936. Johnson also kept a photocopied column from the Raleigh, North Carolina, *News and Observer* (1894-), entitled "Lynching and Reading," with the note: "Think the following editorial from a Raleigh paper interesting." "Lynchers can't, or don't,

read,” the column begins, “—so the literate have assured themselves for generations.” “There is some truth in it, no doubt,” it continues. “At any rate, the section that does least reading is the South, and it is the South that does most lynching.”²¹⁴ The column includes a short evaluation of figures from Dr Louis R. Wilson’s *The Geography of Reading* (1923), compared with lynching statistics from respective states. Mississippi, the least-read state, tops the list with a dizzyingly inhuman 563 recorded lynchings between 1882 and 1936. Though the correlation is not direct down the list, the author notes “[i]f the States had been ranged as book-buyers, instead of newspaper readers..., their order would have come closer to corresponding with their order as lynchers.” The act of reading, especially at-length, and the act of lynching were in 1936 were understood to be mor-or-less mutually exclusive. Generally, those who read did not lynch. Without implying causation, Johnson noted the correlation “interesting,” suggesting in the margins the hope for self-actualization implicit in his library: reading was (perhaps *the*) key to liberal, humanizing understanding.

Importantly, in the first volume of *Opportunity*, Johnson places an incredible influence on the *right* acts of reading. Dozens of books are advertised in the recurring segment, “Our Bookshelf,” with descriptions and reviews of these texts’ efficacy always included. Indirectly in *Opportunity* and more directly in “The Rise of the Negro Magazine,” Johnson’s writing performatively assumes a well-read reader and a reader who will continue to digest the books recommended. The even larger number of editorials and community input in *Opportunity*’s first volume adds to this identity the expectation of *public-facing* digestion; it is not enough to read these books in private – the New Negro citizen must share these books with their peers, discuss them, and (at the tip of the pyramid of self-actualization) write and comment on them in

²¹⁴ “Lynching and Reading.” *News and Observer*, July 16, 1938, page unknown.

publication which ideally adds an additional course for digestion. Johnson's prescriptions, like others of the New Negro movement, are performative largely in their organizational overtones: they brand this reading, writing Blackness specifically as the New Negro paragon, an idea/concept initially introduced, then debated and refined through further acts of writing and embodied performance. Again, just as *The Prince* performatively created the ideal prince, *Opportunity* performatively created the ideal New Negro individual. And that ideal individual was well-read and well-spoken; and, of course, these traits would be (necessarily) publicly presented. As his archive demonstrates, Johnson was a practiced reader who valued the self-actualizing act of readership – and he particularly believed it was the role of the increasingly popular “Negro magazine,” or Black-authored periodical, to provide this self-actualization to the masses (see the discussion of Johnson's “Rise of the Negro Magazine” (1929) in chapter 1). These Black-authored periodicals were central to New Negro identity, both because they embodied the right acts of reading, and because they helped recruit new members, proselytizing the New Negro message of liberal progress for Americans of any race.

To Johnson, the “Negro press,” such Black-authored periodicals, had “a single overriding concern and purpose: [Black American] progress and racial justice.”²¹⁵ Referencing economist Gunnar Myrdal, whose *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944)²¹⁶ proved deeply influential to him, Johnson wrote later in his life that these Black-

²¹⁵ Charles S. Johnson. “The Negro Press” (1947), 1. Box 168, folder 2. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

²¹⁶ Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* has been one of the most seminal mid-twentieth-century sociological texts. In *An American Dilemma*, Myrdal argues that, through democracy, “a constant pressure is brought to bear on race prejudice,” and that democracy will, by design, inevitably undo any lesser bias. It is perhaps no wonder Johnson found the book so inspirational. In addition to selling over 100,000 copies in its first edition, Myrdal's monograph influenced federal American action in multiple moments before and during

authored periodicals “[afford] a socially useful means of expression for resentments and tensions which might otherwise reach the breaking point.”²¹⁷ Echoing the origins of the liberal public sphere famously (and contentiously) laid out by Jürgen Habermas, Johnson upheld Black-authored periodicals as the foundation of popular criticism of social systems, a pursuit in which traditional periodicals had not offered Black Americans nearly enough support. In his personal “Appraisal of the Treatment of Negro News in the American Press” (1944), Johnson concluded that “The Negro press exists because of the failure of the white press to cover [Black American] news adequately, and to edit it in an unbiased manner.”²¹⁸ In an understood paradigm in which the public sphere and its print culture traditionally facilitated the development of the *commons*²¹⁹ and its ability to criticize official practice and ultimately ensure popular sovereignty (a paradigm which Habermas later narrativized), Black Americans had not been allowed to seize this power. Readership was central to the American race problem. The right acts of reading could better

the Civil Rights Movement. Shortly after the book’s publication, the US Office (now Department) of Education published a thirty-two page summary of the 1,483-page tome to be generally distributed among the American public; and, as Maribel Morey explains in her reference entry on the book, Harry Truman’s Committee on Civil Rights “prepared a report that relied heavily on Myrdal’s description of race in the United States as a moral problem and of the federal government’s role in facilitating black Americans’ assimilation into white American life.” Additionally, *An American Dilemma* is referenced in footnote 11 of the decision for *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which emphasizes the negative impact segregation has on a nonwhite child’s education. Gunnar Myrdal, Richard Sterner, and Arnold M. Rose. *An American Dilemma; the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. [9th ed.]. New York: Harper, 1944, 80; Maribel Morey. “An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (Gunnar Myrdal, 1944).” *America in the World, 1776 to the Present: A Supplement to the Dictionary of American History: A-L*, 2016, 57-60, at 59; and United States Supreme Court. *Brown v. Board of Education*. May 17, 1954, pp. 483-496, at 494-495.

²¹⁷ Charles S. Johnson. “The Negro Press” (1947), 1.

²¹⁸ Charles S. Johnson. “An Appraisal of the Treatment of Negro News in the American Press” (1944). Box 157, folder 19. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

²¹⁹ I borrow this term, again, from Elizabeth Maddock Dillon’s *Gender of Freedom* (2004), discussed at-length in chapter 1, to engage the concept of a human collective which has the ability to perform its public judgments.

allow Black Americans participatory access to the whitewashed public sphere, and reading stories of Black American life by Black American authors could better allow white Americans to develop a sense of understanding, respect, and appreciation for Black art, life, opinion, and presence – and perhaps encourage these white Americans to welcome their nonwhite brethren into the public sphere. Johnson believed Black-authored periodicals had the duty to promote this progress: by presenting Black Americans with the right materials to read, by offering Black Americans an outlet for the publication of their own artistic and intellectual creation and discourse, and by providing white Americans with tantalizing *and* empowering examples of nonwhite culture.

As editor, Charles S. Johnson and his personal prescriptions served as the center point for the cumulative whole that was *Opportunity*'s performatively defined personhood; but, true to his liberal mission, Johnson made much space for the individual iterations of the New Negro incarnate within the journal. As such, the printed prescriptions for enfranchised personhood within *Opportunity* and its related texts were as multifaceted and multivocal as the New Negro movement itself. I will now consider the full extent of *Opportunity*'s definition for New Negro personhood, focusing largely on Johnson's writings and incorporating additional art or intellectualism by others from *Opportunity* as evidence where appropriate. Johnson himself wrote multiple (credited and uncredited) editorials and articles for the journal. These many pieces can be read as a whole to distill recurring arguments and central themes, themes it is my goal to unpack in this section. In Puchnerian terms, these printed prescriptions by Johnson and his peers are the *performative* definitions of New Negro citizenship, which were then *theatrically* embodied at public events and in the art attached to publications such as *Opportunity* and *Ebony*

and *Topaz*. Johnson's personal contributions to the New Negro paragon, as an author and editor, reinforce the centrality of purposeful readership to his definition of the New Negro as subject.

Charles S. Johnson served as editor of *Opportunity* from volume 1, issue 1 (January 1923) until after volume 6, issue 9 was released in September of 1928. In the nearly six years and six volumes during his term, Johnson authored ten articles,²²⁰ eight book reviews,²²¹ and (likely) dozens of editorials (with authorship for these likely shared, to some extent, with other editors or

²²⁰ Charles S. Johnson. "Mental Measurements of Negro Groups." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 2 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 21-25; Charles S. Johnson. "Negroes at Work in Baltimore, Maryland." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 6 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 12-19; Charles S. Johnson. "Public Opinion and the Negro" *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 7 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 201-205; Charles S. Johnson. "After Garvey—What?" *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 8 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 231-233; Charles S. Johnson. "How Much Is The Migration A Flight From Persecution?" *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 9 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 272-274; Charles S. Johnson. "The Negro Population of Waterbury, Connecticut." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 10 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 298-302; Charles S. Johnson. "The Negro Population of Waterbury, Connecticut, continued." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 11 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 338-342; Charles S. Johnson. "Some Economic Aspects of Negro Migrations." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 5, no. 10 (1927, Klaus Reprint 1969): 297-298; Charles S. Johnson. "The Social Philosophy of Booker T. Washington." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 4 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 102-105; and Charles S. Johnson. "Negro Workers in Los Angeles." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 8 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 234-240.

²²¹ Charles S. Johnson. Review of *Trend of the Races*, by George E. Hawkes. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 1 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 28; Charles S. Johnson. Review of *Nigger*, by Clement Wood. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 1 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 30; Charles S. Johnson. Review of *The Fire in the Flint*, by Walter F. White. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 2, no. 23 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 344-345; Charles S. Johnson. Review of *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro*, by Newbell Niles Puckett. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 4, no. 46 (1926, Klaus Reprint 1969): 324-324; Charles S. Johnson. Review of *Who's Who in Colored America*, by Joseph J. Boris. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 5, no. 10 (1927, Klaus Reprint 1969): 307-308; Charles S. Johnson. Review of *The American Negro*, by Melville Herskovits. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 6 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 183; Charles S. Johnson. Review of *Health and Wealth*, by Louis I. Dublin. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 6 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 276; and Charles S. Johnson. Review of *Bibliography of the Negro*, by Monroe N. Work. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 6 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 276-277.

contributors).²²² Seven of these articles were written for the first volume alone; thereafter, it appears content proved bountiful enough for Johnson to focus on editing, surveys for the National Urban League, and organizing/promoting – “sidelines activism.” Johnson’s first article within *Opportunity*, “Mental Measurements of Negro Groups (1923),” appeared within issue 1.2. Thoroughly revisionist, liberally individualistic, and deeply quantitative in nature and tone, this article perfectly sums Johnson’s editorial writing style in its first iteration. Johnson begins the piece by challenging previously held racial assumptions among so-called experts of intelligence, a “vague, uncertain, and indefinable quality”:

It was possible at least in this field to experiment, classify and deduce fundamental differences between the white and Negro groups with little or no risk. For on the one hand, the results invariably supplied the proof of a superiority already assumed, and on the other hand such assertions were always blessed with a singular freedom from effective protest.²²³

²²² For sake of comparison, the number of poems, pieces of non-fiction (stories and plays, etc.), and editorials per is as follows:

Volume 1: Poems (7); Non-fiction (5); Editorials (49)

Volume 2: Poems (17); Non-fiction (5); Editorials (59)

Volume 3: Poems (47); Non-fiction (NA*); Editorials (64)

Volume 4: Poems (59); Non-fiction (15); Editorials (74)

Volume 5: Poems (53); Non-fiction (NA*); Editorials (64)

Volume 6: Poems (49); Non-fiction (10); Editorials (44)

Volume 7: Poems (39); Non-fiction (13); Editorials (39)

Volume 8: Poems (52); Non-fiction (10); Editorials (47)

**In volumes 3 and 5, non-fiction pieces were assumed into the sections “Articles and Fiction” and “Articles,” respectively; as such, a count is not (currently) available*

Such a comparison might yield relative levels of artistic and editorial engagement by volume and by editor (noting Elmer Anderson Carter took over starting with volume 6.10). Reading the data, *Opportunity* started out relatively less artistic in focus (with articles largely focused on sociological, economic matters which occasionally glanced toward artistry) and slowly became more committed to publicizing/publishing art across mediums by Black Americans. With Carter’s tenure, the number of poems and editorials dipped slightly, but eventually remained essentially level with those from Johnson’s tenure.

²²³ Charles S. Johnson. “Mental Measurements of Negro Groups,” 21.

These were some of the first words to which Charles S. Johnson signed his name within *Opportunity*. And with them, Johnson was already engaging in public criticism which would last his entire life and career. Gone were the days of such sanctioned scientific racism – and rightfully so! – and Johnson himself felt the weight of responsibility to bring true scientific knowledge to the masses. The article is, in essence, a debunking of historical evidence which supposedly proved the cranial inferiority of Black people, “evidence” which, only fifty years prior, Johnson writes, was used to deny the humanity of Black Americans,²²⁴ and recent (pseudo-) scientific studies with deeply racist, and deeply faulty conclusions. Johnson undertakes an incredible counterargument against a 1913 study by Dr M. J. Mayo of the Public Schools of New York City, which concluded with the following statistics on “comparative grading reached” by white and Black students:

		Percentage Making Grade ²²⁵						
	Number of Cases	D-	D	D-	C	C+	B	A
Whites	93,973	7.0	17.1	23.8	25.0	15.0	8.0	4.1
Negroes	18,891	49.0	29.7	12.9	5.7	2.0	0.6	0.1

Although these scores were likely accurate, Johnson expresses seven “grave reservations” about attributing the findings to racial differences and instead suggests socio-political influences, not racial essentialism, are the cause for the discrepancy.²²⁶ He then offers evidence for these

²²⁴ Charles S. Johnson. “Mental Measurements of Negro Groups,” 21.

²²⁵ Charles S. Johnson. “Mental Measurements of Negro Groups,” 23.

²²⁶ “If these differences are racial,” Johnson writes,” the following would most likely be true:

(a) The differences would tend to be constant

(b) The differences would apply equally to Negroes living in the North and South, most especially in the case of Southern-born Negroes living in the North or Northern-born Negroes living in the South.

reservations, at one point mounting an especially effective economic assault on the findings (and any possible racial conclusion), posting this set of figures:

*Comparative Expenditures for White and Colored Students in Southern States*²²⁷

	White	Colored
Alabama	\$9.41	\$1.78
Georgia	9.58	1.76
Louisiana	13.73	1.31
South Carolina	10.00	1.44

The error, Johnson writes, is that the administrators of this testing “assumed that [the Black students] were exposed to the same experiences.”²²⁸ Educational, experiential, and *especially* economic factors affected the scores and grades these students achieved. Racial factors did not determine what they *could* achieve. Decidedly, Johnson notes that the “[Black] recruits of Camp Lewis [in Tacoma, Washington], for example, registered complete superiority over the [white recruits] of Camp Gordon [near Augusta, Georgia], Camp Meade [in Maryland], and Camp Pike [near Little Rock, Arkansas],”²²⁹ essentially ending any debate on the source of the differences observed in Dr Mayo’s statistics. “Mental Measurements of Negro Groups” demonstrates

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- (c) The differences would apply equally to rural and urban Negroes
 - (d) The difference would be based upon ability to learn rather than upon information
 - (e) The rating would not be seriously altered by extended time of the tests or by repeating them
 - (f) The two groups would have been tested under similar conditions
 - (g) The same experiences would have been assumed”

Charles S. Johnson. “Mental Measurements of Negro Groups,” 24.

²²⁷ Charles S. Johnson. “Mental Measurements of Negro Groups,” 25.

²²⁸ Charles S. Johnson. “Mental Measurements of Negro Groups,” 25.

²²⁹ Charles S. Johnson. “Mental Measurements of Negro Groups,” 25.

Charles S. Johnson's commitment to *Opportunity's* liberal project through its studied determination to undo racialized misinformation with leveled education.

And Johnson's other articles in volume 1 continue this commitment. "Negroes at Work in Baltimore, Maryland," and both iterations of "The Negro Population of Waterbury, Connecticut," are exhaustively detailed "industrial surveys" of the two cities, with statistics on the disproportionate access available to nonwhite citizens to upper-level positions and those less physically demanding. Just as Johnson noted the inequities of national educational practices along racial lines, these studies reinforce the socio-economic imbalance(s) evident in these (and likely most, if not all) American communities. "Public Opinion and the Negro," which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, similarly seeks to dismantle previously held beliefs about Black Americans. "After Garvey—What?" details the criminal career of Jamaican political activist, Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), the so-called "Provisional President of Africa." In the article, Johnson argues that the persona that was Marcus Garvey was "a symbol—a symptom" for the specific type of separatist race consciousness then arising in lower-class Black Americans, "the intelligent as well as the ignorant."²³⁰ Johnson labeled the movement a "revanche," a pseudo-nationalistic reclamation, among "pure-Blood Negroes," Black Americans with no "white blood" whatsoever. While Johnson's project, too, was one of reclamation, in a

²³⁰ "Garveyism" was, in essence, a rebranded form of African/Black nationalism, coalesced into the individual of Marcus Garvey as leader. Tony Martin's lengthy entry on the movement in the *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* (2004) describes it, like any Black nationalism, as "articulated in contradistinction to integrationism." Johnson and his liberal peers sought to fix the inequities of the American system – not flee it or replace it entirely with something else. For this reason, the New Negro movement and the Garveyism movement were in direct opposition in their approaches. Charles S. Johnson. "After Garvey—What?," 232; and Tony Martin. "Garveyism." *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, 2004, 424-429, at 425.

sense – reclamation of the liberal rights and public privileges Black Americans deserved –

Johnson opposed this movement, ultimately concluding:

But it must also be remembered that this restlessness will express itself in some way. Dreaming was, to say the least, a harmless substitute or adventure and the satisfaction of long cherished but repressed desires... The sources of this discontent must be remedied effectively and now, or this accumulating energy and unrest, blocked off from its dreams, will take another direction.²³¹

“After Garvey—What?” reiterates Johnson’s commitment to a procedurally liberal project. A modernist, not an avant-gardist, Johnson sought to chip away at the inequities of the public sphere, not replace it with something new entirely.

Lastly in volume 1, “How Much Is The Migration A Flight From Persecution?” is a deeply fascinating pairing of Johnson’s sociological problem-solving and C. M. Battey’s deeply affective modernist photography. Johnson opens the article with several motivating factors behind the (Great) “Migration” currently ongoing in the 1920s, emphatically placing “[d]esire for more wages and more regular wages” and “better social treatment” atop the list.²³² Johnson continues his liberal endeavor with this article, quickly chiding racial generalizations in the second paragraph²³³ and ultimately arguing for the purposeful living engaged by most Black Americans. Though “[p]ersecution plays its part—a considerable one...,” Johnson writes, “this part seems to be limited.”²³⁴ Rather, Johnson argues, Black Americans were leaving their previous homes, moving North and West and even further South, “deserting soil which cannot

²³¹ Charles S. Johnson. “After Garvey—What?,” 233.

²³² Charles S. Johnson. “How Much Is The Migration A Flight From Persecution?,” 272.

²³³ “All Negroes (no more than all whites) are not uniformly sensitive to their social environment.” Johnson here emphasizes the capability of each individual central to liberalism’s tenets. Charles S. Johnson. “How Much Is The Migration A Flight From Persecution?,” 272.

²³⁴ Charles S. Johnson. “How Much Is The Migration A Flight From Persecution?,” 272.

yield returns in proportion to their population increase.”²³⁵ Black Americans were not driven, without agency, from their homes by persecution; as Johnson here argues, these families seized the opportunities available to them elsewhere in search for a better (or at least more fulfilling life). The bulk of the essay is driven by statistical analysis, again in keeping with Johnson’s personal style. Johnson argues for the idealization of city life over the “monotony and uncertainty of agricultural life;” details the geographical dimensions of the migration; notes the contemporaneous racial similarities in “trend of mobility” between white and Black Americans; undermines the claim of persecution as driving force by examining lynching statistics; and ultimately suggests a path forward suiting Johnson’s professed and performed values.²³⁶ “Knowing just why [Black Americans] left the South,” Johnson concludes, will help in “making their adjustment easier.”²³⁷ He continues:

The thought of flight from persecution excites little sympathy either from the practical employer or the northern white population among whom these [Black Americans] will hereafter live. Every man who runs is not a good worker and from the point of view of the [Black Americans] who have come, they cannot sustain themselves long on sympathy.²³⁸

Johnson’s conclusion here introduces us to his personal brand of self-actualization in relatively concrete terms, and it offers a strong iteration of New Negro citizenship incarnate, as it resonates with the future-minded prescriptions made by *Opportunity* more generally, especially under during Johnson’s tenure. Additionally, it reinforces Johnson’s (and the New Negro movement at large) intentional deviation from purely sentimental appeals – as discussed in chapter 1. Rather than relying on pity (by carrying a past of persecution), Johnson here prescribes level-headed

²³⁵ Charles S. Johnson. “How Much Is The Migration A Flight From Persecution?,” 272.

²³⁶ Charles S. Johnson. “How Much Is The Migration A Flight From Persecution?,” 272-4.

²³⁷ Charles S. Johnson. “How Much Is The Migration A Flight From Persecution?,” 274.

²³⁸ Charles S. Johnson. “How Much Is The Migration A Flight From Persecution?,” 274.

determination – especially one publicly presented and displayed for neighbors and potential employers to see. We can add this level-headed determination to Johnson's running *performative* definition of New Negro citizenship, especially through the acts such a citizen should undertake. The New Negro citizen ought to read and write meaningfully, and they ought to carry this rationality into their public-facing relationships with their peers: theirs is the future-oriented purposeful action, not the past of persecution. If there were an "Old Negro" persona or state of mind, it would be defined by this persecution, this suffering, among other contrasting characteristics.

This suffering is something C. M. Battey, a cutting-edge modernist photographer, was particularly well-positioned to capture. The photograph accompanying the article, entitled "Compensation" (1923), is included on the following page.

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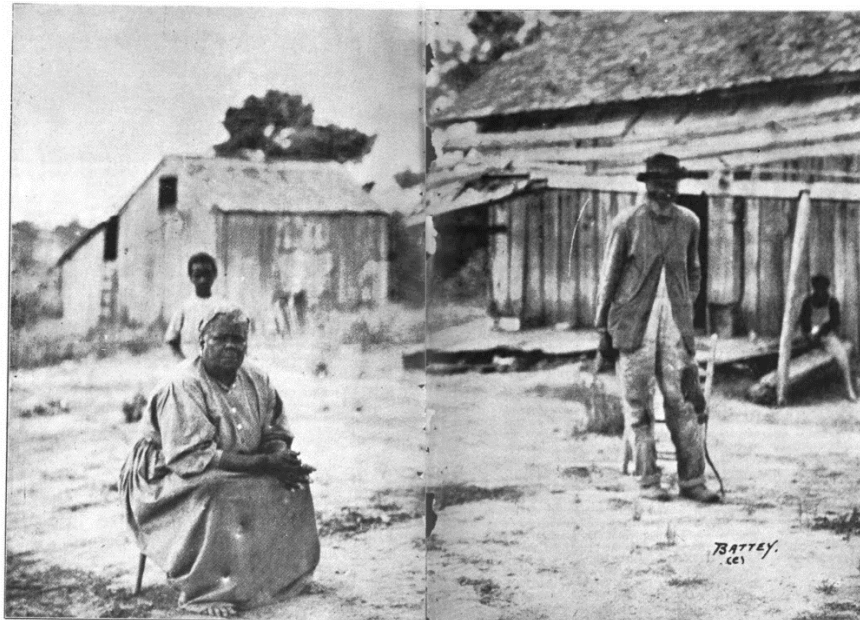
How Much is the Migration a Flight from Persecution?

By Charles S. Johnson

Desire for more wages and more regular wages, for better social treatment, improved cultural surroundings; the hysteria of a mass movement; simple curiosity and desire for travel and adventure, and free railroad tickets, all have played their part in the divorce of the southern Negro from the land of his birth.

Reasons are one thing; motives another. The former with all persons are likely to be merely a rationalization of behavior, while the latter usually play first role in inspiring the behavior. All Negroes (no more than all whites) are not uniformly sensitive to their social environment. And altho emphasis upon the pernicious nature of the social environment of southern Negroes should and doubtless will have the effect of improving it, such emphasis is apt to obscure what seem to be even more vital issues and more substantial elements of Negro character. After all, it means more that the Negroes who left the South were motivated more by the desire to improve their economic status than by fear of being man-handled by unfriendly whites. The one is a symptom of wholesome and substantial life purpose; the other, the symptom of a fugitive in-courageous opportunism. Persecution plays its part—a considerable one. But when the whole of the migration of southern Negroes is considered, this part seems to be limited. It is indeed more likely that Negroes, like all others with a spark of ambition and self-interest, have been deserting

soil which cannot yield returns in proportion to their population increase. The Census of 1920 indicated that the rate of Negro increase declined



"COMPE-
NSATION"
There is to take
As just keeps it
or and have such pay.
fe, from day to day.

from 18.0 for the decade 1890-1900, to 11.2 for the next, and to 6.5 for the last. This does not mean that fewer children are being born, for actually more Negro than white babies per fam-

ily are being born, but that more of them are dying. This desertion of the soil has taken three distinct directions: (a) urbanization—a species

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of migration; (b) quest for more productive lands; (c) transplantation to industrial communities, practically all of which are in the North. During the past thirty years, 1890-1920, there has been an increase in the rural population of 896,124 Negroes as compared with 2,078,331 for cities. The urban increase has been just about 100 per cent as rapid as the rural. In 1890, 19.8 per cent of the Negro population lived in cities; in 1920, this proportion grew to about 40 per cent. In the Southern States, between 1890-1900, the rural population increased 13.6 per cent, and between 1910 and 1920 it actually decreased 3.3 per cent. The Negro population increase in southern cities, considered as a whole, has been greater than the increase in the North, despite the half-million added during the last decade. Here, of course, is the economic factor at work, hand in hand, with greater mobility, increased transportation, restlessness and the monotony and uncertainty of agricultural life ever against the allurements of the city.

The greatest inter-state movements of southern Negroes have been further South and West. In 1910, 52.3 per cent of the migration from Southern States was to the area west of the Mississippi; while in 1920, after the tremendous migration to the North, 42.9 per cent were living in the Southwestern States as compared with 42.2 per cent living in the North and West. For 130 years the center of the Negro population moved steadily some 428 miles toward the southwest—from Dinwiddie county, Va., to northern Alabama. This shifting is further evident in the insta-

The passage below it reads:

“COMPENSATION”

Theirs is to labor and have such pay,
As just keeps life, from day to day.²³⁹

The photo, taken in an unknown location on an unknown date, captures a scene of relative squalor, featuring four Black individuals, a woman crouched in the foreground to the center-left with a young boy mostly obscured behind her, a gray-bearded man standing before a chair to the right, and, at the photo’s right margins, a young man sitting in the distance beside a barn under a nearly collapsing wooden awning. Knowing nothing of these people, it is impossible to say anything of their situation with certainty. However, I can safely say the impact the photograph has on me is one of great pause. I cannot see the photograph without associating the bold word from the headline immediately above it (“**Persecution**”) with what I am seeing. The persecution may not be direct; these individuals are not enslaved, as they or their ancestors may have been a few dozen years earlier, but I get the combined feeling that these individuals have been **persecuted** systemically – as the dense facts and figures of Johnson’s previously discussed articles evidence. As Black Americans before Johnson and his peers testified, notably Frederick Douglass during the era of American slavery, and as Johnson himself continued to testify: Black Americans, historically, in Johnson’s time, and even still today in remnants, did not and do not have the same level of access to the liberal (print) public sphere because of its racialized practices and prerequisites. This inequity was the catalyst of the New Negro movement’s modernist project and Johnson’s personal philosophy. And this rescinded access works/worked as a sort of persecution, comparatively preventing nonwhite Americans from achieving the same level of or access to life, liberty, and happiness as their white peers. This persecution was not

²³⁹ Charles S. Johnson. “How Much Is The Migration A Flight From Persecution?,” 272-3.

definitive of the Black Americans portrayed in “Compensation,” nor did it prevent them from “rising above” their current situation; but this schism between the Old and New was definitive. The New Negro citizen was defined by their (cap)ability to transcend and/or overcome previous racialized social limitations inequitably imposed upon Black Americans. As Johnson writes, the New Negro citizen’s future is not defined by this/their persecution, but rather the brightness of their future, one’s commitment to that future, and one’s determination to manifest it through measured, rational action traditionally embraced by prototypical liberal practitioners. Battey’s photograph draws our eyes to this definitive schism as it instills in us readers a sense-changing empathy only the photographic image can provide – these early photographs literally changed the way their viewers saw the world and racialized subjects within it.²⁴⁰ In its powerful plainness, Battey’s photograph instantly and clearly captures the message of Johnson’s article (which it greatly overshadows on the page): Black Americans were migrating not out of fear, but to improve their station(s) in life; not persecution, but opportunity was the cause.

However, it bears mentioning that within this schism, there is still a profound respect. Once again, the “New Negro” and the individuals pictured in Battey’s photograph have no *essential* differences, only circumstantial, and any New Negro citizen ought to revere their ancestors and their work in preemptively supporting the project of modernism. The New Negro movement could not exist without the “invisible” labor of those who ventured toward liberty and equality before – or even simply *survived* – just as liberalism’s public practices, including debate

²⁴⁰ See the discussion of Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith’s scholarship in the introduction. Photographs such as Battey’s “did more than simply reflect in substance and shadow the wider social, political, and material calculus of the Atlantic world. They conditioned a modern way of seeing.” Maurice O. Wallace, and Shawn Michelle Smith. “Introduction.” *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012, 1-17, at 3.

and publishing, could not exist without the “invisible” work done by women and people of color in private. True to the modernist project, the people within this photograph *deserved* to be photographed.²⁴¹ Just as the eponymous stone-breakers in Gustave Courbet’s canonically catalyzing “The Stone Breakers” (1849), the labor of life undertaken by the subjects of this photograph made them worthy of celebration in this way, through this medium. Their humanity alone had earned them the cost of materials and labor. Per Puchner, “Compensation” performatively defines the driving characteristics of the New Negro movement while drawing due attention to the work put in by innumerable (yet honorably and actively remembered) champions of the past.

Outside volume 1, Johnson wrote three additional articles for *Opportunity* during his tenure as editor. One, “Negro Workers in Los Angeles” (1928), was the published results of a survey Johnson led, similar to those already briefly referenced. Another, “Some Economic Aspects of Negro Migrations” (1927), adds to the conclusions Johnson came to concerning the migration of Black Americans during the twentieth century. Johnson writes of his “almost certain conviction” that “the migrations of [Black Americans] have been economic at base” – that is, “the gross fluctuations... have occurred primarily in response to changing national industrial fortunes.”²⁴² In concluding, Johnson notes ten “questions and problems” “without elaboration,” with the positive points of note among them being that “[o]ver a half-million new votes have been enfranchised” and that “[e]xposure to the North has increased healthcare, literacy for

²⁴¹ Just as modernists attempted to realize the liberal, Enlightenment ideal among the largest possible population, the most possible people, I argue Johnson and Battey here sought to apply the inherent humanism and valuation of realism to underrepresented populations.

²⁴² Charles S. Johnson. “Some Economic Aspects of Negro Migrations,” 297.

children, and cultural contacts for both children and adults.”²⁴³ Here, Johnson again reiterates his commitment to not only personal action but proper social, governmental support in the name of nonwhite self-actualization in America. The remaining article, “The Social Philosophy of Booker T. Washington,” is a memorial piece of sorts, written thirteen years after the seminal figure’s passing, which captures an idyllic set of personal prescriptions for individual action in the form of Washington’s legendary life and his “social philosophy.” In a rather convoluted (not-so-) hypothetical, Johnson outlines Washington’s social philosophy through a narrative worth repeating in full here (with additional emphasis included by me), as it so closely resembles something like a pathway which Johnson himself might suggest toward Black American self-actualization:

If the coldly dispassionate judgment of a philosopher or social psychologist, with no racial theories at stake, were sought in advice as to the calculating diplomacy required to establish a submerged group of former slaves on a plane of equality with their former masters, who both hated and despised them he would quite reasonably argue thus:

In the first place, passions cannot be argued with; the meeting of defiant passion with resistant passion never brings peace but conflict which ends inevitable without conviction.

Beliefs disparaging to the weaker group which have grown up over hundreds of years until they crystallized into traditions, cannot be swept away by mere assertions of their falsity, however false they may be. They must be proved objectively, and this proof can best proceed when the emotional resistance to proof is diverted.

When there is fear that the weaker group will destroy the integrity of the stronger or threaten its self-interest, if freely admitted to equality with it, this fear more than any other passion, will lead to desperate measures, and no movement of the weaker group, however exalted in its principles can succeed rapidly until the fears are by some means quieted, or entirely dissipated.

This philosopher would probably advise, as a first step, the allaying of these fears by any means at hand which did not compromise manhood. He would advise taking hold of these strangely effective “symbols” and “myths” which have been most potent in promoting an aggressive racial solidarity in the

²⁴³ Charles S. Johnson. “Some Economic Aspects of Negro Migrations,” 299.

stronger group, stripping them of their most horrid features when these features are not immediately required, to give them most acceptable content. **A force is a force by whatever name it is called. And if to the stronger group “social equality” in its most obnoxious sense means a matter of eating together, and to the weaker group means the acquirement of a status which if carried out would make eating together a simple matter of course, it is the surer wisdom to expend energy on the status and let human nature take its inevitable course.** This philosopher would reasonably argue that since men hold passionately to opinions which are founded upon intangible emotions, the wiser strategy would shift proof from a subjective to an objective plane, from immaterial belief to visual reality. Such a diplomacy would select from the “emotional clusters,” the most favorable features and extend their implications, and it would spare itself the energy of combatting unfavorable features futilely by the expedient of pointing out, to the strong group, the self-destructive qualities inherent in them. It would as frequently as possible divert unpleasant attention from itself, by directing attention to greater “menaces.” It would deprive the stronger group of the satisfaction it might get through insults, by developing the defensive coating of a sense of humor; it would rid the inferior position of that debasement which engenders scorn, by deliberately rationalizing this position into one which gave its enemy no satisfaction. It would constantly divert attention from abstract and undefinable theories while it laid an unmoveable foundation at the base of this scorn.

And of what should such a foundation consist:

- 1. Security in the possession of land**
- 2. Security in the possession of wealth**
- 3. Security in the possession of skill**
- 4. Security in the possession health**
- 5. Security in the possession of a sound education**
- 6. Sensitiveness to beauty and order²⁴⁴**

These, when they are analyzed are precisely the foundations of abiding culture and civilization. The end, if carried through, would be a radically improved status and acceptance, and in the effort, the weaker group would have the greater spur of deliberate design and intention. The passions conserved might burst forth in creative art and intellectual employments; command of emotions could bring superiority to the silent conflict; security of wealth, by all the economic laws which we worship today, brings respect; security of health brings strength and resistance. This, in its principal outline was actually the social philosophy of Washington.

²⁴⁴ The *materiality* of this list should be noted. These are deeply liberal values and prerequisites, but they also resonate with some tenets of Marxist criticism: the material requirements of any individual's existence must be met before they can self-actualize and participate socially/publicly.

This, being the social philosophy of Booker T. Washington in outline, was also, in essence, the road map for the intentionality behind *Opportunity*, as well as a checklist for personal practice in order to ensure “radically improved status and acceptance” for oneself and one’s nonwhite peers, as authored by Charles S. Johnson. Johnson’s approach is, first and foremost, objective. In the face of “traditions [which] cannot be swept away by mere assertions of their falsity,” Johnson was leveled and rational, approaching each new problem or obstacle with logic and figures. And this commitment to rationality can also be seen in his espousal of realism as vessel for the performative definition of New Negro personhood. Moreover, Johnson *knew* his actions and those of his peers would spur hateful action in those most reluctant to acknowledge the individuality of Black Americans and facilitate their equitable public participation. As such, the first step is the “allaying of these fears by any means at hand,” so long as those means did not compromise one’s “manhood,” or humanity. Johnson would respond to anti-liberal action with patience and forgiveness, a willingness to bend to many demands and to make piecemeal progress – yet in this tolerance, Johnson held tight to the liberal rights endowed him by his own humanity and, more substantially, by the US Constitution. The middle section of this narrative outlines Johnson’s foundational objectives: the New Negro movement was out for more than simply “eating together.” The goal was **status**, a status which “would make eating together a simple matter of course.” Johnson sought for *all* Black Americans, not only those “sufficiently well[-]educated and cultured enough to argue for their rights.”²⁴⁵

The remainder of the article is largely biographical in tone, and Johnson uses the opportunity to bullet-point definitive characteristics of Washington’s persona which readers might emulate in their pursuit of acceptance. These bullet points are: “He advocated conciliatory

²⁴⁵ Charles S. Johnson. “The Social Philosophy of Booker T. Washington,” 102.

rather than aggressive tactics in race relations;” “He advocated the ownership of land and home and the development of business;” “He emphasized the dignity of work;” “He advocated beginning boldly at the beginnings with the elements of education;” “He was an objectivist;” and “He refused to stress politics.”²⁴⁶ These values are decidedly liberal. “Conciliatory” discourse, as opposed to anti-liberal (possibly violent) action, is a central tenet of liberalism. As are its deeply connected commitment to capitalism and private property, its valuation of work, a proper education, and the pursuit of objectivism. Even Johnson’s final point fits into a liberal paradigm: he highlights that the enfranchisement of Black Americans occurs not through politicking but when voting Black Americans “wanted elected men who in character were superior to those who rose to power thru ignorance and chance.” Continuing the theme of active self-actualization present implicitly in these examples, Johnson’s prescription here suggests that **status** was not a gift to be given, but a right to be claimed – it would not passively fall into the laps of Black Americans. The modernist project would require energy to be input. This right to self-creation, too, is a liberal tenet.

Johnson’s book reviews contain fewer raw materials for harvesting printed prescriptions for personal action; however, they are not entirely lacking. The very metatextual act of reviewing a book is intrinsically liberal and aptly befitting the informed New Negro paragon. The choice of books, too, carries semiotic significance. Most of the books Johnson reviewed for *Opportunity* were sociological in focus. I’m notably intrigued by his review of Monroe N. Work’s *A Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America* (1928), both because the practice of collecting books is historically connected to liberal-sentimentalism (as seen reembodyed in *Opportunity*’s long-running “Our Bookshelf” segment) and because Johnson personally kept a sixty-nine-page

²⁴⁶ Charles S. Johnson. “The Social Philosophy of Booker T. Washington,” 104-105.

“Annotated Bibliography of Books by and about the Negro” (c. 1931)²⁴⁷ – evidently this was a practice and point of focus centrally important to Johnson. Additionally, Johnson reviewed two novels: Clement Wood’s unfortunately titled *Nigger* (1922) and *The Fire in the Flint* (1924) by Walter F. White. Novels, especially, have a distinctly liberal-sentimental history and they connote these values (to me, personally, at any rate).²⁴⁸ Johnson’s allusion to and engagement of this framework is intentional, a tactic for achieving that aforementioned **status**. Johnson’s review of Wood’s novel is... “political,” but positive. That is, he is careful with his words. The novel has its faults, certainly – the name alone does little to promote empathy and the humanity of Black Americans – but Johnson concludes that “the story is serious, honest, and tremendously impressive—a real tragedy.”²⁴⁹ Importantly, he continues: “The [Black American subject] is pictured as a human being capable of some aspirations and standards enough to feel disappointment over failure to attain them.”²⁵⁰ Crucially, Wood’s novel, to Johnson, portrays Black characters of aptitude and aspirations with self-awareness. These characters *could*, hypothetically, follow and employ the practices of the New Negro paradigm in an attempt to self-actualize – this is the key. As such, Wood’s novel is passable, recommendable, perhaps despite its title. Johnson’s review of *The Fire in the Flint* is more shining: the book is, in a sense, a battleground for New Negro ideals. Johnson writes that in Wood’s novel a “tradition is rudely

²⁴⁷ Charles S. Johnson. “An Annotated Bibliography of Books by and about the Negro” (c. 1931). Box 208, folder 2. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

²⁴⁸ Habermas himself also argues that novels and the rise of reading culture founded the rise of the public sphere. See section 7 of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Jürgen Habermas. “The Public Sphere in the World of Letters in Relation to the Public Sphere in the Political Realm.” *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989, 51-56.

²⁴⁹ Charles S. Johnson. Review of *Nigger*, by Clement Wood, 30.

²⁵⁰ Charles S. Johnson. Review of *Nigger*, by Clement Wood, 30.

broken” – unlike older, inauthentic stories about Black life which featured characters who preserved the very traditions that oppressed them out of “necessary measure of self-preservation,” *The Fire in the Flint* was able to “capture the essence” of a lived experience “so familiar to [Black Americans], so incomprehensible to others.”²⁵¹ The story centers around a relatively well-off Black family; the son, Kenneth Harper, returns home from Harvard, a graduate and surgeon, to practice. The other members of the family are similarly presentable, even – to an extent – brother Bob, “a sensitive, impulsive youth, [who] lacked [Kenneth’s] tolerance and hopefulness though he managed to keep his emotions in leash.”²⁵² Johnson continues with a sufficiently enticing summary of the plot:

Through the muck of a small town’s petty chicaneries and sexual adventure, gossip, Ku Klux parties, the story ran. Kenneth’s fight for self-respect was a losing one. Faith in his philosophy bit by bit was worn down. Landlords robbed their Negro tenants and dared them to complain, the “best citizens” including the sheriff were members of the Ku Klux Klan. His organization of farmers to handle their crop was interpreted as dangerous agitation. Calamity trooped down on his family. Mamie was outraged by two of the town’s popular young bloods. Bob’s restraint broke. In his blinding rage he killed his sister’s assailants as they boasted of their frolic to a hilarious group of their friends lounging about Ewing’s store, and in turn Bob was killed by a mob. The citizenry aroused, determined to end Kenneth’s obnoxious interference in affairs. The chance came as he left the bedside of his white patient in the Ewing home. On the ready assumption that his mission had been sex adventure, they whetted their passions and killed him.²⁵³

The plot contains familiar touchstones for any respectable early-twentieth-century race novel, and it presents a traceable lineage back to stories such as “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” Johnson even mentions Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel in his concluding evaluation of the novel, ultimately noting it was a “trail blazer, an epoch marker” like its predecessor, yet it “lacks the charm” of the

²⁵¹ Charles S. Johnson. Review of *The Fire in the Flint*, by Walter F. White, 344. In the same sentence as the final quote, Johnson notes this novel’s superiority over Wood’s.

²⁵² Charles S. Johnson. Review of *The Fire in the Flint*, by Walter F. White, 344.

²⁵³ Charles S. Johnson. Review of *The Fire in the Flint*, by Walter F. White, 345.

Stowe's American masterpiece.²⁵⁴ Ultimately, Johnson's book reviews paint a picture of true liberal practice and public performance: he digested notable pieces of culture and evaluated them from a perspective constructed of liberal values (self-ownership, guiding reason, a commitment to capitalism) – and he did so publicly, for all the world to see.

As do the journal's many editorials. As mentioned earlier, *Opportunity* featured dozens of editorials of indiscernible authorship during Johnson's editorial tenure. Although it's perhaps most likely these were penned by Johnson himself as sole editor of the journal, they are unsigned; and other figures (such as Countee Cullen) held editorial duties throughout these volumes – although Cullen not officially until volume 5.²⁵⁵ As such, I am uncomfortable assigning authorship without qualification. Additionally, the breadth of these editorials is impossible to unpack within the frame of this dissertation. Yet these pieces still contain pertinent,

²⁵⁴ Charles S. Johnson. Review of *The Fire in the Flint*, by Walter F. White, 345.

²⁵⁵ Cullen's promotion to Assistant Editor was announced in issue 4.47, in the penultimate editorial for that issue:

OPPORTUNITY is pleased to announce the addition to its staff of Countee Cullen, poet and author of *COLOR*, with whose extraordinary literary competence, particularly in the field of poetry, our readers are already acquainted. Mr. Cullen is not merely a leading Negro poet, but ranks in the first magnitude of the younger American poets. His coming to OPPORTUNITY we regard as both fortunate and significant, a step virtually decreed by the demands of that awakening generation to which this magazine, in many of its interests, has consistently addressed itself. Mr. Cullen will select the poetry and, in his office as assistant to the editor, counsel with that large and growing group of young writers of verse whose work is gradually breaking into light. His opinion on books and events of literary significance will appear regularly as a special new department, and there will be occasional articles and poetry from his pen. He is a graduate of New York University, holder of a Phi Beta Kappa Key, a Master of Arts from Harvard, one who, even as an undergraduate, was a contributor to practically all of the important literary magazines; thus he brings to OPPORTUNITY and its friends, and to the parent organization the National Urban League, rare gifts and a magnificent capacity for usefulness to the whole cause.

"Countee Cullen." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 4, no. 46 (1926, Klaus Reprint 1969): 3.

valuable case studies for this investigation. As such, in this cursory evaluation, I will consider (mostly) examples directly pertaining to other media, especially pieces of print and performance, or those directly related to liberal practices. As with the general trend with *Opportunity's* content, the journal's editorials became increasingly more artistic in focus as the years and Johnson's tenure (and personal philosophy) progressed. With the beginning of the *Opportunity* Literary Prize Contest in 1924, many of the artistically minded editorials in volumes were focused on introducing or explaining the contests and subsequently celebrating their winners. These introductory notes and these prize-winners as paragons contain useful prescriptions for artistically liberal personal practice, as did multiple other editorials from volumes 1-6 – especially in volumes 3-5, which appear to have been a sort of artistic awakening for the journal.

In volume 1, two editorials are particularly worthy of examination. The first (chronologically), “Romulus and Uncle Remus” (1923), is a deeply liberal editorial remarking on current events with a deep tie to popular literature. The title itself holds multiple allusions: “Romulus and Remus” being the legendary founders of Rome and “Uncle Remus” being a popular Jim Crow-era “character and central storytelling device” developed by Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908) in the eponymous serials of the same name from the late nineteenth century.²⁵⁶ Christopher Allen Varlack in *American Myths, Legends, and Tall Tales* describes the character as “a composite of elderly slaves Harris once encountered when he was thirteen years old,” noting that “Harris’s early stories were politically charged and laden with the harsh social and cultural criticisms of former slaves that were commonplace for the time.”²⁵⁷ These racialized criticisms have left the character mired in well-deserved criticism and controversy which, as

²⁵⁶ Christopher Allen Varlack. “Uncle Remus.” *American Myths, Legends, and Tall Tales: An Encyclopedia of American Folklore: Q-Z*, 2016, 977-979, at 977.

²⁵⁷ Christopher Allen Varlack. “Uncle Remus,” 977.

Varlack notes, has “extended into the twentieth century and even into the cultural conversations of the present day.”²⁵⁸ The editorial introduces recent official actions undertaken by the Governor of Mississippi (then Lee Maurice Russell (1875-1943), in office 1920-1924) to recognize and commemorate a lifetime of work done, in service of the state, by “Uncle” Lewis Malone, a deceased Black porter who was previously employed at the State Capitol. In his speech, Governor Russell is quoted to have championed Malone’s “many good traits and the fidelity and respect that he showed during his long life.”²⁵⁹ The author does not doubt that Malone was, in fact, a dutiful, respectable man with “many good traits,” however, they retort:

But it is no disrespect to [Malone’s] memory to venture that the governor, let us say, with his record for perhaps these same virtues, would not have been content to spend his life within the rigid economic and cultural circle that bounded “Uncle” Lewis Malone.²⁶⁰

The author balks at the governor’s words, because Malone and, in fact, *every* Black American – certainly the New Negro citizen – deserves more than traditionally allowed them, equality with their white peers at the very least. This, again, is *Opportunity*’s liberalism printed on the page: rejecting the limitations of “Uncle Remus” stereotypes and claiming ownership of a future filled with equitable possibility.

A photograph by C. M. Battey, published later in volume 2 of *Opportunity*, once again adds to the discourse begun by a piece of writing, complicating any over-simplified reading of the journal (and the entire New Negro movement)’s relationship to the character of Uncle Remus and the persona/paradigm that was the “Old Negro.” Battey’s “Yours Respectfully, Uncle

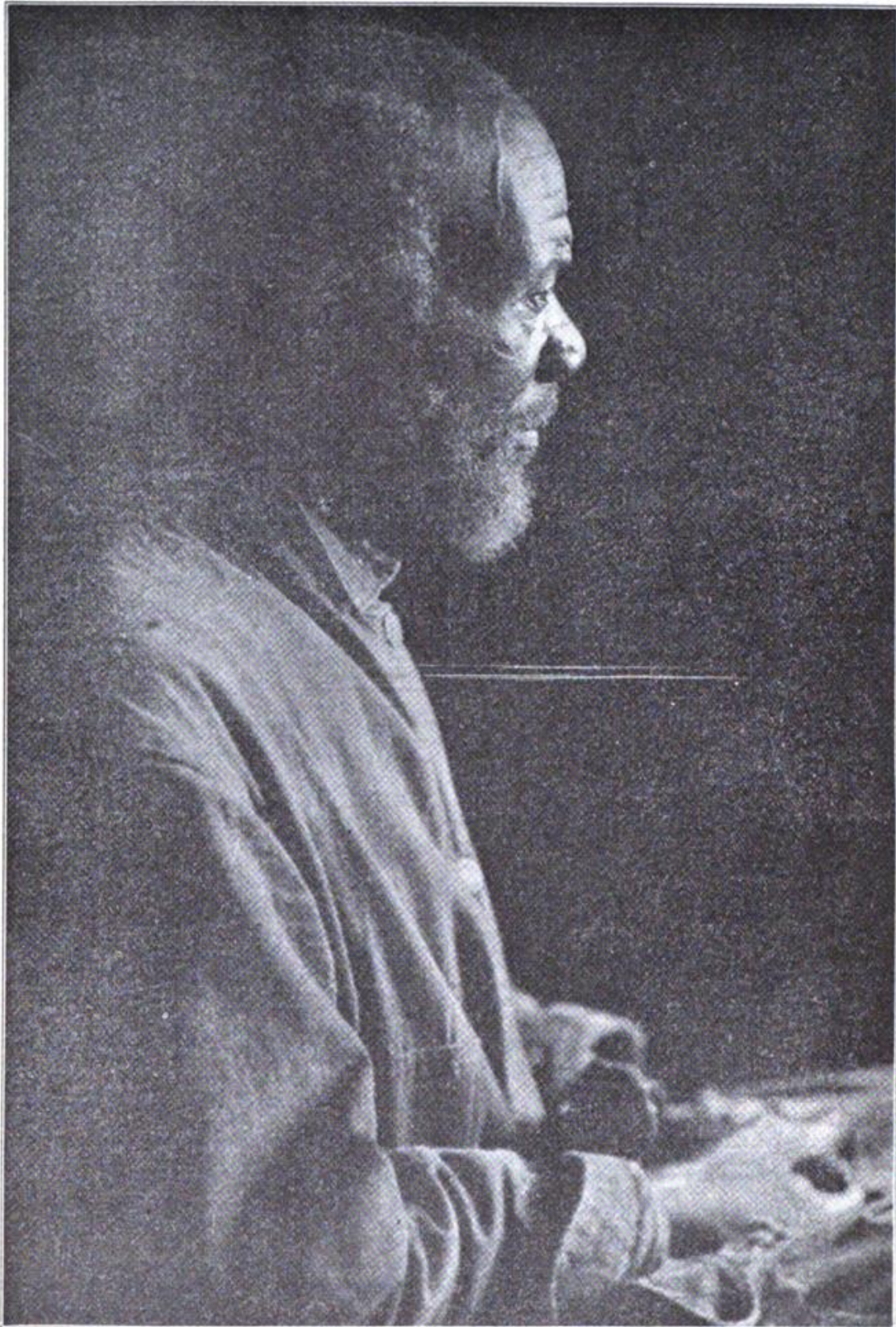
²⁵⁸ Christopher Allen Varlack. “Uncle Remus,” 978.

²⁵⁹ ““Romulus and Uncle Remus.”” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 7 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 195.

²⁶⁰ ““Romulus and Uncle Remus,”” 195.

Remus” (1924) was featured as the frontispiece to issue 2.15. It is included as reference on the next page. Visually similar to Battey’s other photography with its imposing shadows and stark contrast, the photograph depicts a well-lit, but weathered older Black man. He wears a utilitarian and rough, but well-kept, shirt and he holds his hands before him in a pose connoting praise or perhaps a plea. His surroundings are plain and mostly unseen. The photograph is included on the next page. Before reading the photograph and its use semiotically, it might prove useful to consider the only use of the term “Uncle Remus,” between Battey’s photograph and the aforementioned editorial: in an issue 1.12 review of Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923) by Montgomery Gregory, the author fondly references Joel Chandler Harris’s stories for being inspired by the stories of actual Black storytellers and not coming from a place of “bigotry and oppression.”²⁶¹ Gregory’s reference here reminds us that the unfortunate racial stereotypes and criticisms within Harris’s stories do not render them entirely valueless, nor do Uncle Remus’s caricatured characteristics negate the positive qualities inferred by references such as Governor Russell’s. As discussed earlier concerning Battey’s photo, “Compensation,” so, too, here does this photo show a requisite amount of respect for the subject of this photograph, one’s ancestors, and even the character of Uncle Remus, despite its complications. This photograph encapsulates the good-natured, “conciliatory” nature of Johnson’s brand of New Negro citizenship and personhood while also, crucially, signing off in its verbiage. “Respectfully yours” is used in closing, not opening a letter; so, too, does this photograph’s inclusion signal a respectful close of a previous era and the ushering in of the New Negro paragon/paradigm.

²⁶¹ Montgomery Gregory. Review of *Cane*, by Jean Toomer. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 12 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 374-375.



*Yours Respectfully,
"Uncle Remus"*

C. M. Battey

The second noteworthy editorial within volume 1, “Negro Life and Its Poets” (1923), celebrates young writers “with a technique that is modern, and with the burning enthusiasm of a new race”: Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Gwendolyn Bennett, and Langston Hughes.²⁶² The editorial quotes Robert T. Kerlin in stating that “a people that is producing poetry is not perishing, but is astir with life, with vital impulses, with life giving visions.”²⁶³ The sentiment is both liberal and questionably in spirit: art-making is the sign of a good life as it also prerequisite for (a good) life. This article, like “Yours Respectfully, Uncle Remus,” looks forward to a new generation. Perhaps no piece, however, is as future minded as any of the many editorials on *Opportunity*’s Literary Prize Contests, first introduced in 1924, within an advertisement/ editorial in issue 2.20. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these contests were initiated to “stimulate creative expression” among even more individuals within the new generation. And stimulate it did! The first contest received 732 manuscript submissions,²⁶⁴ so many that it bogged down *Opportunity*’s office and its volunteer judges until a May reveal date. Especially notable for this study, the author writes:

The significance of the plays may be sensed when one considers that the plays about [Black American] life available in this country may be counted on the fingers of one hand. The Contest brought to light about sixty-five, many of which have a distinct merit and are producible [sp].²⁶⁵

The Contest had achieved its goal in its very first iteration, and Johnson and his peers set their eyes immediately on future contests to continue spurring artistic production by Black Americans. Importantly, each of these potential case studies carries its respective set of printed (and possibly

²⁶² “Negro Life and Its Poets.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 12 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 355.

²⁶³ “Negro Life and Its Poets,” 195.

²⁶⁴ “The Contest.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 29 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 131.

²⁶⁵ “The Contest,” 131.

performed) prescriptions for New Negro practice. As such, I will be exploring the dramatic production of these contests in the following chapter in order to distill the prescriptions within each. For now, I would like to call attention to a tangential article surrounding the *Opportunity* Literary Prize Contests, printed immediately after the piece which introduced the success of the first contest, “The Debut of the Younger School of Negro Writers” (1924): Carl Van Doren’s “The Younger Generation of Negro Writers” (1924), as the article looks forward with prescriptive advice.

Van Doren’s article is hopeful and sincere, yet filled with a sort of scientific racism and essentialism unfortunately present in some of even the most allied white commentators from the period.²⁶⁶ However, it does retain a useful section of positive insight:

That [Black American] writers must long continue to be propagandists, I do not deny. The wrongs of their people are too close to them to be overlooked. But it happens that in this case the vulgar forms of propaganda are all unnecessary. The facts about [Black citizens] in the United States are themselves propaganda - devastating and unanswerable. A [Black] novelist who tells the simple story of any aspiring colored man or woman will call as with a bugle the minds of all just persons, white or [B]lack, to listen to him.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Several quotes from the piece don’t resonate quite as nicely as the penultimate prediction I quoted in the body:

Long-oppressed and handicapped, [Black Americans] have gathered stores of emotion and are ready to burst forth with a new eloquence once they discover adequate mediums [or, as he expresses later, “[o]nce they find a voice”]. Being, however, as a race not given to self-destroying bitterness, they will, I think, strike a happy balance between rage and complacency.

Or: “Richly gifted by nature with distinctive traits, they will be artists while they are being critics,” as these Black Americans “keep in their modes of utterance the sympathies, the memories, the rhythms of their ancient stock.” Carl Van Doren. “The Younger Generation of Negro Writers.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 29 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 144.

²⁶⁷ Carl Van Doren. “The Younger Generation of Negro Writers,” 145.

Here Van Doren rationalizes that there is, in a sense, a bit of “propaganda” inherent in these (and every) act(s) of Black publication, insofar as they have an individual motive and work to ensure its implementation. However, Van Doren also argues the US’s treatment of Black Americans cannot be observed and understood without instilling a sense of criticism and the desire for change within the observer. Within such stark circumstances, then, Black Americans, to Van Doren (and, I argue, to Johnson and his peers), need only tell the stories of their lived experience for white readers/listeners to be swayed to their modernist cause. Although this may have proven to have been somewhat optimistic, the sentiment is certainly central and definitive – *performatively* definitive – of the New Negro movement and Johnsons editorial endeavors.

The other editorials from *Opportunity*’s first seven volumes paint a similar picture and offer reiterated prescriptions for New Negro practice. As do Johnson’s many writings outside *Opportunity* from the era.²⁶⁸ As do the other pieces Johnson chose to be published during his editorship (perhaps unsurprisingly given the individual identity of the curator). The *performative* definition of the New Negro paragon/paradigm offered within *Opportunity* and its surrounding texts is one founded in metatextual action: reading, writing, discussing culture publicly. The New Negro citizen is founded upon liberal-sentimental values, beginning during the Enlightenment and flourishing during modernism. The New Negro artist has a diverse, long-running cultural memory to interrogate, reference, and from which to venture into new frontiers. The pieces of culture these artists and intellectuals create ought to be propagandistic in their intent to equalize the races, yet valued for the sake of their artistic expression alone; they ought to contain

²⁶⁸ See, for example, Charles S. Johnson. “Black Workers and The City.” *Survey Graphic* 6, no. 6 (1925, Black Classic Press Reprint 1980): 641-643; Charles S. Johnson. “The New Frontage of American Life.” *The New Negro*, edited by Alain Locke. New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925, 278-298; and Charles S. Johnson. “The Negro Enters Literature.” *The Carolina Magazine* 57, no. 7 (1927): 3-9, 44-48.

“unpleasant” characters to reinforce the notion that Black life of all sorts is worthy of theatricalization. Continuing outward, this art should be modernist, too, in its form and medium: artists ought to use new technologies to express themselves, relying on the strengths of each medium to ensure meaningful expression. The New Negro paragon is Enlightenment liberalism modernized, with crucial, *definitive* race-consciousness. Through editorial and article and book review and photograph, Charles S. Johnson and his peers within *Opportunity* promoted that New Negro paragon, *performatively* defining it, per Puchner’s terminology – that is, defining it through socially transformative practice.

Theatricality

Opportunity and its surrounding texts are filled with these textual “utterances” which *performatively* define and, in essence, *create* their audience, the New Negro citizen incarnate. But the authority required for such acts of *performative* creation varies significantly between audiences, due to the inherent hierarchies of Western publics and culture. It was one thing for Johnson to suggest (and actually enact) this brand of New Negro citizenship among a Black audience, his peers of equal social stature. It was another thing entirely to do so among a white audience – the dominant force in American culture, society, and politics. Johnson expounds on the reality of this situation in his speech and essay, “Public Opinion and the Negro” (1923), in which he comes to terms with the fact that “[t]here are certain physical facts that do not change” but also recommends methods for overcoming these barriers and dismantling their social structures: “[t]here are again, generalizations and theories built upon these assumed and actual

facts that do change as society develops.”²⁶⁹ Johnson speaks to the three “cardinal beliefs” about Black-bodied people (that they are “mentally inferior,” “immoral,” and “criminal”),²⁷⁰ details their institutionalized history, and ultimately seeks to discredit them and ensure their erasure through intelligent action by Black individuals under the New Negro moniker. Because Johnson is speaking to (mostly) Black readers in a dominantly white medium, and because he wishes to also speak effectively to the white readers that *do* happen to open a copy of *Opportunity*, he must be very planned in his theatrical imagination and enactment of New Negro identity. In Puchnerian terms, Johnson performatively creates New Negro identity via the very white substrate of publication, but theatrically must assume the efficacy of his work and the eventual enactment of an accepted, publicly discoursing Black public in order to even found the possibility of his success.

Some of Johnson’s work is more performative than it is theatrical – and, not coincidentally, these appear to take on the affect of “more white” and “more Black,” respectively – for me as reader, at least.²⁷¹ Much of Johnson’s own writing, such as “The Rise of the Negro

²⁶⁹ Charles S. Johnson. “Public Opinion and the Negro.” *Opportunity Reader: Stories, Poetry, and Essays from the Urban League’s Opportunity Magazine*, edited by Sondra K. Wilson. Modern Library, 1999, 430-443, at 430.

²⁷⁰ Charles S. Johnson. “Public Opinion and the Negro,” 433.

²⁷¹ This dichotomy, especially in its phrasing here, recalls Langston Hughes’s essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” first published in *The Nation* on June 23, 1926, in which Hughes chastises the debate within some Black artists from the New Negro movement between being more or less like their white peers in their terms of expression. Hughes argues that “no great poet has ever been afraid of being [themselves],” centering and celebrating his Blackness and the Blackness of his art. I invoke this reference here as evidence that, despite its engagement of white-dominant paradigms as tools for social self-actualization, the New Negro movement (and most of its individual members) never stopped emphasizing their Blackness. The New Negro movement believed Blackness was something to be celebrated, not hidden, even in the white-dominant (or perhaps even white-passing) metatextual acts figures such as Charles S. Johnson prescribed. Langston Hughes. “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.” *The Nation* (June 23, 1926, issue),

Magazine” and “Public Opinion and the Negro,” calmly, logically, plainly lays out historical truths and promotes solutions which are largely acceptable to dominant culture (e.g. “Black Americans have been slurred as ‘less-than’ for centuries, we must educate ourselves and them to undo this”). I also read these examples to be more “performative,” insofar as they describe their ideal audience in greater textual detail and specificity. Inversely, Johnson’s especially artistic endeavor, *Ebony and Topaz* theatrically imagined Blackness more poetically and pictorially. The *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* describes the “collectanea” as “a companion piece to Alain Locke’s *The New Negro*, to which it was similar in format; however, the [B]lack literary expression in *Ebony* and *Topaz* was less self-conscious and more self-assured.”²⁷² Whereas Johnson’s writing could perhaps have passed as white (excepting its decidedly Black core), Johnson’s editing work was more unabashedly Black. *Ebony and Topaz*, in particular, is noted to have contained “some of the most striking graphic images of the Harlem Renaissance: four illustrations titled *Drawings for Mulattoes*” by Richard Bruce Nugent²⁷³ and a cover piece by Charles Cullen. In her analysis of these illustrations, Caroline Goesser writes that:

On the one hand, these illustrations disrupted negative stereotypes of [B]lack identity by confounding racist connections between black skin and "primitive" identity. At the same time, they challenged prevailing tendencies within the African American community to fix [B]lack identity to a narrow ideal of racial uplift, a message that served to ossify rather than relax fixed categories of race.²⁷⁴

Just as Johnson’s written work challenged white cultural dominance and supported unapologetic Blackness, his (mostly “invisible”) editing work expressed the same message, only these

hosted online at <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/negro-artist-and-racial-mountain/>.

²⁷² “Ebony and Topaz.” *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, 2004, 326-327, at 326.

²⁷³ “Ebony and Topaz.” *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, 2004, 326-327, at 327.

²⁷⁴ Caroline Goesser. “The Case of Ebony and Topaz: Racial and Sexual Hybridity in Harlem Renaissance Illustrations.” *American Periodicals*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2005, pp. 86–111, at 86.

illustrations and pieces of poetry took greater liberty to theatrically imagine the furthest extent of written and embodied Blackness. In *Ebony and Topaz* the New Negro and their Blackness and black skin are represented artistically, as something worthy of higher-level modernist abstraction; with a common identity performatively created in the many logical written texts before it, *Ebony and Topaz* was free to engage artistry and fancy.

Johnson himself opened *Ebony and Topaz* with an introduction that clearly details the intention of the following collectanea. Unlike other periodicals, *Opportunity* included, which typically serve to “prove a thesis” or “plead a cause,” *Ebony and Topaz* was exclusively concerned with serving as an artistic outlet for Black expression, specifically on the subject of Black American life.²⁷⁵ Instead, Johnson writes:

[*Ebony and Topaz*] is a venture in expression, shared, with the slightest editorial suggestion, by a number of persons who are here much less interested in their audience than in what they are trying to say, and the life they are trying to portray.²⁷⁶

Ebony and Topaz was, at its root, an invitation to Black artists across mediums to explore artistic self-representation of their life and their Blackness with no intention or expectation to appease white audiences. Johnson preempts white resistance to such a project, though he chalks this up to a simple individual desire to escape the insecurities of one’s worldview.²⁷⁷ Johnson also briefly

²⁷⁵ Charles S. Johnson. “Introduction.” *Ebony and Topaz*, edited by Charles S. Johnson. New York: *Opportunity, Journal of Negro Life*, 1927, 11-13, at 11.

²⁷⁶ Charles S. Johnson. “Introduction,” 11.

²⁷⁷ Johnson writes:

It is not improbable that some of our white readers will arch their brows or perhaps knit them somberly at some point before the end. But this is a response not infrequently met with outside the pages of books. There is always an escape of a sort, however, in ignoring that which contradicts one’s sense, even though it were the better wisdom to give heed.

argues for the worthiness of such “unpleasant” characters as those supported by a dramatic article by Willis Richardson, which will be discussed in the following chapter.²⁷⁸ Most importantly for this analysis, Johnson then outlines the decidedly liberal, emphatically interracial nature of his (and *Ebony and Topaz*’s) project, reinforcing the foundational notion that Black American life is worthy of artistic interpretation by its “own worth” and noting that both “white and [Black] writers and artists are finding together the highest expression of their art in this corner of life.”²⁷⁹ Blackness is worthy of artistic expression, Johnson argued, while welcoming any and all to apply modernism (as artistic style and paradigm) to the Black American lived experience with respect and understanding. In so doing, Johnson legitimated the artistry of familiar (Black) faces such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Aaron Douglas, and Richard Bruce (Nugent) and encouraged artists in positions of greater privilege to take artistic risks more afforded them to abstract and modernize the Black subject. While Douglas and Bruce have begun to have their individual brand of expression appreciated and analyzed by scholarship, American illustrator Charles Cullen has not been deservedly recognized. Though my primary goal with this dissertation has been to draw attention to the work of Black Americans underrepresented in scholarship, I am urged in this moment to unearth Cullen’s silent impact on American modernisms. Cullen has left a smaller archival trace than any other figure analyzed in detail in this dissertation; yet his unique approach to artistic representation can be read as a powerful example of *theatrical* imaginations of New Negro personhood incarnate.

There is an “escap[ism]” inherent in the act of simply “arching [one’s] brows,” Johnson argues, a turning away from the difficulties of self-actualization in the form of challenging and changing one’s “sense,” or opinions. Charles S. Johnson. “Introduction,” 11.

²⁷⁸ Willis Richardson. “The Negro Audience.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 28 (1925, Klaus Reprint 1969): 123.

²⁷⁹ Charles S. Johnson. “Introduction,” 11.

Little of Cullen's life is known to me and the archive. Thankfully, Julie Mellby, now-retired Graphic Arts Curator at the Princeton University Library Special Collections, has dug deep to reveal as many details as (thus far) possible. I have been able to correspond briefly with Mellby about her work, and she has also published her findings in the form of a blog on Princeton's library website. Through her research, Mellby has been able to write a brief biography for the illustrator. He was born, the sixth of seven children, on December 19, 1887, in LeRoy, New York, to parents Matthew and Ellen Cullen. His father was an Irish immigrant, his mother Canadian. At the age of five, he and his family moved to Adelphi Street in Brooklyn after his father accepted employment as an engineer. He was excused from service in WW1 because of his poor eyesight, and his draft card labeled him "Tall and blond with blue eyes."²⁸⁰ Mellby notes that in 1917, Cullen was living at 1441 Broadway and working as an artist professionally. It was "around this time," Mellby continues, that Cullen met "the African American writer, performer, artist Bruce Nugent... who worked as a bellhop at the Martha Washington Hotel near Charles' apartment."²⁸¹ This happenstance meeting was revolutionary for Cullen, both in terms of his artistry and his sexuality, Mellby reveals. The two began a friendship and artistic partnership which culminated most tangibly in *Ebony and Topaz*. Gwendolyn Bennett notes in *Opportunity* 5.9 that Cullen receiving a copy of Countee Cullen's *Color* (1925) from his father – simply because his father "is always interested in anyone whose name is Cullen" – was similarly foundational for the illustrator's career.²⁸² Mellby writes that Cullen arranged an introduction with the rising star within the New Negro movement shortly thereafter, showing him some

²⁸⁰ Julie Mellby. "Charles Cullen." *Graphic Arts Collection* blog. Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University. <https://graphicarts.princeton.edu/2020/07/24/charles-cullen/>.

²⁸¹ Julie Mellby. "Charles Cullen."

²⁸² Gwendolyn Bennett. "The Ebony Flute." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 5, no. 9 (1927, Klaus Reprint 1969): 276-277, at 276.

drawings inspired by the “erotic black and white designs” of Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), short-lived British phenom of the Art Nouveau movement. The author was presumably impressed, as the two partnered several times on multiple publications: *Copper Sun* (1927); *The Ballad of the Brown Girl* (1927), published by *Opportunity*; the illustrated second edition of *Color* (1928); and *The Black Christ and Other Poems* (1929).²⁸³ The publication of *The Black Christ* essentially ended Charles Cullen’s contribution to the New Negro movement, however his illustration career continued sparsely from there. He illustrated “overtly sexual” editions of *The Mimes of the Courtesans* by Lucian of Samosata (1928) and Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1933), two poetry anthologies (*Michigan Poets* in 1936 and *Contemporary American Men Poets* in 1937), and then finally *Jesus the Christ* (1944).²⁸⁴ Mellby finishes her brief biography by detailing Cullen’s downward trajectory:

[W]hen Charles filled out the 1940 census form, he had been without work for 156 weeks, living with a young social worker named Torlyn Perstholdt. Little else is known about Charles Cullen’s later years. When he died, there was no obituary.

Charles Cullen’s life ended with a proverbial whimper, but his artistry lived (and continues to live) with vigor, uniquely capturing Blackness in print within *Ebony and Topaz* and *Opportunity*.

Charles Cullen produced five pieces of art for *Ebony and Topaz*, including having the honor of producing its cover and frontispiece. Cullen also illustrated the collection’s reprinting of

²⁸³ Countee Cullen. *Copper Sun*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927; Countee Cullen. *The Ballad of the Brown Girl: an Old Ballad Retold*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927; and Countee Cullen. *The Black Christ and Other Poems*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927.

²⁸⁴ Lucian, and Charles Cullen. *The Mimes of the Courtesans*. New York: Private Print for Rarity Press, 1931; Walt Whitman. *Leaves of Grass*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1933; *Michigan Poets*, edited by Henry Harrison. New York: Henry Harrison, 1936; *Contemporary American Men Poets*, edited by Thomas Del Vecchio. New York: Henry Harrison, 1937; and Charles Cullen. *Jesus the Christ: Events of the Gospel Story in the Words of the King James Version*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1944.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's (1806-1861) *Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* (1848); and another new standalone drawing by the artist is featured. Additionally, a drawing from *Copper Sun*, then-recently published, appears in the collection. In total, five artworks by Cullen are published in the collection of *Opportunity's* best and brightest, more than any other artist featured. Within each of the pieces, Cullen applies his own style to Black skin and lived experiences, and the results bear a striking modernism certainly influenced by Beardsley and retaining levels of Art Nouveau practice. Cullen's embrace of Art Nouveau style (and perhaps theory) represents a noted shift from the realism of C. M. Battey's performatively definitive photography.

Importantly, because of its lineage, Cullen's modernist abstraction theatrically imagined a New Negro paragon which was innately free – free from historical bonds and from white expectations. Art Nouveau (literally “new art”) was a proto-modernist style of art and architecture which flourished between from the 1890s until the onset of World War 1 (and the predominance of modernism), defined by its valuation of decorative art and its desire to break with traditional hegemonies and modes of representation.²⁸⁵ The style is visually known for its organic, flowing lines, often taking the form of vines, flowers, or long feminine hair. Artists such as Cullen couched their desire for freedom within these natural forms. As Cybele Gontar writes for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, “the unfolding of Art Nouveau's flowing line may be understood as a metaphor for the freedom and release sought by its practitioners and admirers from the weight of artistic tradition and critical expectations.”²⁸⁶ Beneath its beautiful, innocuous surface,

²⁸⁵ The *Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art*, third edition, defines Art Nouveau as, “[a]s the name suggests, a deliberate attempt to create a new style in reaction against the imitation of historical forms that had been such a prominent feature of 19th-century architecture and design.” Ian Chilvers and John Graves-Smith. “Art Nouveau.” *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art*. Oxford University Press, 2015, n.p.

²⁸⁶ Cybele Gontar. “Art Nouveau.” *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/artn/hd_artn.htm.

Cullen's artwork imagined and subtly argued for the liberal freedom definitive of the New Negro movement. As with the minoritarian manifestos Puchner discusses, Cullen's illustrations were minoritarian publications: because Black Americans were (and still are) the nondominant cultural force within the print public sphere, the artists and intellectuals of the New Negro movement were *not* free from historical bonds or white expectation.²⁸⁷ However, *Opportunity's* platform for artistic expression allowed Cullen (and, more famously, Black Americans such as Richard Bruce Nugent and Aaron Douglass) to create a metaphysical literary world in which Black Americans *were* free.²⁸⁸ Therein lies the power of Cullen's illustrative work and the art printed within *Opportunity*. Puchner argues that, in the *Communist Manifesto*, "Marx wants to replace the specter of communism with communism itself. The manifesto is precisely the instrument, the genre that replaces specters with the real thing."²⁸⁹ Through artistically imagining the free, unimpeded New Negro paragon, Cullen primed the US and current (and future) Black Americans for such citizenship. Powerfully, Cullen's paragon also offered an imitable model for Black Americans to embody in manifesting such citizenship: a lithe, beautiful Blackness which demanded its freedom and forced the acknowledgement of its innate human worth. Lastly, Art Nouveau is also remembered for its delineated nationalism, "as each country tried to assert independence in literature and in art," as Jean Lahor explains.²⁹⁰ For this reason, especially, the style was perfectly predisposed to be claimed by artists such as Cullen in the creation of future citizens. In all, Cullen's reclamation of Art Nouveau in the 1920s embodied his nationalist,

²⁸⁷ Though Cullen was white, expressions of Blackness were not free from white expectation, even when created by white artists.

²⁸⁸ Notice that Cullen's artistry here functions in a similar manner as the sentimental novel, discussed in chapter 1: both create alternate paradigms as testing zones for identity.

²⁸⁹ Martin Puchner. *Poetry of the Revolution*, 25.

²⁹⁰ Jean Lahor. *Art Nouveau*. New York: Parkstone International, 2012, 5.

modernist attempt to authorize future generations of Black Americans in the act of artistic self-representation.

Beginning with the grandiosity of the cover, each also reinforces the value of this Blackness and theatricalizes New Negro personhood. The cover illustration appears to be a two-color screen-print atop the *large* blue heavy-weight paperwork cover, featuring two (perhaps interracial) figures and a striking, stylized scenic background. The blackness of the primary figure's skin and the yellow accenting applied to the sun, the burning stars in the background, and (lightly) to the foreground figure pop powerfully off the faded blue of the background. The figures are svelte, yet powerful, with the Art Nouveau application rendering them idealized above reality. The woman is ornately adorned with jewels and gold. Their surroundings, too, explode with splendor. Stars bound in swatches off the flowing, multifaceted fabric which appears to make up the ground upon which the figures stand; the sun's light bubbles and blazes far from its corona as an abstracted palm tree fails to shade the figures from its heat. The [B/b]lack figure looking up, the lighter figure looking down, each appears to be basking in the brilliance of the world around them. The entire image feels weightless. Cullen's cover captures the beauty of Blackness *and* the objective of *Ebony and Topaz's* artistry. Blackness, Black Americans, Black American life *all* held true beauty, and, by value of their own existence, deserve to be lifted up to the level of their white counterparts. Cullen's cover captures that beauty and that power.

As does his frontispiece, a densely symbolic and similarly uplifting promise for Black progress. This time in monotone, as with most of Cullen's printed illustrations, the frontispiece depicts a masculine [B/b]lack figure placed center-frame, posed as though leaping, reaching for a





A drawing by Charles Cullen



star just out of the frame's boundaries; this figure is supported by a dense web of organic material and a feminine [B/b]lack figure lower in the frame; a hanging schism oozes to the opposite of the star, dripping something like blood and unappealing fruits alongside a snake, which slithers down from the edge, out of frame; a faint star can be seen behind the masculine figure, including the suggestion of a mouth and nose behind their head. While the allusions intended by this illustration's symbolism are deeper than I can possibly comprehend fully, the ultimate theme is certainly one of upward motion, that modernist value of *progress*. Supported and upheld by the earth and the ones they love beneath, the central figure reaches up and outward, away from the dark temptations of their right and toward *progress*, the self-actualization of oneself and society. Inversely, yet just as powerfully (and still liberal in its ultimate objective), Cullen's pair of illustrations for *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* abstractly depict the abject tragedy of the Black enslaved woman from Browning's poem. In the

poem, the woman decries her enslavement, her separation from the enslaved man she loved, and her terrible fate – having carried a baby in the hope of having a living memento of her love, only to give birth to the nightmarish incarnation of her rape at the hands of the white man with power over her. Cullen captures this both realistically and through general symbolic abstraction: he depicts the woman in the center of the frame, collapsed on her knees, bearing her awful kerchief (and the newborn corpse therein), ensnared by a visualized whip, held by an almost cosmic being, almost a mirage, dominating the background of the frame. Her love's broken body can be seen in the foreground beneath her in the frame. Stars, leaves, a setting sun, and other scenery can be seen. The symbolism here is powerful, if heavy-handed, and the woman's tragic suffering is palpable. Cullen's treatment of this lowliest-of-women lifts her to the upper echelons of epic trauma, the likes of Medea and Sarah Bernhardt's *Camille*. Her suffering is, unfortunately, beautiful. While Cullen certainly treats this unnamed woman with a new respect, its possible his romanticization of her situation may obscure the horrors of the source text (and, truly, the lived experiences of enslaved Black Americans). However, for me personally, the beauty of Cullen's artistry does not fully distract from the harsh realities narrated in his illustration. The second illustration is more abstract, and more akin to Cullen's other work for *Ebony and Topaz* and *Opportunity* at-large. It continues to depict the woman's suffering, this time showing her chained to a seaside cliff as the ghosts of the pilgrims to whom she pleads for their metaphoric freedom dance above the water. Cullen has made the woman's suffering Promethean. Again, the loftiness of Cullen's respect for Black Americans and their lives is evident in his treatment of these Black subjects. Whether celebrating the successes of Black individuals or equitably applying (modern) artistry to their plight (as artists have done with white pain for centuries), Cullen uniquely

captured Blackness in his artwork in a manner Charles S. Johnson clearly appreciated and regularly sanctioned for the covers and features of *Opportunity*'s publications.

Surrounding Charles Cullen's publication in *Ebony and Topaz*, the illustrator was also featured multiple times in *Opportunity*, both as artist and citizen. Four large advertisements for Countee Cullen's *The Ballad of the Brown Girl* appear in volumes 5 and 6, followed by two advertisements for *Ebony and Topaz*, each ad highlighting Cullen's illustrations. Cullen is also featured in that aforementioned column by Gwendolyn Bennett, and he is highlighted in the final "Who's Who" of volume 6.²⁹¹ Additionally, a testimonial by Cullen's friend, Richard Bruce, was published, praising the beauty of Cullen's illustrations. Bruce writes that the poems, "replete with apt and beautiful imagery," are "charmingly illustrated."²⁹² Lastly, Countee Cullen himself lauds the illustrator in his editorial within issue 6.6, letting readers know (after many inquiries) the two are not related, though he'd be as tempted as ever to call Charles brother after his successes had garnered him international attention.²⁹³ Cullen is also featured in 6 printed pieces of art between volumes 5 and 6, including three covers, once again allowing Cullen's theatrical imagination of the New Negro paragon to shine above others. The three covers Cullen illustrated for *Opportunity* include a reprinted drawing from the recently-printed *Copper Sun*, as well as two original drawings, one with a Christmas theme for the December number. The reprint from *Copper Sun* is typically abstract in its setting, with one [B/b]lack figure erupting from a

²⁹¹ "Who's Who." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 12 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 385.

²⁹² Richard Bruce. "The Dark Tower." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 5 no. 10 (1927, Klaus Reprint 1969): 305-306, at 305.

²⁹³ Cullen writes that Charles Cullen had been recently featured in an article in the South-African *Potchefstroom Herald* by editor C. V. Bate. I have reached out to the paper to request access to their archives but have yet to hear back. Countee Cullen. "The Dark Tower." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 6 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 178-179, at 178.

crystalline void at its center, and another [B/b]lack figure crouched with their hand to their chest. The drawing is beautiful, but difficult to read for its thematic values.

Cullen's second cover, however, for *Opportunity* 6.2, reiterates the same grand narrativization of his cover and frontispiece for *Ebony and Topaz*. The illustration, printed in black and white (a choice, given that many covers from *Opportunity* are full-color), again features two [B/b]lack figures – a recurring trope for these Cullen illustrations. The figures, one masculine, one feminine, greet each other among beautiful, organic yet also cosmic, surroundings. A blazing sun rises impressively behind them, covering nearly the entire horizon. The scene suggests a prototypical “brighter day,” one in which the [B/b]lack figures have their beauty captured by Art Nouveau-akin standards. The cover art captures the same hopeful phenomenon as the title immediately above it, the liberal opportunity Black Americans had to claim that better day in the present in the form of equitable public activity – and to claim it, in part, through artistic self-expression of this sort. Cullen's final cover, for *Opportunity* 6.12, the December issue, is noteworthy for applying Cullen's brand of artistry *and* valuation of Black individuals to a familiar Christian motif – the birth of Jesus and the proverbial reason for the season. The cover depicts the expected Mary and newborn Jesus, visited (in my interpretation) by the three Magi. Standing decidedly above the others, featured prominently, his shining black skin shimmering more brightly than even the glow of Mary's halo, Charles Cullen has depicted one of the Magi as Black. Powerfully, he portrays this beautiful figure as *even more breathtaking* than the subjects of the image. Surreptitiously, without any overt symbolism, Cullen has artistically imagined his values in this illustration just as any, more propagandistic, drawing previously referenced: Cullen has placed the glory of Blackness at the same level as the glory of the Christian God himself. The frontispiece for issue 6.12 continues this expression. The drawing



again depicts the baby Jesus in stylization recognizable from millennia of iconography, this time held by a light-skinned Black (or otherwise nonwhite) woman and surrounded in abstracted embrace by a darker-skinned masculine Black figure. The three rest in tableau, surrounded by the stars. Thematically (again, to me, personally), this



Reproduced from a drawing by Charles Cullen

resonates as an attempt to reclaim the historical Jesus's nonwhite heritage. Unlike the recognizably white Mary on the cover, this woman, cradling the baby Jesus in her arms, *could also be Mary*. This Mary's features, however, are not so white, connoting to me a sense of Blackness, despite the figure's relative light picture. Joseph, too, a Middle Eastern man at the turn of the common era, would not have been white. Perhaps this man, supporting the mother and child in his embrace, is Joseph. In all, the effect of the drawing is one of awe at the goodly, godlike Blackness of these figures. Culminating his liberal project, Cullen has, for the last time within *Opportunity*, lifted Black characters to the level of gods – Christian and secular.²⁹⁴

Cullen's many illustrations for *Ebony and Topaz* and *Opportunity* carry these recognizable values of the New Negro movement, and – applying Puchner's lens – they also serve as

²⁹⁴ I can't see Cullen's work without recalling Cleveland's famous *Guardians of Traffic*, monumental Art Deco depictions of godlike guardians who protect Cleveland's commuters – with notably “white” neo-classical features. Pamela Dorazio Dean. *The Guardians of Traffic*. Western Reserve Historical Society, 2021. <https://www.wrhs.org/blog/the-guardians-of-traffic/>.

theatrical imaginations of the New Negro *performative* definition earlier developed by writers such as Charles S. Johnson and Willis Richardson. These illustrations can be read as *theatrical*, insofar as their “speech acts occur in an unauthorized and unauthorizing context.”²⁹⁵ In other words: Blackness, in 1927, was not commonly equated with goodliness, let alone *godliness*; public opinion did not uplift enslaved Black women as tragic heroine; Blackness was not largely celebrated for its natural, even *celestial* beauty. Charles Cullen imagined worlds in which Blackness and Black individuals *were* celebrated in this way he felt they deserved, in order to (hopefully) enact small transitions toward this reality in his world. This artistic advocacy was *almost* avant-garde. Cullen clearly saw a utopia, and he sought to manifest that utopia on earth – through guiding forward-looking artistic activity, no less. And it was deeply modern: Cullen was influenced by the Art Nouveau movement, and he created inspired art along those guidelines – art which celebrated the equal individual worth of Black individuals. In closing, the textual and metatextual acts of the New Negro movement can be understood by the same performativity and theatricality by which Martin Puchner defines the manifesto: Charles S. Johnson, like the other editors, authors, and (to an extent) readers of the New Negro movement, carefully curated a definition of the New Negro paragon/paradigm (he *performatively* created it) and boldly published inspired, artistically groundbreaking embodiments of that paragon (he *theatrically* imagined them).

²⁹⁵ Martin Puchner. *Poetry of the Revolution*, 25.

Chapter 3: Performance
A Comparative Reading of New Negro Personhood within the
Drama and Theatre of *Opportunity's* Literary Contests (1924-1927)

The analysis in this dissertation until now has been concerned mostly with the presentation of self through metatextual acts (reading, writing, talking about reading and writing, etc.). This “presentation-of-self” is central to the act of performance – definitive, even. Richard Schechner quotes Erving Goffman’s seminal text (cited at the top of the previous chapter) in “defining performance” in the introductory pages of his textbook on performance studies.²⁹⁶ “Performance,” to Goffman, “may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants.”²⁹⁷ Schechner embraces this definition, but expands upon it (immediately, and throughout the text). In continuing to define “performance,” he famously expounds:

One way to parse existence is to distinguish among:

- Being
- Doing
- Showing doing
- Explaining showing doing

“Being” is existence itself, all that is. “Doing” is the activity of all that is, from quarks to viruses to sentient beings to supergalactic strings. “Showing doing” is pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing. “Explaining showing doing” is performance studies. Performing takes place both in doing and showing doing. The more clearly you show what you are doing, the more obviously you are performing... The more aware we are of what we, or others, are doing, the more those actions are “performances.”²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Richard Schechner. *Performance Studies: an Introduction*. Fourth edition. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020, 3.

²⁹⁷ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, monograph no. 2. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956, 13; Richard Schechner. *Performance Studies: an Introduction*, 3.

²⁹⁸ Richard Schechner. *Performance Studies: an Introduction*, 4.

“Performance” is defined as more than simply “doing” – it exists, for Schechner, “in between doing and [pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing].” Performance, then, carries the level of intention evident especially in Goffman’s definition and the awareness captured in the later sections of the block quote above: performance “serves” the performer; and it is defined by an “awareness of what we, or others, are doing.” The metatextual acts of Charles S. Johnson and his peers, especially the acts of publication, *are* and *should be* considered acts of performance. Johnson and his peers were aware of what they were doing in publishing increasingly abstract or underrepresented Black art and opinion, and they did so intentionally and with determined direction.²⁹⁹

Opportunity, the Drama of the New Negro Movement, and Performances of Personhood

This chapter concerns itself with performance that is more theatrically centered.³⁰⁰ The production of drama and, subsequently *and* concurrently, performance (both in production and

²⁹⁹ Schechner also delineates the differences between studying an act “as” performance and claiming an act “is” performance: “According to performance studies, anything can be studied ‘as’ performance... The situation is very different with regard to ‘is’ performance. Something ‘is’ a performance when historical-social context, convention, usage, and tradition say it is. Rituals, play, sports, theatre, dance, and music, and the roles of everyday life are performances because context, convention, usage, and tradition say so.” Because Johnson and his peers understood their work to be propagandistic (in the most wholesome sense), with the intention to affect opinion and action in others, and because early-twentieth-century sociological theory had already begun to consider the “social act(ion)” as something akin to performance as Goffman defined it, I argue we cannot only read these acts of print *as* performance, but that they truly *were* performance. Richard Schechner. *Performance Studies: an Introduction*, 12.

³⁰⁰ I will reference and thank Scott Magelssen here, for his concept of “lowercase-t” “theatre,” as opposed to “uppercase-t” “Theatre,” which I have used more times than I count in leading discussion sections for DRAMA 101. The concept of “lowercase-t” “theatre” matches performance as more broadly defined by Goffman and Schechner. “Uppercase-t” “Theatre,” however, carries the connotation of “a night at the theatre” – the hullabaloo of getting dressed up, getting dinner and/or drinks before and/or after the show, etc.

the act of metatextually creating drama) was central to the *Opportunity* and the New Negro movement. In this section, I will outline *Opportunity* and the New Negro movement's relationship to drama, theatre, and performance, by centering the theory and practical advice of Charles S. Johnson and especially Willis Richardson, whose regular entries in *Opportunity* made up the bulk of its dramatical theory. Importantly, the Johnson, Richardson, and their peers in *Opportunity* believed drama and theatre were an ideal medium for the performance and presentation of New Negro values in the name of the proliferation of these values. In all, I hope to develop a comparative rubric for measuring the qualities and usefulness of the unpublished plays from the Johnson's private collection, which I publicize, read closely, and analyze in the following section. From its first volume, the journal flaunted its relationship to the theatre, publishing reviews, theory on drama and performance, even entire plays, and eventually featuring a reward for best drama within its Literary Prize Contests. Importantly, this production of drama and performance was understood in pseudo-nationalistic terms; theirs was a citizen-making project.³⁰¹ the proliferation of theatre meant a rising numbers of writers, performers, and

"Uppercase-t" "Theatre" carries the conventions of Western professional theatre in its definition.

³⁰¹ Western theatre has held a long connection to citizenship, specifically the making of new or specific citizens. Ancient Attic tragedy, as understood by Aristotle and his concept of *mimesis*, created an informed citizenry by dramatizing lessons and Athenian values. Ancient Roman theatre and paratheatrical entertainment was used as a colonizing force, demonstrating the power of Rome in its acquired territories and either encouraging these subjects to become Roman or enforcing submission. Medieval Christian theatre instilled Christian values in its followers and converts; early-modern European theatre performed the power of princes on a transnational stage and supported proto-nationalism; early American theatre-makers seized Republican Roman motifs to define their resistance to monarchical tyranny. Especially, the artists and performers of the historical avant-garde embraced the social philosophy of Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) in creating pieces of culture which also defined and delimited certain vanguard citizenship. I cover Saint-Simon's relationship to the avant-garde in greater detail in this dissertation's introduction.

audience members who could progressively identify with the New Negro paradigm.³⁰² Dwight O. W. Holmes captures this drive in an early feature on “Our Negro Colleges” (1923) within issue 1.3, in his segment on Howard University.³⁰³ “One of the most recent developments in the life of the University,” Holmes begins, “is an intense interest in dramatics, a field in which the race [i.e. Black Americans], although possessing wonderful talents, has had but little opportunity to participate.”³⁰⁴ Howard University and *Opportunity* were committed to increasing dramatic participation, and Holmes highlights the many productions delivered recently by the “Howard Players,” including, he writes, *Tents of the Arabs* (1922) by Lord Dunsany, *Simon the Cyrenian* (1917) by Ridgely Torrence,³⁰⁵ Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* (1920), and *Canterbury*

³⁰² A paradigm defined by its liberal (and distantly sentimental) values, its commitment to procedurally resolving the inequities of socio-political and economic realities of Black Americans – especially through the sharing of interracial experiences via metatextual acts, individual self-actualization, and eventually curated self-representation.

³⁰³ Howard University was famously the academic home of both Alain Locke, most-famed progenitor of the New Negro movement and paragon (and editor of its introductory tome), and Willis Richardson, influential theatre theorist from the era, who will be featured later in this chapter; also, Montgomery Gregory (1887-1971). Locke and Johnson had a deep, long-running partnership, and Locke was regularly featured within *Opportunity*, even early in its run. In fact, his review of the newly printed “Goat Alley” (1922) by Ernest Howard Culbertson was the first dramatic entry in *Opportunity*’s annals. Richardson, too, is highlighted and featured within the journal on multiple occasions.

³⁰⁴ Dwight O. W. Holmes. “Howard University.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 1 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 10-13, at 13.

³⁰⁵ The play was published in Torrence’s collection of “plays for a Negro theater” near its premiere on April 5, 1917, the night James Weldon Johnson lauds as “the most important single event in the entire history of the Negro in the American theatre,” because that evening “was the first time anywhere in the United States for Negro actors in the dramatic theatre to command the serious attention of the critics and of the general press and public.” Sheila Tully Boyle celebrates the premiere as “the first time a white American playwright had created a role for a [B]lack man other than a stereotypical shuffling buffoon.” Paul Robeson notably starred in a 1920 production of the play at a local Harlem, NY, YWCA, which may have inspired this Howard University production. Ridgely Torrence. *Granny Maumee, the Rider of Dreams, Simon the Cyrenian; Plays for a Negro Theater*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917; James Weldon Johnson. *Black Manhattan*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1930, 193; and Sheila Tully Boyle.

Pilgrims (1903) by Percy Mackaye. Charles Gilpin (1878-1930) even reprised his titular role in O'Neill's tragedy. Holmes finishes by stating the aim of the Department of Dramatic Art and Public Speaking at Howard University: "to develop the dramatic possibilities of [Black Americans], and to be one of the pioneers in a movement for the establishment of a national Negro³⁰⁶ theatre."³⁰⁷ Holmes's submission is the first instance of the word "theatre" outside of an advertisement for an upcoming piece from issue 1.4 seven pages earlier,³⁰⁸ and its publication had nationalist intent, the creation of a counterpublic theatre with its own, specific citizenry as audience. This call for a new national theatre may have had some institutional intentions, but Howard University's objective particularly professes a call for popular dramatic development under a communal banner. It also demonstrates the power of theatre as an engine for citizen-making. Just as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* left an inexpressible mark on the American psyche during the mid-nineteenth century, the plays of the New Negro movement, Johnson and his circle believed, could performatively create their audience through theatrical production.

Perhaps no individual contributed to this nation-making progress within *Opportunity's* views on drama and performance more than Willis Richardson (1889-1977), theatre educator, theorist, and practitioner, and author of *The Chip Woman's Fortune* (1923), the first Black-

Paul Robeson: the Years of Promise and Achievement. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001, 89.

³⁰⁶ Breaking my traditional approach, I have kept Holmes's use of the term "Negro" intact here, both because of its almost titular use in this example and in order to capture the complete dimensions of the term Holmes's may have intended – "Black (American)" doesn't feel interchangeable in this instance.

³⁰⁷ Dwight O. W. Holmes. "Howard University," 13.

³⁰⁸ The ad at the bottom of page 5 highlights articles from the upcoming issue, including Esther Fulks's "The All American Theatre Movement," the first printed iteration of the word "theatre" in *Opportunity*. Holmes's iteration is significantly more substantial.

authored drama produced on Broadway, whose manifesto-like tracts³⁰⁹ were regularly published in the journal and whose work as an educator primed many young actors for New Negro performance. In his first article for *Opportunity*, “The Negro and the Stage,” Richardson looked to a brighter future for Black American drama, as he did within “The Hope of a Negro Drama” (1919), published within *The Crisis* 19.1 five years earlier. The article begins with Richardson’s personal penchant for purposeful theatre-making. The author criticizes theatre-makers and theatre-goers interested only in performances which allow one to “laugh, to rest [one’s] mind, to be amused,” insisting instead that “the theatre should always, and seriously, be considered as an education institution side by side with the school.”³¹⁰ Richardson then chides his Black peers for not better supporting dramatic and performatic production within their communities, before

³⁰⁹ Richardson’s “The Hope of a Negro Drama” (1919), published in *The Crisis* 19.1 is perhaps the closest text the New Negro movement has to an avant-garde manifesto. “[W]e must have a Negro Drama,” Richardson writes, concluding the first paragraph; and “[i]f the signs of the times do not point to such a thing, we must change their direction and make them point the right way.” Richardson submits a call to action to any and all Black poets, charging them with the proliferation of “Negro Drama,” the type of “play that shows the soul of a people; and the soul of this people is truly worth showing.” Richardson references the Irish National Theatre as “an excellent model” to follow before briefly occupying racial essentialism (noting, he says, the “natural ability for fine acting” Black Americans have) in the name of inspiration, before ending with his ultimate charge:

I am very sure that all those broad-minded people who are intelligently interested in the welfare and development of the Negro race in America will be delighted when we shall be able to send a company of Negro Players with Negro Plays across our own continent; and those intelligent people who have never been interested in us will surely give us a second thought when we send our Negro Plays and Players to show hitherto unknown things to the artistic peoples of Europe.

Richardson’s goal is a nationalistic “Negro Theatre,” producing plays which “capture the spirit” of Black American life in order to garnish respect not only on the American but on the global stage. This goal and Richardson’s charge for artists to lead Black life into the future resonates with the values of the historical avant-garde referenced in the Introduction. This context should be considered when reading Richardson’s commentary within *Opportunity*.

³¹⁰ Willis Richardson. “The Negro and the Stage.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 2, no. 22 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 310.

restating his ultimate goal “a theatre where [Black] actors will play in plays the majority of which will be written by [Black] playwrights.”³¹¹ He legitimates his endeavor in truly liberal terms, noting that “the [Black] actor with the same training can depict characters as well as the Caucasian actor,”³¹² emphasizing the equal ability (and, extrapolated, humanness) of Black actors and Americans. Richardson then engages some racial exegesis as “illustration,” “chang[ing] a familiar passage of Shakespeare, one of Iago’s hypocritical speeches to Othello³¹³ from the original to the [Black American] dialect.”³¹⁴ After some parsing, Richardson’s “The Negro and the Stage” reads very much like his earlier “The Hope of a Negro Drama” (which is unpacked in footnote 14), with similar rhetorical touchpoints and the same endeavor: the creation of a theatre by and about Black Americans – and crucially *for* any audience member. Extrapolating the liberal logic from Richardson’s earlier rationale, any play which tells a story of Black American life well will be pleasing to any audience member, regardless of race. Through these stories, such the New Negro movement’s liberal project might also be realized through the education of and artistic appeal to the masses. By demonstrating the similarities between Black and white American life, by dramatizing the everyday experiences of Black Americans, by telling good stories about Black characters, New Negro theatre-makers might garner the respect from white Americans Richardson was after – and, ultimately, the improved equity of public access desired by the New Negro movement as a whole (Charles S. Johnson included).

³¹¹ Willis Richardson. “The Negro and the Stage,” 310.

³¹² Willis Richardson. “The Negro and the Stage,” 310.

³¹³ Specifically act 3, scene 3, lines 156-162. William Shakespeare. *Othello*, edited by Burton Raffel. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, 1.1.156-162.

³¹⁴ Willis Richardson. “The Negro and the Stage,” 310.

Richardson wrote three additional articles for *Opportunity* during Johnson's tenure, each continuing this almost-avant-garde, yet deeply liberal project³¹⁵ laid forth in both "The Hope of a Negro Drama" and "The Negro and the Stage." His short submission "The Negro Audience" (1925), featured within a segment on "Correspondence" from issue 3.28, is another generalized theatrical wrist-slap for his theatre-going peers, audience members, Richardson writes, who "do not like dialect, they do not like unpleasant characters and endings, and the most important thing of all they forget... the main business of the drama is the portrayal of human characters."³¹⁶ Engaging the liberal rhetoric demonstrably common in his writings, Richardson figuratively steps atop his proverbial soapbox to continue: "Those characters may be beggars or kings, [sex-workers] or queens; that part of it should not matter."³¹⁷ Most practically, however, Richardson outlines some key dramatic and theatrical values in the following section:

Some of the things which should matter are: whether the characters are well drawn, whether the dialogue is natural, whether the ending is consistent and whether the whole thing is interesting and logical.³¹⁸

Fifty years after the Moscow Art Theatre revolutionized psychologically realistic production methods, Richardson championed them in *Opportunity*, implicitly here and explicitly two sentences later. These values, recognizable as tenets of realism, are important for multiple reasons. Most practically, they offer a set of criteria by which to analyze pieces of drama and

³¹⁵ Richardson's rhetoric was liberal insofar as it embraced the self-ownership Black Americans deserved, emphasized the equal individual ability of Black Americans to their white peers, and espoused incremental change through the improvement of democratic/republican systems. His rhetoric was *almost* avant-garde, too (despite the inherent conflicts between the two paradigms), because of its emphasis on citizen-making – specific, *vanguard* citizen-making.

³¹⁶ Willis Richardson. "The Negro Audience." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 28 (1925, Klaus Reprint 1969): 123.

³¹⁷ Willis Richardson. "The Negro Audience," 123.

³¹⁸ Willis Richardson. "The Negro Audience," 123.

theatrical performance from and surrounding *Opportunity*. Perhaps most importantly (for the New Negro movement), these values were becoming increasingly familiar to then-dominant white audiences across socio-economic strata, carrying increased respectability with each realist production. This palatability was crucial in the earliest frontline attempts at claiming respect, which is why Richardson himself repeated the manta so often, as did Johnson and their peers within the New Negro movement. His other articles, “Characters” (1925) from issue 3.30 and “The Unpleasant Play” (1925) from issue 3.33 both reiterate this set of values, championing characters and plots which “make one’s audience hear the truth, or nothing.”³¹⁹

In addition to his authored articles, Richardson was regularly referenced within *Opportunity* during Johnson’s tenure for his artistic accomplishments. Four of his plays are referenced as having won or placed in dramatic competitions,³²⁰ he is featured in the “Who’s Who” section of issue 2.22 (among other iterations of the recurring segment),³²¹ and he is featured as one of only a few Black playwrights in volume 5, issue 1 editorial expounding upon

³¹⁹ Willis Richardson. “The Unpleasant Play.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 33 (1925, Klaus Reprint 1969): 282. Also referenced: Willis Richardson. “Characters.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 30 (1925, Klaus Reprint 1969): 183.

³²⁰ After its premiere during the Howard Players’ 1923-1924 season, “Mortgaged” (1923) was presented by an all-Black cast during a drama tournament in Plainfield New Jersey on May 22, 1925. “The Broken Banjo” (1925) won first place in the play section of the Amy Spingarn Prizes on August 14, 1925. “The King’s Dilemma” (?) was performed by the Arnet-Patterson School, winning first prize at a “colored school dramatical carnival” held in Washington, DC in the late summer of 1926; “Fall of the Conjuror” (?) is also referenced as having received “Honorable Mention” in *Opportunity*’s 1925 Literary Prize Contest. “[Untitled editorial note].” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 31 (1925, Klaus Reprint 1969): 219; “The Amy Spingarn Prizes.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 33 (1925, Klaus Reprint 1969): 287; and “Survey of the Month.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 4, no. 44 (1926, Klaus Reprint 1969): 262.

³²¹ “Who’s Who.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 2, no. 22 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 317.

the need for better plays by and about Black Americans.³²² Beneficially for this investigation, a photograph³²³ from a 1928 production of Richardson's *The Chip Woman's Fortune* by the Dixwell Players of New Haven, CT, is reprinted in *Opportunity* issue 6.10, featured on the following page. There is no additional information provided with the photograph inside the column in which it is printed, and the company is never mentioned again within *Opportunity* (although the Dixwell Players have also left their trace in the archive in the form of correspondence between George W Crawford, speaking for the organization, and W. E. B. Du



The Dixwell Players of New Haven, Conn., in a scene from Willis Richardson's "The Chip Woman's Fortune"

Bois).³²⁴ Reading the image formally, then, I see a semi-professional production, staged either in

³²² "On the Need of Better Plays." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 5, no. 1 (1927, Klaus Reprint 1969): 5-6.

³²³ "The Dixwell Players of New Haven, Conn., in a scene from Willis Richardson's 'The Chip Woman's Fortune.'" *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 10 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 313.

³²⁴ The pair of letters is held within the University of Massachusetts Special Collections archive. Within them, Crawford thanks Du Bois for lending the Players a cut from an Aaron Douglas drawing printing within *The Crisis* before asking for another for a future production; Du Bois responds by stating the only fitting piece is too large for such purposes. Dixwell Players. *Letter from Dixwell Players to W. E. B. Du Bois, March 27, 1928*. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
<http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b178-i558>; and W. E. B. Du Bois.

a plain theatre space or a multipurpose venue (perhaps a church or similar community building) with only a moderate ability to recreate the scenic demands of the script.³²⁵ The production choices the Players *were* (more) able to control, however, appear well-intentioned, although underinformed and caught in an awkward state between the onset of proper realistic production and the ongoing trends in classical and melodramatic staging. The actors present themselves almost completely in a neat line across the width of the stage, turned toward each other or cheating out toward the audience – none fully embraces the realistic trend of turning one’s back to the audience or forgetting the proverbial “fourth wall” entirely. The costumes appear too formal for the characters in Richardson’s script, highlighting the schism Black theatre-makers were experiencing during the 1920s: the choice between producing *real* or “presentable” characters on-stage. The Dixwell Players chose to portray presentable characters rather than strictly following realistic methods of production or the demands of Richardson’s script. This distance between the prescriptions of figures such as Richardson and Alain Locke and the

Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Dixwell Players, April 6, 1928. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b178-i559>.

³²⁵ The opening stage directions for *The Chip Woman’s Fortune* begin:

The scene is the very plain dining room of a poor colored family. The floor is without covering and the walls are without pictures. At the center of the floor is a rectangular table with a couple of chairs near it. In the rear wall is a fireplace in which a low fire is burning, and at the left of this sits LIZA in a rocker. She is wrapped from shoulders to ankles in blankets, for she is just up from a spell of sickness. At the right of the fireplace is a window. A door at the right leads through to other rooms and to the back yard. Another door at the left leads to the front of the house. Against the left side near the door stands a Victrola. There is a deep silence as LIZA sits gazing into the fire. She looks up at the clock on the mantel, then looks toward the right and calls.

I see no requisite Victrola, and the fireplace (if that is a fireplace – or the staged suggestion of one) is in the wrong place. Additionally, this space feels much too large to be the home of a poor Black family at the turn of the century. Willis Richardson. *The Chip Woman’s Fortune*. [First electronic edition]. Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2001, n.p.

realities of Black American production draws necessary attention to the relatively limited access to public participation Black Americans experienced, catalyzing the New Negro movement. As Richardson's articles in *Opportunity* captured, it was easier for companies to drive Black and white attendance with presentable characters. As such, Richardson's prescriptions can be seen to function under the same Puchnerian paradigm as the manifestos in chapter 2: without sufficient ethos in the present, Richardson made his prescriptions for theatrical practice, and companies such as the Dixwell Players made small-scale change until Black Americans would be able to fully embrace realistic production methods. Richardson's prescriptions, the foundation of *Opportunity*'s perspective on drama and theatre, argued for "unpleasant" characters caught in interesting scenarios – Richardson wanted good stories and captivating characters starring and embodied by talented Black actors, not simply "pleasant," obviously propagandistic characters.

The segment which hosted this photograph, "The Theatre," was a short-lived column for all things dramatic and theatrical, published first during Johnson's tenure in issue 6.7³²⁶ and again five additional times under Elmer Anderson Carter.³²⁷ It, too, adds to *Opportunity*'s relationship to drama and theatre, this time, featuring the voice of multiple authors. The column generally published recent theatrical updates, including reviews and features on relevant companies. The authors featured in this segment were noteworthy theatre-makers or other well-known figures within the production community, including (chronologically) Rowena Woodham

³²⁶ "The Theatre." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 7 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 214-215.

³²⁷ "The Theatre." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 10 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 312-313; Rowena Jelliffe. "The Gilpin Players." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 10 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 344-345; "The Theatre." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 12 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 381; "The Theatre." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 7, no. 1 (1929, Klaus Reprint 1969): 25; and "The Theatre." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 7, no. 4 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 132.

Jelliffe (1892-1992), Jules Bledsoe (1898-1943), Dorothy Randolph Peterson (1897-1978), Eulalie Spence (1894-1981), and Theophilus Lewis (1891-1974)³²⁸ – the reputation of each of these contributors proverbially preceded them, marking each as an imitable mentor for liberal success. Additionally, the column published multiple theatrical photographs, which, along with the above Richardson production photo, can be read as purposefully curated representations of the New Negro paragon embodied on-stage (or the inverse – or at least meaningful theatrical representations with other value). The other two photographs from “The Theatre” within issue 6.10 were taken from an ongoing production of Ransom Rideout’s *Goin’ Home* (1927), presented by Brock Pemberton (1885-1950) at the Masque Theatre in New York City. Rideout’s full-length play won first prize in a contest hosted by Longmans, Green and Co. and the Drama League of America, and judged, in part, by Pemberton himself.³²⁹ The play tells the story of two American military police officers, Slim and Bill, serving the final days of their deployment in France during World War 1. The pair build a relationship with a café proprietress, Lise, and her husband, Israel Du Bois, who becomes something of a protagonist in the play. Jim, a deserter from the American army, on the run from the MPs and his commanders also appears prominently in the play. At the play’s climactic moment, during a confrontation between Israel and Major Edward Powell of the American Expeditionary Forces, over Lise’s tryst with the officer, Israel

³²⁸ Jelliffe was a former-social-worker-cum-patron-of-the-arts who founded the Karamu House in Cleveland, OH, a nationally known center dedicated to interracial theatre. Bledsoe was an American opera singer and actor, known for originating the role of Joe in *Show Boat* (1927). Peterson was a Spanish teacher professionally and actress semi-professionally, involved in the writers’ scene in Harlem and organizations such as the Negro Actors’ Guild. Spence was a playwright who featured prominently and successfully in many cultural competitions, including those hosted by *Opportunity*. Lastly, Lewis was a writer, dramatic critic, and editor most strongly associated with *The Messenger* (1917-1928), a socialist magazine with the subtitle “Only Radical Negro Magazine in America.”

³²⁹ “The Contests.” *Goin’ home: and Other Plays of the 1927 Contest*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928, v-ix, at v.

intends to shoot and kill the major – however, during the struggle, he kills a Senegalese soldier about to stab Powell instead. Israel later admits, “I had to. He’d a killed the Major.”³³⁰ This poor plot device, and the Blackface used in its production were the primary points of audiences’ disdain. Dorothy Randolph Peterson reviews the play, noting immediately that “[i]f you are of the class that takes their drama seriously and looks to it for solutions of social ailments then you will find plenty with which to disagree in this prescription for the color problem.”³³¹ Immediately, we as reader understand this is not a piece of performance of the vein Richardson espoused, this is not the New Negro paragon; however, Peterson’s rejection of it *does* evidence implicit New Negro values. Peterson denounces the plot as nonsensical and the characters as deplorable from any racial perspective before gesturing to an analysis for which the column’s photographs prove indispensable, one of casting. Peterson notes that the lead Black character from the play, Israel Du Bois – an honorable and *honored* Black man, the script emphasizes, having earned the Croix de Guerre “for bravery for stopping runaway horses”³³² – was played by Richard Hale, a white actor, in Blackface. “I cannot help but feel,” Peterson observes of Hale’s casting and performance, “that his part could have been done better by a good [Black] actor and that the box office would have benefited therefrom.”³³³ The play’s primary Black protagonist, a respectable Black man with many imitable characteristics, was played by a white man inhabiting a terribly dehumanizing performance tradition. Meanwhile, another notable Black character from the play, a Senegalese soldier named Samba Saar (whom Du Bois kills to save the life of Major

³³⁰ Ransom Rideout. *Goin’ Home. Goin’ home: and Other Plays of the 1927 Contest*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928, 1-91, at 75.

³³¹ Dorothy Peterson. Review of *Goin’ Home*, by Ransom Rideout. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 10 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 312.

³³² Dorothy Peterson. Review of *Goin’ Home*, 312.

³³³ Dorothy Peterson. Review of *Goin’ Home*, 312.

Edward Powell), was played by a Black actor. A photo³³⁴ of the character is printed center-page amid the review, and I have included it below.



From "Goin' Home," drama of the Negro Soldier in France, now playing in New York City.

That the (casting) director or producer deemed it suitable to cast a white actor in debasing Blackface while flaunting a Black body, a Black *actor* in this role in this way, should say all that is needed about this production of *Goin' Home*. And the words of Peterson's review only support this immediate conclusion: this story is "poorly told," both in terms of the text and the dramaturgical decisions which led to the level of Black debasement seen in photographs and the production at-large. Unfortunately, another production photo reprinted in this column,

alongside Peterson's corroborating take, demonstrates that this lack of representation affected all levels of casting. In her review, Peterson notes that "the best scene, in [her] opinion, is the second act where the [nonwhite] doughboys³³⁵ pile into Lise's café and celebrate their last night on French soil. Their singing is good and their comedy amusing."³³⁶ A photo,³³⁷ presumably of

³³⁴ Untitled photograph. Review of *Goin' Home*, by Ransom Rideout. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 10 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 312.

³³⁵ The term "doughboy" references WWI infantry.

³³⁶ Dorothy Peterson. Review of *Goin' Home*, 312.

³³⁷ Untitled photograph. Review of *Goin' Home*, by Ransom Rideout. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 6, no. 10 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 313.

the doughboys, is printed after Peterson's review, included on the next page. Peterson's enjoyment of *Goin' Home* was limited by the play's plot and the production's casting choices, but also, I argue, by the characters included. Although Du Bois serves as a respectable Black character (until the unfortunate turn of events that colored the character in Peterson's eyes), the other Black characters are either savages or musically endowed comedic relief. What's more, we know at least one member of the cast was a white actor playing a Black character. The quality of this photograph (and its many layers of reproduction) makes concrete analysis possible, but I believe at least one member of the ensemble is in Blackface. If a cast member outside Hale



*From "Goin' Home," drama of the Negro Soldier in France,
now playing in New York City.*

playing Du Bois *were* in Blackface, this level of racial ascription, a white man playing “Black” would only add additional layers of insult to the already banal production. In all, this production of *Goin’ Home*, might be understood as a sort of “anti-New Negro” production. It does not extend to its Black characters or audiences the liberal values of the modernist project: its Black characters do not value their freedom or the tenet of self-ownership; nor does it treat the Black body with any innate respect, continuing the tradition of Blackface instead of employing more Black actors. Its characters do not act as the New Negro paragon would: Du Bois kills his friend, a Black character, in a false sense of duty to an authoritative character who had personally fouled him. Worst of all, Peterson writes, the character “leaves France where he was attaining a semblance of manhood to return to servitude under the Major in New Orleans.”³³⁸ This quite literally, the *opposite* action any New Negro citizen would take; it is anti-liberal and regressive. The plot, like the characters, makes little logical sense, and the production choices made fare no better than the substance from the text itself. As such, it serves as a helpful reference, a touchstone for what the New Negro paragon is not.

At the same time, however, I feel this example serves as a crucial piece of context for this examination, for me, personally, at any rate. Despite the many strikes against this production, Peterson does not reject it wholly, and she is still able to find bright spots within her review. Another published review, this time reviewing *Roseanne* (1923) by Nan Bagby Stephens,³³⁹

³³⁸ Dorothy Peterson. Review of *Goin’ Home*, 312.

³³⁹ The script for *Roseanne* is not extant, however, a contemporaneous review published within *The Billboard* (1894) summarizes the plot as such:

“[*Roseanne*] deals with a not too convincing story of a woman [Roseanne] whose whole life and faith are wrapped up in a girl [Leola, her younger sister] she mothers and in her church. The preacher [Cicero Brown] stands for truth itself to her and when she finds he has made her girl steal and has seduced her her world is shaken to its foundations. The girl dies and she denounces the preacher in open

written by Eric D Walrond (1898-1966) and published in issue 2.14, reveals a similar lesson.

Walrond opens the review with a racialized tract:

Let me confess at the outset that I went to see this play with a prejudice in my mind. Essentially a modern, I abhorred the idea of going to see a [drama on Black life] written by a white person (a Georgia white woman, in this case) in which white actors, duly blacked and browned, conspired to take off the lyrical idiom of Georgia farm-hands, to roll and shake and gyrate under the sweltering balm of [Black] spirituals, and to depict the savagely religious, paganly virtuous life of untutored primitive sons of soil.³⁴⁰

Walrond, himself a Black man, shuddered at the thought of sitting through another uninspired mis-imagination of Black life at the hands of a white author and underinformed white actors. As I read this opening, I found myself nodding along. I was onboard with Walrond's expectations, which seemed to mirror my own – we were both prepared for a proverbial trainwreck. However, despite the “helplessness” our reviewer felt at the beginning of his viewing experience, Walrond ultimately notes “*Roseanne* is a play well worth seeing,” a “truthful presentation of [Black American] life;” the “revival scene,” in particular, Walrond notes, “[was] so realistic that [he] immediately recalled having seen two years ago a similar upheaval at Little Mount Zion Baptist

meeting to his flock. They pursue him, threatening a lynching if they effect his capture. He seeks refuge in *Roseanne*'s cabin and she, moved by his earnest plea that the has found good at last, misdirects his pursuers and sets him free.

It is also worth noting here that, after the original production's three week run at the Greenwich Village Theatre, Mary H. Kirkpatrick, its producer, also ran a short-lived production with an all-Black cast, starring Rose McClendon (1884-1936) and Charles Gilpin. The play was well-attended by Black audiences, but drew few white ticketholders. Gordon Whyte. “The New Plays on Broadway: ‘*Roseanne*’—with—Chrystal Herne.” *The Billboard*. Cincinnati: P-MRC, 1924, 10 and 104-105, at 104; John Gilbert Monroe. *A Record of the Black Theatre in New York City: 1920-29*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1980; and Cheryl Black. “Abject No More: Authority and Authenticity in the Theatrical Career of Rose McClendon.” *Theatre History Studies* 30, no. 1 (2010): 42–64.

³⁴⁰ Eric D. Walrond. Review of *Roseanne*, by Nan Bagby Stephens. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 2, no. 14 (1928, Klaus Reprint 1969): 60.

Church on 140th Street and Seventh Avenue, in Harlem.”³⁴¹ In analyzing these theatrical representations of Blackness, we (or more appropriately *I*) must consider the context of history: to Eric Walrond, a Black audience member in the 1920s, even this “duly blacked and browned” production, an insult by today’s standards, could be deemed a “truthful” success. *Roseanne*, even Pemberton’s production of *Goin’ Home* could be found to carry New Negro values. I should borrow this sense of looking.

On the inverse, Eugene O’Neill’s *Emperor Jones* (1920), one piece of culture regularly lauded by *Opportunity*’s writers, might be more easily distilled to determine best practices for the New Negro theatrical paradigm. The play, although written by a white playwright, is referenced more regularly and more substantially than any other within the journal, and, as such, ought to reveal the dramatic and theatrical values held by the journal. Despite the brashness of Brutus Jones’s character and the play as a whole offer prescriptions for modernist New Negro practice. *Emperor Jones* tells a succinct story of the final hours of Brutus “Emperor” Jones’s self-promoted reign and, subsequently, his life. Jones, a Black man, once a worker on Pullman train cars in the US, had previously stowed away on a smuggler’s ship to flee the law before ultimately arriving upon “an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by white Marines” and placing himself artificially above the indigenous population as ruler through fearmongering, threats, and trickery.³⁴² With a tom-tom drumbeat set to match the rising heart rate of its audience, the play develops through an uprising against Jones’s corrupt rule. The Emperor escapes his palace, spending a fraught, frightful night in the woods, filled with theatricalized, Expressionist “haunts” fitting O’Neill’s oeuvre, before ultimately being captured

³⁴¹ Eric D. Walrond. Review of *Roseanne*, 60.

³⁴² Eugene O’Neill. *The Emperor Jones*. Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1997, 9.

and killed by the less-than-romantically represented indigenous peoples. Jones himself is hardly a paragon image of the New Negro incarnate: he is greedy, he has a history of crime and murder, and he has treated other humans illiberally. Yet, even Brutus Jones deserves his spot on this stage, and even this corrupt “Emperor” can teach us a lesson about self-actualization. The eponymous Oedipus of Sophocles fame was a relatively admirable king, but hardly a perfect human. He famously errs; it is, perhaps, his most defining characteristic, and yet even error incarnate can be referenced for millennia as the key case study for Aristotle’s concept of “mimesis.”³⁴³ Jones, like Oedipus, teaches us not only in his successes, but also his failures – he makes them, so to speak, so that we, as audience, don’t have to. While he *does* occasionally act nobly, and these moments bear special witnessing, Emperor Jones is mostly a visceral example of what happens when any number of people, imbued with inalienable human rights, are treated illiberally too cruelly and for too long. The indigenous population in *Emperor Jones*, too, despite their rude portrayal, also engage the New Negro paradigm in moments (unpacked in the following section). Above all, however, I believe O’Neill’s play is flaunted within *Opportunity* for its willingness to abstractly extrapolate the Black lived experience, to apply modern artistry to a Black subject.³⁴⁴ *Emperor Jones* is no simple propaganda piece. It is a spectacular adventure

³⁴³ Marvin Carlson summarizes Aristotle’s concept of *mimesis*, which originated in earlier Platonic philosophy, as “a tool for looking toward a more fully formulated reality.” TO Aristotle, Oedipus was a tool for creating a more fully formulate reality, one in which its citizens had already learned the lessons Oedipus had to teach. Through *mimesis*, ancient Athenian tragedies taught its audiences how to be better Greeks. Marvin Carlson. “Mimesis.” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*. Oxford University Press, 2003, n.p.

³⁴⁴ As the guest of honor at a banquet held by the Denver Colored Civic Association in November 1922, Charles Gilpin himself argued that *Emperor Jones* “is not a racial play; it is universal in its application.” A Black man playing the titular role in a “universal” play would have been a new honor at the time, one which implicitly demonstrates a certain requisite valuation of Blackness. For this reason, too, *Emperor Jones* was worthy of flaunting in *Opportunity*. Archival material from the Gilpin File at the Hatch-Billops

with theatrical embellishments and tantalizing characters and their (almost-)inevitable plots. For this reason, the play held the power to both entertain and educate the masses, an enviable capability, and one worth striving to emulate. I will unpack this power and the play's semiotics in the following evaluation in order to establish, along with the previous representational conclusions, a set of applicable New Negro values for dramatic and theatrical production.

Emperor Jones's commentary on liberalism and its usefulness for the New Negro movement can be found especially in Jones's rhetoric within the piece, certain eleventh-hour actions made by both Jones and the indigenous population, and the Expressionist lens O'Neill applies to the play. First, the deeply individualistic rhetoric within the play (which could be read as *performative* in an Austinian sense, insofar the rhetoric also suggests the act of self-creation *through words*). During the largely expositional first scene, Jones tells Henry Smithers his tale of self-creation, finishing his tale with pride and exclaiming: "From stowaway to Emperor in two years! Dat's goin' some!"³⁴⁵ Jones is an iconically self-made man, and his rise to power smacks (in certain parts) of liberalism's valuation of self-creation, the claiming of rights due the individual. As Jones here paints his colonization, his was truly an admirable project. However, Jones's phrasing hides deeply illiberal realities, illiberalisms which later literally haunt the corrupt Emperor. Smithers challenges the Emperor on his corruption on the following page, noting Jones's excessive taxing (which only made him personally more rich) had "squeezed [the citizens] dry."³⁴⁶ "And as for me breakin' laws," Smithers continues, "you've broke 'em all

Collection in New York City quoted in David Krasner. "Whose Role Is It Anyway?: Charles Gilpin and the Harlem Renaissance." *African American Review* 29, no. 3 (1995): 483–96, at 489.

³⁴⁵ Eugene O'Neill. *The Emperor Jones*, 13.

³⁴⁶ Eugene O'Neill. *The Emperor Jones*, 14.

yerself just as fast as yer made ‘em.”³⁴⁷ “Ain’t I de Emperor,” Jones retorts? “De laws don’t go for him.”³⁴⁸ Jones’s rhetoric has shifted from vaguely liberal to espousing the values against which early liberals fought in word and practice. Jones quips back that he learned the harsh realities which drove him to these actions while working as a porter on Pullman cars for ten years. I personally read this as an implication that Jones was simply doing what any enterprising white man would in his situation – and, perhaps, that under different racial circumstances, Smithers wouldn’t be challenging Jones, but rather praising him. When Smithers attributes Jones’s quick success to luck, Jones instead posits his “brains” and his capabilities of persuasive speech as the true source: the true reason Jones remains unchallenged as Emperor, despite his mistreatment of the indigenous population, is because he has convinced them of his invulnerability to any and all weapons outside of silver bullets, the only example of which the Emperor keeps in his personal revolver. Thanks, truly, to a bit of blind luck in Jones’s key, defining moment, and, admittedly, his ability to persuade, Jones had kept himself in a position of unquestioned authority for years. “Yankee bluff done it,” Jones scoffs, but Jones retorts with perhaps the most poignant piece of advice the play holds: “Ain’t a man’s talkin’ bit what makes him big—long as he makes folks believe it?”³⁴⁹ Jones is Emperor because he claimed himself to be; and his authority rests in his ability to craft a believable lie. While Jones’s actions are despicable, his logic is inspirational. Without lying, but rather armed with the inherent propaganda of the Black American experience Carl Van Doren referenced in *Opportunity*

³⁴⁷ Eugene O’Neill. *The Emperor Jones*, 14.

³⁴⁸ Eugene O’Neill. *The Emperor Jones*, 14.

³⁴⁹ Eugene O’Neill. *The Emperor Jones*, 15. The quote continues: “Sho’, I talks large when I ain’t got nothin’ to back it up, but I ain’t talkin’ wild just de same. I knows I kin fool ‘em—I knows it--and dat’s backin’ enough fo’ my game.” The end of the quote resonates with the same performativity within Puchner’s scholarly work on the manifesto, in which one’s authority in the present relies on authority hypothetically earned in the future.

3.29,³⁵⁰ Black Americans, the individual New Negro citizen, could claim respect and the liberal rights due them by making their dominant peers believe they have (or perhaps “deserve” in unfortunate terms) these rights, as well as the capability to thrive artistically and intellectually in the public sphere. And what better a tactic than by demonstrating this en masse in publication after publication, or in event and performance after event and performance? Such was *Opportunity*’s project; and with this value apparent, Willis Richardson’s revelations within his aforementioned article, “Characters” ring as true as ever: “it is not necessary for your leading character to be a criminal, but it is very necessary for [them] to be interesting and distinctly a [Black] type.”³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ Carl Van Doren. “The Younger Generation of Negro Writers.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 29 (1925, Klaus Reprint 1969): 144.

³⁵¹ Again, more of the quote can offer additional insight here; in “Characters,” Richardson writes:

We hear that the desire is for [Black] characters of refinement and culture. This is all very well. All of us know that there are thousands of refined and cultured [Black Americans], but what shall the [Black] character in the drama be? Shall he be like Hamlet or Denmark, refined, cultured, and a Prince of the blood, but harboring revenge in his heart? Shall he be like the Macbeths committing murder, or like our own Othello, a leader of men, listening to the slanderous lies of a scoundrel and strangling a faithful wife? All these characters are refined and cultured, but look what Shakespeare has done with them.

No, it is not necessary for your leading character to be a criminal, but it is very necessary for him to be interesting and distinctly a [Black] type. In order for him to be interesting he must either do something or have something done to him; and in order for him to be a distinct [Black] type he must be distinctly different from the white man. How much difference is there between the cultured [Black man] and the cultured white man? White men and Negroes of the same cultured plane use the same language, have the same manners, and their desires are very nearly the same; so nearly the same that one cannot tell them apart by hearing their voices, reading their letters, knowing what they eat at meals, or learning how they wish to spend their summer vacations. Judging by these things and thousands of others one can easily see that the cultured [Black man] is so much like the cultured white man that he is seldom interestingly different enough to be typical of the whole [Black] race. So to write a play about cultured [Black people] is very

Jones, again, despite almost the whole of his character, still serves additional thematic purpose in the final pages of the play. Nearly through his night of suffering (dramatically – he’s only halfway through chronologically), Jones opens Scene Five by pleading to the Christian God, throwing himself to his knees and begging for protection, if not forgiveness:

Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer! I’s e a po’ sinner, a po’ sinner! I knows I done wrong, I knows it! When I cotches Jeff cheatin’ wid loaded dice my anger overcomes me and I kills him dead! Lawd, I done wrong! When dat guard hits me wid de whip, my anger overcomes me, and I kills him dead. Lawd, I done wrong! And down heah whar dese fool [plural expletive] raisea me up to the seat o’ de mighty, I steals all I could grab. Lawd, I done wrong! I knows it! I’s e sorry! Forgive me, Lawd! Forgive dis po’ sinner!³⁵²

In his eleventh hour, Jones demonstrates that he does, in fact, maintain a moral compass. He understands each of his wrongs, and he repents. Once more, Jones, a *terrible* character by any moral judgment, proves his ability to garner redemption. However, Jones is perhaps a bit too confident of his godly protection immediately thereafter, as he is shortly doomed to survive his final “haunt” before being finally captured and killed by the uprising indigenous citizens.

O’Neill’s dramatic depiction of Lem and his devoted followers opening Scene Eight is perhaps the least flattering piece of the entire play, capturing an incredibly stereotypical portrayal of these Black individuals.³⁵³ As Smithers once more moves the plot forward, this time in the role of exposition, he attempts to engage Lem in conversation – the successful conspirator guttural

nearly to write a play about cultured white people; and unless it should be a propaganda play the average audience would hardly call it racial.

Richardson argues that characters such as Brutus Jones (without labeling him explicitly) are more deserving of attention on-stage than “cultured,” perhaps more-palatable characters, simply because they are more “interesting” – and drama/theatre should be interesting. Willis Richardson. “Character,” 183.

³⁵² Eugene O’Neill. *The Emperor Jones*, 34.

³⁵³ Lem, for instance, is described as a “heavy-set, ape-faced old savage of the extreme African type, dressed in only a loin cloth.” Jones’s depiction is both parts racist in its historicity and also commentary on other cultural depictions from the era.

muttering only “We cotch him” in response most times. Yet the ending beat of the play is just that: Lem and his ilk *did* catch Jones, and they deposed their corrupt Emperor. O’Neill’s questionable depiction of these indigenous characters is (at least somewhat) here redeemed for its dramatic purpose: even *these* people, O’Neill argues, have claimed their inalienable rights. This, too, although coarse, is inspirational at its core. All humans, no matter how nastily depicted, deserve to live in an equitable socio-political paradigm; and, importantly, all humans are capable of creating such a paradigm. A New Negro reader could find such gems of “mimesis” within any piece of culture, *Emperor Jones* included: Brutus Jones’s faults do not make him subhuman, and even he can teach lessons – even the character of Lem, a racist stereotype made manifest, is human and capable of teaching us something important.

Lastly, and, I think, most powerfully, O’Neill practices an implicit valuation of Blackness and Black Americans within *Emperor Jones* by lifting them to the point of modern, artistically stylized subjecthood. In *Emperor Jones*, O’Neill created Brutus Jones as a literal piece of art, reinforcing the value inherent in artistic depictions by artists such as Charles Cullen and C M Battey, referenced in detail in the previous chapter. The type of modernist abstraction Jose Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) identified in *The Dehumanization of Art* (1925), the stripping away of the subject in modern art, requires previous acknowledgement of such a human subject. To abstract is to first acknowledge the human. Inasmuch as O’Neill subjected Jones to an Expressionist nightmare, he also lifted him to a status above the enslaved Black American, above the free Black American mistreated in the South, above even still the ignored Black American laboring away fruitlessly in the North – to the level of a twentieth-century peer. Doubling the efficacy of this artistic interpretation, O’Neill applies additional artistry in creating a well-constructed, captivating piece of art. Especially in comparison to the more domestic dramas

within the cultural memory of the New Negro movement, *Emperor Jones* is *exciting*. Admitting my own ignorance, I had never read the play before undertaking this research; and I was taken on a figurative ride during my initial read. The “haunts” Jones experiences within the already-foreboding forest sent shivers down my spine and kept me eagerly flipping through the play’s pages. In “The Negro and the Stage,” Richardson writes, scathingly, “the indiscriminate praise and support of bad acting and worthless plays surely cannot last forever.”³⁵⁴ When I first read the column, I was shocked by Richardson’s pessimism, but I have also since attempted to get into his headspace. And, with some imagination, I can understand that a viewing experience such as *Emperor Jones* would be a proverbial breath of fresh air after seeing too many “worthless plays.” *Emperor Jones* is, in short, first a good play, and secondly a useful play. While this order isn’t necessarily always preferred, a good play will always be a better tool than a piece of culture no one sees or reads. It was essential for the cultural curators of the New Negro movement to create interesting pieces of propaganda which explicitly entertained and implicated educated.

In all, *Emperor Jones* is a good play and an effective piece of propaganda. As such, it was employed by the artists and intellectuals of *Opportunity* multiple times throughout its run, both during Johnson’s editorship and beyond.³⁵⁵ Many reviews of the play are republished by the journal to flaunt Paul Robeson’s successes and spectacular acting ability; one particular piece, “‘The Emperor Jones’ in London,” features eight different rave reviews, alone.³⁵⁶ Robeson himself wrote a retrospective on the play for *Opportunity* in 1924. “Reflections on O’Neill’s Plays,” through its photographs and Robeson’s reflections, offers a unique look at the Broadway

³⁵⁴ Willis Richardson. “The Negro and the Stage,” 310.

³⁵⁵ The play and/or its titular character were referenced 42 times during Johnson’s tenure.

³⁵⁶ “‘The Emperor Jones’ in London.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 35 (1925, Klaus Reprint 1969): 346-347.

production of the play in which Robeson starred. Robeson honors the play as “undoubtedly one of ‘the great plays’—a true classic of the drama, American or otherwise,” and reveals his optimistic perspective of Jones’s character: “his is the exultant tragedy of the disintegration of a human soul,” Robeson writes.³⁵⁷ Robeson expresses his doubts he will ever play a character “more heroically tragic” than Jones, “not excepting Othello,”³⁵⁸ suggesting that the star may not act again *and* evidencing that Jones’s character is superlatively “heroically tragic.” Engaging the liberalism valued by *Opportunity*, Robeson notes that “Jones’s emotions are not primarily [Black], but human;” the actor also champions O’Neill as a “liberal-minded man” and an ally of the New Negro movement.³⁵⁹ Importantly for this study, Robeson also reiterates the same value of conflicted characters Richardson expressed earlier:

We [Black Americans] are too self-conscious, too afraid of showing all phases of our life, especially those phases which are of greatest dramatic value. The great mass of our group discourage any member who has the courage to fight these petty prejudices.³⁶⁰

Acknowledging the humanity in even the lowest points of life on-stage, as long as those moments resemble true life and the lived experiences of Black Americans, Robeson here agrees that good characters are often flawed, and that even morally “bad” characters can retain their humanity and their value(s). Robeson then ends by reaffirming his personal hope for a “great future on the serious dramatic stage” for Black Americans and their stories.³⁶¹ In addition to this

³⁵⁷ Paul Robeson. “Reflections on O’Neill’s Plays.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 2, no. 24 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 368-370, at 368.

³⁵⁸ Paul Robeson. “Reflections on O’Neill’s Plays, 369.

³⁵⁹ Paul Robeson. “Reflections on O’Neill’s Plays, 369.

³⁶⁰ Paul Robeson. “Reflections on O’Neill’s Plays, 369.

³⁶¹ Paul Robeson. “Reflections on O’Neill’s Plays, 370.

reflection, Robeson's article also features dramatic sketches from two productions,³⁶² reprinted from *Theatre Arts* and included at the end of this chapter, which reinforce the expressionism inherent within the play.

Charles S. Johnson didn't write much on theatre (if at all) for *Opportunity*; but his possible dramatic and performatic prescriptions should be considered before concluding our lens for analyzing the plays from *Opportunity*. There is only one editorial from Johnson's tenure, which Johnson *may* have (or is most likely to have) written, concerning the theatre: "On the Need of Better Plays" (1927), from issue 5.1. The editorial opens:

The Drama Section of the last two OPPORTUNITY Contests, while contributing new material, and a few good one act plays for the [Black American] Theatre, seems yet farthest behind the possibilities of its field of all the literary divisions.³⁶³

Despite the successes of the Literary Prize Contests, our editorialist feels the dramas could be of a higher quality, and they use this editorial as a charge for the creation of better-still pieces of drama and performance. The author continues to admonish a public which, through taste and patronage, has supported "the stereotypes of buffoons, and Uncle Tom of Mrs.. Stowe's play, and rejected by its indifference, and sometimes hostility, the efforts to revise these to more faithful pictures of reality."³⁶⁴ Matching the rhetoric we have heard multiple times in pieces such as this within the journal, the author concludes:

³⁶² "Jungle Scene from the American Production of 'The Emperor Jones.'" *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 2, no. 24 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 368; and "Palace Scene from the French Production 'L'Empereur Jones.'" *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 2, no. 24 (1924, Klaus Reprint 1969): 369.

³⁶³ "On the Need of Better Plays," 5.

³⁶⁴ "On the Need of Better Plays," 5.

[Black Americans] have been too ashamed of the material of their own lives to give it artistic portrayal. These new writers [such as Willis Richardson and Eulalie Spence] are beginning to see these situations and are clothing them in a new beauty. Herein lies the great future of the [Black American] in drama. It can provide a medium for the forceful interpretation of [Black American] life itself, a service which the stage undoubtedly can perform with as great, if not greater, directness and power than either fiction or poetry.³⁶⁵

Our final piece of the rubric for New Negro dramatic and theatrical production offers its clearest prescriptions for successful, moving audience experiences. New Negro plays and productions ought to be inspired by Black American life, and they should seek to recreate this inspiration as authentically as possible. Perhaps most importantly, Black Americans *must* engage the power of the theatre itself, the unique abilities of the medium over other forms. While the author doesn't extrapolate this, we can apply the most definitive characteristics of the theatre to engineer a possible meaning: theatre is ephemeral, unique in its ability to force connection between individuals. New Negro drama must be theatrical, it must engage these strengths, and it must include interesting characters. Artistic exploration, where appropriate, is encouraged. Combining this with other values from the New Negro movement, its drama must be liberal in paradigm, propagandistic in intent, and Black at its core. The ideal New Negro drama is not written by a white person, nor does it employ white actors in Blackface; its characters are Black, its story dramatizes Black American lived experience in a meaningful way. The prize-winning plays from *Opportunity's* Literary Prize Contests should observably profess these values, and the other non-published plays should be seen to carry this inspiration, if with faulted or under-inspired delivery.

Iterations of Personhood within the Prize-Winning and Unpublished Plays from *Opportunity's* Literary Contests

³⁶⁵ "On the Need of Better Plays," 6.

I will now evaluate the drama from *Opportunity*'s Literary Prize contests by borrowing this lens of New Negro analysis amalgamated from the many dramatic criticisms published within *Opportunity*. For the sake of this analysis, I will first unpack the representations of New Negro personhood present within the prize-winning plays from each of the three contests, *Frances* (1925) by G. D. Lipscomb, *Sugar Cain* (1926) by Frank H. Wilson (1886-1956), and *Plumes* (1927) by Georgia Douglas Johnson (1880-1966), in order to establish a sort of "control" for analysis, the paragon image by which to judge the representations within other, unpublished plays from the contests. During my research within the Charles S. Johnson collections at Fisk University, I had the pleasure of discovering five unpublished plays³⁶⁶ which were likely submitted to the 1925 contest.³⁶⁷ Three of the plays' authors have left behind small, but archived, traces, mostly within the journal of *Opportunity*, itself. Most of these unpublished plays were, presumably, penned by amateur playwrights, the named of whom having left no archival trace outside of their passing reference in *Opportunity* – for those of whom lucky enough to even be featured by name. I can find no information whatsoever on either Jesse C. Stubbs or Eddie King.

³⁶⁶ In alphabetic order, the plays are *A Bogus Hero* (c. 1925) by Jesse C Stubbs; *Her* (c. 1925) by Anonymous; *Scion* (c. 1925) by Eddie King; *The Cuss'd Thing* (c. 1925) by May Miller; *The Deep Regret* (c. 1925) by Claude Reymond (pseudonym). Manuscripts for '*Cruiter* (1926) by John Matheus and *The First One* (1927) by Zora Neale Hurston, two plays later published by their respective playwrights, were also included in the folder. *The First One* was submitted under the pseudonym "Xanthippe," but credited to Hurston in the announcement of winners; the play was later first published within *Ebony and Topaz*. "Contest Awards." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 4, no. 41 (1926, Klaus Reprint 1969): 156-157, at 156. Zora Neale Hurston. "The First One." *Ebony and Topaz*, edited by Charles S. Johnson, 1927, 53-56.

³⁶⁷ The announcement of contest awards in issue 4.41 corroborates the dates of three of the plays within the folder. Two of the submissions, *The First One* and *The Cuss'd Thing* were awarded Honorary Mention in the 1925 contest. '*Cruiter*, also included in the folder, won second place in the dramatic contest for that year. With these corroborating dates firmly applied to three of the plays in the folder, and having found no other possible corroborating information, I date all six of the submissions to the 1925 contest. "Contest Awards," 156.

May Miller (1899-1995), on the other hand, has achieved some historical notoriety. I am proud to do my small part to bring these underrepresented pieces of culture from the New Negro movement to the attention of scholarly analysis. I will now read these plays for the iterative representations of New Negro personhood they provide: first the prize-winning plays to demonstrate the ways in which they embody the New Negro dramatic values distilled in the previous section, and then the unpublished plays in order to determine their strengths and shortcomings.

G. D. Lipscomb's *Frances* was chosen as the winner of the first *Opportunity* Literary Prize Contest and, as such, it can be considered one of the first official New Negro dramas. Although *The Crisis* (and other contests) had honored dramatic winners in years prior, the issue of *Survey Graphic* which would eventually become Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925) was published in March 1925 after the success of the Civic Club Dinner the previous year – the moment many identify as the official public launch of the New Negro movement. *Frances* was published in May 1925. Helpful for this project, correspondence concerning *Frances* (and the first contest in general) make up the bulk of Johnson's archived content from the contests. As such, the original documents which determined *Frances* the winner are available for our perusal; beneficially, some of these letters evidence exactly why the play was chosen above its peers. The one-act play is set within the Yazoo Delta of Mississippi during the winter at about 8 PM, inside the "poor but neat room of a typical shotgun house."³⁶⁸ It could be considered a dramatic tragedy, telling the story of a confrontation between two Black Americans, Frances and her uncle Abram, and the owner of the property, a white citizen of some standing name Charles Thawson.

³⁶⁸ G. D. Lipscomb. "Frances." *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 3, no. 29 (1925, Klaus Reprint 1969): 148-152, at 148.

The play is concise, enthralling, and both effective and *affective* as a metaphor for the New Negro movement and its relationship to older Black populations, much like *A Chip Woman's Fortune* before it.

The play recurrently captures the values of the newly formed New Negro movement dramatically. From the introduction of its first character, the play is concretely liberal-sentimental, decidedly “New Negro.” The first line of stage directions reads: “Scene discovers Frances, a neat and intelligent girl of about nineteen, seated near the bed sewing, with a book lying open before her on the bed.” The cultural connections are myriad. First, her presentation. Frances is “neat and intelligent.” She is respectful and *respectable*. Although, as Richardson previously pleaded, not all New Negro characters need be “pleasant,” a character of legible sensibility, such as Frances, would likely bridge empathy better than the likes of Brutus Jones. Importantly, Frances displays her sensibility from her very introduction. Her act of reading was definitive of the New Negro citizen, and it referenced a long-running cultural memory respected by white audiences. Her sewing, too, reifies her sentimental lineage, her ability to cultivate her middle-class, feminine interiority, as sewing is essentially an industrialized form of the same act which constitutes writing (or, more appropriately, typing). The act of sewing itself carries countercultural weight within sentimentalism as a literary genre,³⁶⁹ and, from a materialist perspective, the act of sewing is the feminine gendered partner of (masculine) composition. In his chapter on the history of the typewriter, Friedrich Kittler reveals:

³⁶⁹ In “Reclaiming Sentimentalism in Edith Wharton’s *Summer*,” Nina Bennett offers a striking reading of the act of sewing within the text as a clear metaphor for feminine sexuality. Nina Bannett. “Reclaiming Sentimentalism in Edith Wharton’s *Summer*.” *Edith Wharton Review* 31, no. 1/2 (2015): 29–56, at 38.

[P]rior to their industrialization the two sexes occupied strictly symmetrical roles: women, with the symbol of female industriousness in their hands, wove tissues; men, with the symbol of male intellectual activity in their hands, wove tissues of a different sort called text.³⁷⁰

“Symmetrical,” yet socially gendered, women once wove tissues with their hands and men manually wrote texts. With the onset of industrialization, however, men began to type, and women now sewed with machines – machines made by the same companies that made their oppositely gendered typewriters.³⁷¹ Frances sewing with a book open at her feet was doubly, triply liberal-sentimental because of the connotations with which it would have resonated in the contemporary cultural memory of its audiences. From the foundation laid in this very first line, the play retains its iconic New Negro status as it progresses.

As Frances sews, her uncle Abram, “grizzled and swarthy,” crosses the room on his way out to attend to some business, bringing up the failing local school as he goes to leave. Through some classic dialogic exposition, we learn that George Mannus, a Black teacher at the school, has recently found himself in trouble of an unknown sort – trouble serious enough to warrant his soon-to-be quick departure from town and to ensure his unlikely return. Frances expresses immediate consternation, Abram condemnation, claiming the way George “has got—goin’ ‘roun’ heah tellin’ dese [Black folks] what they ought an’ oughten’ to stan’ fur,” is “hurtin’

³⁷⁰ Friedrich A. Kittler. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999, 186.

³⁷¹ Friedrich A. Kittler. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 187. Kittler notes later in this chapter that women were eventually granted access to the typewriter – but with capitalist, not compassionate, motive. The typewriter coopted women’s abilities with an especially sentimental tool, the piano; however, the typewriter was actually used to produce something of value. Kittler highlights a particular argument for the benefits of the typewriter by two German economists, who note that the new tool may “find a practical use for what has become a veritable plague across the country, namely, piano lessons for young girls: the resultant dexterity is very useful for the operation of the typewriter.” Friedrich A. Kittler. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 194-195.

[them] mo' den anything else."³⁷² Abram's sentiment here, denouncing Northerners who come South and, as Abram sees it, telling Southerners how to best live their lives, stages a common trope within drama from the era – such a line of conflict will also be seen in *Sugar Cain*. Abram tells Frances he has locked the back door (a key plot point later) and leaves. Dramatically expedient, George (whose name should connote the same liberalism of character as George Harris from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) arrives, and it becomes immediately clear the two share a romantic connection. George fills in the gaps of Frances's understanding, revealing that he had a confrontation with Charles Tawson the day prior, a white townsman and the owner of the home Abram leases. George describes the confrontation, explaining that "[Tawson] came into the classroom yesterday and insulted me. I might have taken a personal insult, but when he mentioned you I struck him."³⁷³ George's uncharacteristic punch is the hook of this play, and the climactic plot immediately starts upward. Tawson has responded with lethal retribution, promising to lynch George if he is seen in town after the following evening. Frances commands George to leave, and he lays out his plan, asking Frances to flee north to Chicago with him. Hesitant, Frances is ultimately convinced after a decidedly liberal *and* sentimental conversation, in which George details the freedom she would experience North, out of the financial bonds of Tawson, who had lent Frances money for her education, and promises her of the value she has in his heart. The two make plans to meet at nine to flee together.

Abram returns and he and Frances argue one she reveals her plan. The argument contains powerful rhetoric and striking domestic drama. In the argument's climax, Frances launches a potent insult with race-consciousness implications:

³⁷² G. D. Lipscomb. "Frances," 148.

³⁷³ G. D. Lipscomb. "Frances," 149.

You call him a [expletive] because he has race pride and is a gentleman. You're the [expletive], you and your type—you're the cause. ... Oh it's just as George says: we're still slaves. Oh, I wish I was free. I wish I was away from this place. I want to be a free woman.³⁷⁴

While not chattel slavery, George has compared Frances and Abram's existence to slavery, arguing that, as they are endlessly indebted to Tawson, her educational achievements here are meaningless and that she cannot truly be free until she sheds these bonds. During this confrontation, Abram settles into the type of the "Uncle Tom" Black character. He attempts to convince Frances of Tawson's geniality, and he stubbornly upholds the system of oppression with treats him inequitably. However, the argument ends shortly thereafter with the unexpected (for Frances) arrival of Tawson. The scene is tense and rife with the dramatically ironic knowledge that something *bad* is going to happen. Frances is immediately antagonistic toward Tawson, and duly so. The argument in which Frances and Abram were engaged extends into Tawson's visit after the man reiterates his ownership of the property and his intentions to both stay the night and court Frances, even extending his sense of ownership to the poor woman herself on page 152. Frances moves to leave, but Abram locks the front door, rendering his niece effectively trapped. After the confrontation reaches boiling with Tawson expressing his intention to be paid for the residence with Frances's subjugation, the play's nasty antagonist tears up the deed of lease he previously admitted meaningless, revealing his true intention to scam the Black family. Abram is shattered. He falls to the floor, groveling about his loss of faith in the world. A broken man, Abram lashes out, "leap[ing] onto Charles, who is borne to the floor. They grapple in a terrific struggle."³⁷⁵ Frances runs to the door, calling for George, when a gunshot is heard.

³⁷⁴ G. D. Lipscomb. "Frances," 151.

³⁷⁵ G. D. Lipscomb. "Frances," 152.

“Abram rolls over and remains still. Charles struggles to his knees...”³⁷⁶ Frances screams and falls on Abram’s broken body. Charles remains crouched and ready with his gun. “It is ten minutes of nine.”³⁷⁷ Another struggle ensues as Frances “gathers all her strength and snatches at the pistol with both hands.”³⁷⁸ Tawson overpowers her, forcing her to drop the weapon, whereupon Abram “seizes it immediately” – he heroically manages, “De Lawd has puherved me fo’ dis one pu’pose,” “shoots and sinks back to the floor. Charles falls dead across the table.”³⁷⁹ The closing stage direction powerfully reads:

(Frances, from where she has fallen on the floor, gazes in bewilderment at the spectacle, then jumps up and, running to her Uncle, seizes his head in her arms and buries her face in his wooly hair. There is silence for a minute, then the clock over the mantel strikes out nine times. Frances looks up at the clock, then returns to her attitude over her Uncle.)

In the play’s final beat, Frances embodies her selection, her valuation, of her uncle over George. Frances has chosen to stay in her home, to honor what her uncle has just done, rather than selfishly retreat to the North.

The metaphor (perhaps not-so-)hidden within this final tableau powerfully captures the sacrifice of older generations of Black Americans, both free and enslaved, which has earned the freedom of current generations and ensured the New Negro their ability to self-create and self-actualize. Just as Abram’s act had freed Frances from the ties which bound her – at great physical (and likely legal) sacrifice – the perseverance and constitution of previous Black Americans had developed the foundation for the New Negro movement through enforced sacrifice. As such, *Frances* carries powerful meaning for any New Negro reader or audience

³⁷⁶ G. D. Lipscomb. “Frances,” 153.

³⁷⁷ G. D. Lipscomb. “Frances,” 153.

³⁷⁸ G. D. Lipscomb. “Frances,” 153.

³⁷⁹ G. D. Lipscomb. “Frances,” 153.

member, enshrining the values of the movement thematically and through the composition of its characters. The play captures respectable characters interestingly and dramatically, even allowing its “pleasant” characters to falter and stage their mistakes – lifting itself to a level commendable by critics such as Richardson. It stages a respectful relationship between the New Negro paragon, embodied in Frances, and its ancestors; and it repeatedly connects itself supertextually to other notable pieces of culture. With these traits, *Frances* would serve as an ideal New Negro drama, prepared to educate *and* entertain and *hopefully* change white perspectives. It certainly affected me: I was moved, but still cognizant of the play’s allusions and intentions. The judges³⁸⁰ for *Opportunity*’s first Literary Prize Contest largely agreed. Montgomery Gregory and Edith Isaacs ranked it first of the eleven submissions, whereas Robert Benchley and Alexander Woolcott ranked it fourth, preferring *Color Struck* by Zora Neale Hurston (which took third in the contest) and *The Humble Instrument* by Warren A MacDonald (which took second), respectively.³⁸¹ Of the play, Isaacs said it was “chosen because it is dramatic in form, material and characterization and achieved its intention;”³⁸² Gregory wrote much more:

³⁸⁰ The dramatic judges for the 1925 contest were Montgomery Gregory, “formerly Instructor in Dramatics, Howard University;” Alexander Woolcott, “Dramatic Critic;” Robert C. Benchley, “Dramatic Critic and Editor of *Life*,” and Edith Isaacs, “Editor, *Theatre Arts Magazine*.” Contest Awards, 143.

³⁸¹ I find it worth noting each of the plays was submitted to the judges under a pseudonym. G. D. Lipscomb is “Carl Fitch.” Warren A MacDonald is “John Dennison.” Although Hurston’s chosen penname, “Xanthippe,” matches that on the manuscript submission for *The First One*, it is still unclear if the pennames were chosen upon submission by each contestant, or if they were applied retroactively in the name of a blind judgement. Given the fatal consequences of Black public activity staged in plays such as *Rachel*, it is also possible the writers submitted manuscripts under pseudonyms for the sake of protection.

³⁸² Edith Isaacs. *Letter to Charles S. Johnson*, April 21, 1925. Box 194, folder 2. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

I place this play first because of its faithful portraiture of a segment of southern life; the excellent presentation of racial types, especially in the case of Abram, the Uncle of Frances; and finally the powerful dramatic interest maintained throughout the play, culminating in a denouement of exceptional strength. This play has minor faults of language, etc., but the above strong points places [sp] it in a class by itself in this contest.”³⁸³

Frances was labeled the paragon of New Negro theatre in 1925 because of its interesting, effective dramatization of the movements values. The bar for New Negro performance had been set, and later dramatists sought to have their own iterations of modernist Black drama recognized and officially sanctioned.

Frank H. Wilson, who acted alongside Robeson and Patrick Gilpin in productions of O’Neill’s *Emperor Jones* and *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* (1924), won the following Literary Prize Contest with his submission of *Sugar Cain*. The play dramatizes a similar animosity for Northern values seen in *Frances*, however, the argument between son Fred and father Paul within *Sugar Cain* is more clearly expressed and more powerfully felt, even if the plot’s modern “deux ex machina” leaves the play feeling underwhelming by comparison at its end. The play stars the Cain family, parents Paul and Martha, son Fred and daughter Celia, “called Sugar for sweet,” in their own domestic drama, set in a “small room in an old-fashioned frame house” which has reached a state of disrepair – the wallpaper is “hanging down in long strips,” the “wooden floor is covered with a torn and dilapidated rug,” etc.³⁸⁴ The characters are familiar types.³⁸⁵ The play opens with traditional exposition in the form of a conversation between

³⁸³ Montgomery Gregory. “A Critical Estimate of Plays Submitted in *Opportunity* Playwriting Contest.” *Letter to Charles S. Johnson*, April 17, 1925. Box 194, folder 2. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

³⁸⁴ Frank H. Wilson. *Sugar Cain*. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 4, no. 42 (1926, Klaus Reprint 1969): 181-184 and 201-203, at 201 and 181.

³⁸⁵ Sugar is described simply as a “young dark brown girl about 23 years old, comely and well built;” Paul is “an old-fashioned [Black man], about 62 years old, with gray beard,

Martha and Paul, in which we discover that their daughter had previously had a baby – and Paul presumes Howard Hill, a local young Black man with whom Sugar has recently become smitten, is the father, foregrounding Paul’s vindictiveness for the man whom he had once welcomed warmly into his home, though he originally pins it on Howard’s northern origins.³⁸⁶ Fred enters and he and his father have another heated race-consciousness debate, akin to that between Frances and her father, catalyzed by a reference to Lee Drayton, with whom Fred shares an antagonistic history (in essence, he’s the Charles Tawson analogue in this play). Fred argues for his right to think for himself, and Paul counters that, without the assistance of white society and its technological advances, Fred would be “running round in Africa half naked.”³⁸⁷ Paul continues to offer the plain realities of racialized existence in America as evidence, concluding: “Who’s got everything down hyer—white folks, ain’t day?”³⁸⁸ Hard truths clash against youthful hope and idealism throughout their debate, with Paul powerfully noting his ultimate stance, a resolution suggested to be thematic of older generations (at least dramatically, given the recurrence of the trope):

(Spits.) Lissen, son—I got money an I got property. I could buy an sell some o’ dees white folks roun hyer — but I ain’t goin’ ter let dem know it. I could fix dis shack up and live in grand style if I wanted to—but de minnit I did dat dese folks would git curious and wanten say dat I didn’t know mah place, an dat I was tryin’ ter act lak white folks—fus thing yo know I’d have a lot ob trouble on mah hans—an I couldn’t stay hyer—so I fools em.³⁸⁹

eyebrows and hair, walks and moves somewhat feeble from hard work;” Martha “a small dark complexioned old lady of about 55 years, with kindly face and disposition.” Frank H. Wilson. *Sugar Cain*, 181.

³⁸⁶ Frank H. Wilson. *Sugar Cain*, 181.

³⁸⁷ Frank H. Wilson. *Sugar Cain*, 182.

³⁸⁸ Frank H. Wilson. *Sugar Cain*, 182.

³⁸⁹ Frank H. Wilson. *Sugar Cain*, 182.

Paul claims, whereas Fred has “race price,” he himself has “race sense.” He understands the socio-economic realities of his lived experience, and he manages expectations to ensure his hidden prosperity. Fred, however, maintains his desire for and belief in something bigger, something better, more equitable. He expresses his intention to head North for an education, and he asserts Sugar’s desire, right, and ability to do so, as well. Paul scoffs before Martha enters – one of a few convenient “saving graces” within the script – asking the family if they’ll be joining her for church. Fred obliges, Paul leaves for the yard to vent.

Without judges’ notes from this year to reference, I believe this well-staged debate, a hidden sort of teaching piece within the play, lifted *Sugar Cain* above its peers in the competition. The remainder of the plot is engaging, but dramatically efficient. In perhaps the play’s greatest moment of emotional engagement, Sugar tells her mother that it wasn’t Howard, but Lee Drayton, who is the father of her two-year-old daughter, Ora – Lee Drayton, who had previously forced himself upon her when she was asked by Martha to deliver some clothes to Lee’s mother, Lee Drayton who had forced her to stay quiet about the truth, despite her father’s yearslong hatred, to keep that same family safe. Howard appears on-stage, Paul threatens him, before Sugar ultimately tells Howard, too, the truth. He leaves and a gunshot is heard. Almost like a Greek messenger, Howard appears to tell us of the scuffle that occurred. When Lee went to shoot him, he missed; during the ongoing struggle, Lee fell and hit his head on a rock to (conveniently) prevent Howard from being a murderer. A crowd can be heard outside, presumably a lynching mob to kill Howard for what he’s done; but Fred appears and reveals the truth: a fire had broken out in the Drayton home. Miss Mary Drayton, Lee’s mother, was trapped. Fred heroically entered the collapsing home to save her, and the crowd the family had heard was actually amassing to celebrate Fred’s heroism. Lee, not dead, it is discovered, had stumbled into

the house and was burned to death – “God punished him for his sins,” Martha exclaims at the news.³⁹⁰ All is well, despite the animosity that still remains at the play’s end. In all, *Sugar Cain* is dramatically expedient, yet potent in the characters it presents and the debates they host. *Sugar Cain* literally dramatizes the debates likely ongoing in homes across the country, serving as a useful guide for engaging in such difficult discussions. It also notably shows a respectable Black character, Howard Hill, slipping into indecency in the name of defending his love’s honor. Such heroism, almost melodramatic, was a value demonstrably held by New Negro dramas, as we’ve seen in both *Frances* and *Sugar Cain*, and as we will see repeated in unpublished entries.

Last of the prize-winners, Georgia Douglas Johnson’s *Plumes* (1927) has likely had the most successful canonical life since its publication. It was the only of the three I had read before this study, and Johnson’s fame certainly surpasses Wilson’s and Lipscomb’s. I will now tap the play’s useful thematic elements: most notably Charity Brown’s anti-rational ability to *know* her daughter’s fate in attempting to prepare for it. Roughly speaking, *Plumes* dramatizes another difficult conversation, this time between Charity Brown and her friend, Tildy, regarding Charity’s daughter, Emmeline’s, immediate mortality. The scene is familiar, the kitchen of a small two-room cottage, we can see a “[n]eedle, thread, scissors, etc. on [the] table;”³⁹¹ and the conversation is similarly domestic and difficult. Emmeline has been sick for some time, and her condition is only getting worse. The doctor(s) and her friends remain hopeful, but, after witnessing a plain funeral for another little girl, Charity has her doubts; and she vows to celebrate her daughter deservedly in death, with plumes at her funeral. She states, powerfully:

³⁹⁰ Frank H. Wilson. *Sugar Cain*, 203.

³⁹¹ Georgia Douglas Johnson. *Plumes*. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 5, no. 7 (1927, Klaus Reprint 1969): 200-201 and 217-218, at 200.

I made up my mind when little Bessie went that the next one of us what died would have a sho nuff fun'ral—plumes! So I saved and saved and now —this doctor—³⁹²

She is cut off, exasperated by the thought of paying a doctor to fruitlessly attempt to save her daughter. Doctors, Tildy scoffs, “[a]ll they think about is cuttin’ and killing and taking your money.”³⁹³ The two share a noted distrust for the practitioners of Western medicine, despite its lifesaving advancements (promoted by the “Uncle Tom” sort of characters in our previous two plays), and a shared certainty in Emmeline’s fate. This is only confirmed as the two are drinking coffee, whereupon Tildy finds an omen in the grounds at the bottom of Charity’s cup, a vision of a big gathering. A funeral. In this moment, Charity knows. Tildy knows. *I knew*. Emmeline’s fate was sealed. No matter how irrational it may seem, this was true, this would happen. However, when Dr. Scott arrives in the following moment and, after a brief examination, recommends operating on Emmeline as “her last chance” at survival, Charity refuses, confirming her maternal duty – “I do want to—do—everything I can do to—to—to...,” having previously told Tildy, “I don’t trust [the doctor]. I jest want to do what’s right by her”³⁹⁴ – while also committing to her anti-rational sense of knowing. After the doctor leaves, repeating his plea, Charity affirms her decision to Tildy: “It would take all the money I got for the operation [sp] and then—he can’t save her—I know he can’t—I feel it... I feel it...”³⁹⁵ Tildy confirms that “it’s in the air,” and, then, as if Charity had performatively spoken the truth into existence, the sound of “strangling noises” emanates from the inner room, Emmeline’s death knell.³⁹⁶ The pair shouts and jumps to before finally accepting the fate they already knew to be true, and the play comes to its close.

³⁹² Georgia Douglas Johnson. *Plumes*, 201.

³⁹³ Georgia Douglas Johnson. *Plumes*, 201.

³⁹⁴ Georgia Douglas Johnson. *Plumes*, 218.

³⁹⁵ Georgia Douglas Johnson. *Plumes*, 218.

³⁹⁶ Georgia Douglas Johnson. *Plumes*, 218.

Plumes is perhaps the most powerful of all New Negro dramas, and it stages a heartbreak I cannot even properly imagine. Most interestingly, it also stages familiar New Negro tropes, such as the sentimental lineage of sewing paired with the more-liberal, enterprising business Charity has made for herself from her old-fashioned skills, with a definitive twist: a committed slip into anti-liberal other ways of knowing. The New Negro paragon and paradigm was *largely* Western, and it engaged legible tropes of liberal-sentimental public activity in order to ensure respectful reception and greater access for future citizens. However, alternative ways of knowing beyond Enlightenment rationality were also central to the New Negro paragon/paradigm, and *Plumes* dramatizes this dichotomy beautifully. Other plays within Charles S. Johnson's collection share similar values (such as an honoring respect for the past) and, as such, Georgia Douglas Johnson's play serves as a sanctioned point of reference.

Importantly, through plays such as *Plumes* (and, in the following section, May Miller's *The Cuss'd Thing*), the drama of the New Negro movement can be seen to serve a special use, unique in its ability to stage the duplicitous nature of the paragon/paradigm. The New Negro movement was *modernist*, with a foundational emphasis on the *new* and a similarly liberal Western genealogy. However, the New Negro movement also had non-Western genealogies: epistemologies, values, and best-practices bestowed by the traditions of enslaved Black Americans, the contemporaneous Pan-Africanism movement, and other, likely innumerable, individual influences. Pan-Africanism was an international movement among the global African diaspora (and on the African continent), which sought to emphasize the African roots of Black folks around the world and to celebrate this African heritage and its unique cultural history. In American, to the New Negro movement, the movement was largely embodied by W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, referenced in chapter 2 in a scathing criticism by Charles S.

Johnson.³⁹⁷ Du Bois's Pan-African aspirations are largely embodied in the short-lived children's periodical he edited, *The Brownies' Book* (1920-1921), through which Du Bois sought to inform Black American children of their African heritage and subtly prescribe best-practices for future generations.³⁹⁸ Du Bois laid a foundation for the artists and intellectuals (*and* lay-people) of the New Negro movement to reference non-Western traditions and epistemologies, ways of knowing.

Already subaltern in its Blackness, the New Negro paradigm welcomed other minoritarian ideologies, where applicable, while also generally promoting the respectable self-actualization thematically central to the movement.³⁹⁹ While Charles S. Johnson was a cis,

³⁹⁷ Christopher Riches and Jan Palmowski. "Pan-Africanism." *A Dictionary of Contemporary World History*. Oxford University Press, 2021, n.p.

³⁹⁸ Du Bois himself captured the aspirations of *The Brownies' Book* in an editorial introducing the publication in *The Crisis*, issue 18.6 (1919):

Deftly intertwined with this mission of entertainment will go the endeavor:

(a) To make colored children realize that being "colored" is a normal, beautiful thing.

(b) To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race.

(c) To make them know that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons.

(d) To teach them delicately a code of honor and action in their relations with white children.

(e) To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their own homes and companions.

(f) To point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things of life.

(g) To inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice.

W. E. B. Du Bois. "The True Brownies." *The Crisis* 18, no 6 (1919): 285-286, at 286.

³⁹⁹ For more on the insurgent movements within the New Negro movement (e.g. Marxism/socialism), see, for example Minkah Makalani. "For the Liberation of Black People Everywhere: The African Blood Brotherhood, Black Radicalism, and Pan - African Liberation in the New Negro Movement, 1917-1936." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2004; Minkah Makalani. "An Apparatus for Negro Women: Black Women's Organizing, Communism, and the Institutional Spaces of Radical Pan-African Thought." *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 4, no. 2 (2016): 250-273; and Jeffrey

straight man, other seminal figures within the New Negro movement were more fluid in their sexuality, and this queerness has become a definitive characteristic of the movement and its paradigm. Alain Locke, Bruce Nugent, Charles Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston all embraced the spectrum of their sexuality.⁴⁰⁰ Locke, in particular, wrote extensively about the complexities of New Negro identity, pointing us toward the value of plays such as *Plumes* and the doubleness they dramatize. Introducing the concept and movement in his titular edited collection, Locke begins by concluding the New Negro “cannot be swathed in [the] formulae [of sociologists, philanthropists, and race-leaders],” because “the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology” – “the mind of the [Black American] seems suddenly to have slipped from under the tyranny of social intimidation and to be shaking off the psychology of imitation and implied inferiority.”⁴⁰¹ The New Negro movement was modernist, and, as such, it emphasized the *new*; *and* the New Negro movement was minoritarian in a social system which oppressed it, a system to which Black Americans owed no favors (a system engaged mostly for the genealogical authority it offered the movement). As such, the New Negro movement was doubly determined in its espousal of the new, and, occasionally, in its argument that alternative epistemologies could be equally valid to the rational epistemology of liberalism. Black women (and Black women characters), especially withheld from the liberal paradigm, were often central to this argument.⁴⁰² Although intellectuals such as Locke within the movement headily theorized this

C. Stewart. *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2018.

⁴⁰⁰ Terrance Wooten. “On Black Bottom Epistemologies and The New Negro.” *The Black Scholar* 50, no. 1 (2020): 47–55.

⁴⁰¹ Alain Locke. “The New Negro.” *The New Negro*, 1925, 3-16, at 3-4.

⁴⁰² This history of Black women’s intellectualism (and its lack of proper recognition in other intellectual fields, such as scholarship) recalls Patricia Hill Collins’s seminal scholarship in *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), in which she argues that “African American women outside of academia have long functioned as intellectuals by representing the interests of

contradiction, the women playwrights and women characters in the plays from the New Negro movement capture the legitimacy of these epistemologies better than any manifesto. The theories are hypothetical; the stories these dramas tell feel *real*, and they happen in front of us. The dramatic irony of *Plumes*, the knowledge that Charity is right and that Emmerline's inevitable death *will* unfold before us, created a dramatic world in which this alternate epistemology is legitimate, suggesting such a reality in our own world. As such, these dramatic case studies celebrated within *Opportunity* carry unique presentations of New Negro personhood, iterations of the paragon which could give these debates space to exist. I will now search for this power within the unpublished plays from *Opportunity*'s 1925 literary contest.

The unpublished plays, kept (mostly) unseen in Johnson's archive since their circa 1925 submission, perform similar, observably New Negro, values, although they haven't officially been awarded in so doing. These plays may have been deemed less worthy because of the type of language used, because of the relative banality of the characters or plot portrayed, or perhaps because the play(s) did not serve sufficient propagandistic purpose – or for some other reason(s) entirely – but they can (and, I argue, *should*) be read for the individual iterative definitions of New Negro personhood they contain. For the sake of this analysis, I will undertake close readings of three plays submitted to the *Opportunity* Literary Contest: *The Deep Regret* by Claude Reymond, *The Cuss'd Thing* by May Miller, and *Scion* by Eddie King. Again, each of the author's names, outside of May Miller, are pseudonyms – though she herself submitted her

Black women as a group.” Other scholars, such as La Donna Forsgren, in *Sistuh's in the Struggle* (2020) have continued to argue for Black women's lay intellectual activity. Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, second edition. New York: Routledge, 1991, 16; and La Donna L. Forsgren. *Sistuh's in the Struggle: an Oral History of Black Arts Movement Theater and Performance*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2020.

manuscript anonymously. Zora Neale Hurston's *The First One* has already been the focus of some scholarship;⁴⁰³ *Her*, which was anonymously submitted, is subtitled "A Mystery Play," doesn't carry the thematic weight of its peers, though it may be the most interesting drama in the collection (and my personal favorite); and Jesse C. Stubbs's *A Bogus Hero* is much too long to have ever been printed as winner of the contest; as such, they will not be included in this close reading – however, *A Bogus Hero* is still included in the appendix for reference. Each of the plays in this analysis are deeply domestic, three of which could aptly be labeled "domestic dramas." Of the domestic dramas, all contain familiar touchstones, but the conflicts within *The Deep Regret* and *The Cuss'd Thing* are especially recognizable after reading *Frances* and *Plumes*. *Scion* could be considered an anti-lynching (or "lynching") play. I will first unpack *The Deep Regret* and *The Cuss'd Thing*, detailing their contents and reading them thematically, comparing them to the aforementioned paragons of New Negro drama in order to evaluate their (potential) contributions to the movement, before applying the same treatment to the remaining two plays.

The Deep Regret, submitted under the pseudonym "Claude Reymond," is another powerful example of the trope dramatizing what happens when a respectable Black citizen slips into "unpleasantness." This feature alone warrants it interesting on Richardson's earlier rubric – or at least giving it the potential to be. Our primary characters are Sarah Anderson, "a slim brown woman of thirty-six, wearing a calico dress and gingham apron," her daughter Mamie, "a girl of twenty" – a true Everygirl – and father Josh, "a slightly bald man of forty, wearing sidlers

⁴⁰³ Taylor Hagood. "Dramatic Deception and Black Identity in 'The First One' and 'Riding the Goat.'" *African American Review* 39, no. 1/2 (2005): 55–66.

but no mustache. He is a little above medium height and very strongly built.”⁴⁰⁴ The setting is “the room which the family uses as dining-room and kitchen;” “[t]here are one or two chairs filled with ironed clothes about the room,” and “[t]here are no pictures on the wall. This is another plain space, a poor family’s home *and* working space. Here Sarah launders and presses clothes for a living. Her enterprising nature renders her immediately respectable to a broad white population, however it also carries connotations of the “old ways,” a binary pole somewhat opposed to the educated directive of the New Negro paradigm. This play, too, contains the familiar, expected exposition; Sarah and Mamie discuss the goings-on since Josh left to do business in Palm Springs, as he does annually: Mamie has been “going with” Amos Jackson, a young working Black man in the neighborhood, who’s employment beneath a loan-shark has allowed the Andersons to take out a loan on collateral (despite the racial limitations on lending normally imposed by figures such as Mr. Green, the loan shark, Jackson’s rueful employer, and this play’s primary antagonist), which the household has used to buy new furniture and Christmas presents. Mamie also has a new pair of shoes, an immediate and ongoing point of contention between Mamie and her mother, who works throughout much of the play to deduce where her daughter obtained the money to afford a fancy, ten-dollar pair of shoes, as opposed to the \$3.50 utilitarian pair she normally wears. Mamie tells her Martha, her neighbor (and no friend to her) lent her the money; she lies. In reality, Jackson, Mamie’s boyfriend, purchased the shoes for her as a present. The pair argue and dream in parts, reflecting on the joys of being able to spend money to stave off their loneliness in Josh’s absence and looking forward to the father’s return, fantasizing the riches he’s sure to bring and mentioning that when Josh returns from these business endeavors, “he’s just as happy as a lark, cause he knows he’s got his pocket full o’

⁴⁰⁴ Claude Reymond (pseudonym). *The Deep Regret*, c. 1925. Box 194, folder 2. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN, 1 and 15.

money, a full stomach and good clothes on his back,” instilling an unfortunate dramatic irony in the situation.⁴⁰⁵ We as reader begin to suspect Josh’s belly may not be so full, his mood not so lark-like, on his return.

A knock on the door is heard and, before our ironic suspicion can come to fruition, Amos Jackson and his cruel boss, Mr. Green, enter. The pair enter to claim payment for the debt, due at noon, it being a few minutes after. Sarah explains the situation, assuring Green his payment will come as soon as Josh arrives in a few minutes time, but Green nonetheless threatens to take their front-room furniture into repossession. He leaves to assess the value of the furniture, while Mamie and Jackson sneak an aside. The pair quickly reaffirm their “like” for each other, and Jackson does his best to cheer up his beau, committing himself to her best interests.⁴⁰⁶ Green chastises Jackson for lending the family money for such worthless furniture, fearing he will be unable to sell the repossessed furniture to cover the loss, and the shark ultimately leaves to collect another debt, giving the Andersons a few more minutes to gather the funds. On cue, Josh enters, noticeably dejected, “he does not seem to be ‘as happy as a lark.’”⁴⁰⁷ We as audience or reader feel our heart drop. When the loving family questions Josh’s mood, the awful truth is revealed, complicating the dramatic arc direly:

Josh. (Rubbing his hands slowly.) Yes, Ah’m all out o’ luck. Ah aint done a thing this season. Aint hardly made ma expenses. Ah just did have enough to get back home. The toughest season Ah ever seen...

Sarah. Josh Anderson, is you kiddin’ me?

Josh. Do Ah look like Ah’m kiddin’?

Sarah. You mean to stand there and tell me you aint brought no money back from Palm Beach?

⁴⁰⁵ Claude Reymond (pseudonym). *The Deep Regret*, 4.

⁴⁰⁶ Jackson tells Mamie, “You know Ah’ll save you from trouble any time Ah kin cause Ah like you a whole lot.” Claude Reymond (pseudonym). *The Deep Regret*, 8.

⁴⁰⁷ Claude Reymond (pseudonym). *The Deep Regret*, 15.

Josh. Not a thing. Not less you call fifteen or twenty cents money.
Sarah. Now we sure is in a hole.

The Anderson's immediate financial fate has been sealed: they are doomed. Sarah and Mamie tell Josh of their predicament, and he chastises the pair for living beyond their means, surrendering to the idea that they'll have to give up the new furniture. Green and Jackson return, and Josh explains to the debtors that he is unable to pay, permitting them to reclaim the furniture. Bereft at the sight of losing her now-beloved belongings, Sarah pleads with Josh, "Is you goin' to stand here like a coward and let 'em clean our front room out?"⁴⁰⁸ But Josh wisely tempers her temperament:

What else you want me to do? They got the law with 'em, aint they? If Ah make 'em git out, they'll get the cops and take the things anyhow! If Ah beat 'em up they'll have me put in jail! [...] Ah could take one of 'em by the neck with each hand and choke 'em till they couldn't walk, but that wouldn't do no good; so you just as well make up your mind to take your medicine! (Sarah sits by the table and begins to cry.)⁴⁰⁹

Josh, despite his physical strength and capabilities, understands the powerlessness of his situation, legally and contractually, and he acquiesces. Mamie, too, begs Jackson to follow-through on his promise, but her suitor helplessly expresses his need to follow orders to retain his job. In the climactic moment, as Green and Jackson are beginning to repossess the Anderson's furniture, Sarah acts where her husband refuses:

Sarah. (Snatching up an iron as Green starts out with a chair.) If my husband is too big a coward to stop you, Ah'll stop you! (She makes a dash for Green with the iron raised. Dropping the chair Green catches her hand and pushes her backwards. She stumbles and nearly falls, but Josh catches her, and angered by Green's action takes the iron from Sarah's hand and starts for him.)

Josh. (As Green hurries out.) Put your hands on ma wife and think you'll

⁴⁰⁸ Claude Reymond (pseudonym). *The Deep Regret*, 20.

⁴⁰⁹ Claude Reymond (pseudonym). *The Deep Regret*, 20.

get away with it! (As Green darts out of the door Josh catches him in the back of the collar and raising the iron strikes. We hear the fall of a heavy body.)⁴¹⁰

The playwright here stages the most viscerally anti-liberal moment of any New Negro domestic drama I have read (which is certainly only a small percentage, but the violence of this moment is self-evident). Josh's actions in this moment go against not only his own professed reason, but against the tenets of liberalism. However, although somewhat paradoxical, the New Negro paradigm makes certain room for moments of violent heroism of this sort, as evident in both *Frances* and, to a lesser extent, *Sugar Cain*. Abram shooting Tawson is, arguably, justified, and the act itself creates his niece's freedom (if condemning him to incarceration). Here, Josh is, to me, less justified, but his actions resonate with a similar protective, custodial heroism. When his wife's safety is threatened, his sense of duty supersedes his liberal logic, and he attacks Green (likely fatally). We never see the extent of Green's physical response to Sarah's assault, but it is very possible Josh is saving her great, perhaps mortal, harm. Similarly, this climactic catastrophe doesn't have the performative undertones of Abram's sacrifice in *Frances*. Josh's momentary act of heroism has incurred the wrath of the law upon him, as Abram's certainly would have, but in beating Green, he doesn't free Sarah from her debt to the company, and he doesn't create a more hopeful future for his family.

For these reasons, I find *The Deep Regret* powerful – its final moment has been etched into my brain more than any other moment from these dramas – yet it doesn't serve quite the metaphorical purpose of *Frances*, nor does it contain the loopholes for innocence we see in *Sugar Cain*. Josh (possibly, most likely) saved Sarah from harm, but he has doomed himself to imprisonment or death, and Sarah still owes those fifty dollars... and now she has no

⁴¹⁰ Claude Reymond (pseudonym). *The Deep Regret*, 21-22.

breadwinner. As such, *The Deep Regret* doesn't earn itself any prizes within the *Opportunity Literary Contest*, but it does serve as a powerful piece of drama, one which I feel would only gain power in performance. I believe its plot would achieve Richardson's approbation, as it is certainly interesting and its characters are tantalizingly "unpleasant." Moreover, read thematically, the play offers powerful messages. Economically, Josh's values carry the moral message against consumerism and spending beyond one's means, a sort of twentieth-century (Black) Epicureanism: "Didn't Ah tell you you made a mess of it? All this comes from wantin' to show off in front of the neighbors!"⁴¹¹ Perhaps the playwright intended to warn Black readers of the dangers of "keeping up with the Joneses," practicing comparative consumerism despite the inherent economic imbalances which practically separate Black from white neighbors. Perhaps this is a Marxist critique, denouncing the alienation of selling oneself in labor only to purchase and inherently keep the machine moving. Personally, I sense no radicalism in Josh's action, only an honest attempt to protect his wife in a stressful moment atop stressful months of stressful moments. The liberal subject in Josh had been pushed to its breaking point by Sarah's goading and Green's physicality, and he momentarily broke from his paradigm of (relative) New Negro practice. Each character in this play has their lesson(s) to teach,⁴¹² and, ultimately, *The Deep Regret* marks a theatrically interesting, valuably unique interpretation of New Negro values and personhood in a challenging moment.

⁴¹¹ Claude Reymond (pseudonym). *The Deep Regret*, 22.

⁴¹² Sarah could stand to care less about appearances; Mamie has probably fallen too quickly and too far for Jackson; Jackson ought to follow-through on promises made to those he loves (or "likes"); Green needs to respect people, especially Black people, more; and Josh should (probably) improve his position in life so that his fate is not determined by the luck of his business once per year; etc.

May Miller's *The Cuss'd Thing* is another domestic drama with a powerful, yet completely different, plot which emphasizes alternative ways of knowing akin to those present in *Plumes*. Miller writes in "Just a Word," a note attached to the title page of the manuscript, that the story was "suggested by the pathetic case of a boy whom I taught in the high school," who was only excited intellectually by music; ironically, the boy's mother "did not believe in it; she though it wicked to play [in class or other "worth-while" places]." ⁴¹³ Seizing this inspiration, the play follows the unfortunate plight of Sampson and Marthy Lee, a stevedore and his wife, set within "[t]he kitchen of a two room apartment in Harlem" during the present, a "May evening about six o'clock." ⁴¹⁴ The play includes a list of furniture and properties in its preamble, emphasizing the realistic nature of its intended production. Its first page reinforces this first impression, consisting entirely of a set of stage directions to introduce us to the simple scene and its characters. Most noteworthy, Sampson Lee strums a mandolin, and Jim Watkins, his friend, puffs at his cornet; the pair play "Old Fashioned Love" (1923), a contemporary song by James P Johnson and Cecil Mack, composers and musicians famous for "The Charleston" (1923). Miller describes the pair: Jim Watkins, "a well built mulatto of about thirty-five..., dressed in a carefully pressed threadbare dark suit. In his tie a gaudy scarf pin glitters and both ring fingers are circled by gold rings;" and Sampson Lee, "a slender dark brown fellow of about thirty... His attire is in striking contrast to that of his companion. His colored shirt is open at the throat and his dark trousers bag sadly." ⁴¹⁵ Already, our primary male protagonist oozes "unpleasantness." Through some brief exposition, it becomes clear that we've been witnessing a rehearsal for an audition. Sampson has been preparing to prove his worthiness to join the band of which Jim is

⁴¹³ May Miller. *The Cuss'd Thing*, c. 1925. Box 194, folder 2. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN, 1.

⁴¹⁴ May Miller. *The Cuss'd Thing*, 2.

⁴¹⁵ May Miller. *The Cuss'd Thing*, 4.

part, a position with a pay of thirty-five dollars per week – an honest sum (roughly \$600 per week by today’s valuation). Sampson is visibly excited by the opportunity, especially the income. When Jim asks what his wife thinks of the prospect, Sampson reveals he has yet to tell her; he’s scared:

Sampson. (Looking out the window) Marthy? I aint tol’ huh yit.

Jim. Why? Want ‘a s’prise her?

Sampson. Not ‘xactly. Yuh know Marthy ain’t been well fuh uh lon’ time, she goin’ tuh hab uh baby. I’s kinda skeer’d tuh tell huh.

Jim. Scared? Why?

Sampson. (Turning slowly toward the window) She don’t lak mah playin’ an’ say Gawd don’t lak it.

Jim. (He approaches Sampson) Well, maybe she’ll change her min’. Thirty-five dollars ‘ud come in powerful good an’ her havin’ a baby.

Sampson. I donno but I ‘ud lak de money fuh huh and de baby. Den tuh I’d mah chance. All de time I’s been awantin’ tuh play an’ play—. ⁴¹⁶

Sampson’s fears here serve as the play’s hook, introducing an essentially supernatural or faith-based line of conflict while espousing another branch of illiberal knowledge, continuing the trope seen in *Plumes* of the dramatization of a now-demonstrated New Negro value. Before we’ve met, we as reader know Marthy *knows* God disapproves of Sampson’s music-playing. We have another loaded Chekhov’s gun, an expected plot development, and the secretive joy of a piece of dramatic irony (even if it also holds the weight of a terrible omen). Additionally, the affected nature of Sampson’s speech, in particular, is noteworthy. This reifies his “unpleasantness.”

The two are interrupted by the arrival of Marthy, “a small brown woman of twenty-five, dressed in a dark suit and carrying a basket,” who drops her load and collapses into the nearest chair immediately after making it through the door. ⁴¹⁷ Sampson rushes to comfort and care for her, Jim cordially greets Marthy (who rejects his amicability) and departs, sensing he and his

⁴¹⁶ May Miller. *The Cuss’d Thing*, 7.

⁴¹⁷ May Miller. *The Cuss’d Thing*, 7.

music are no longer welcome, expressing his intention to return in thirty minutes. Marthy expresses her utter detest for musicians the moment Jim leaves and inquires about his return, whereupon Sampson is forced to reveal his secret intention:

Sampson. (Speaking desperately as if seeking to gain Marthy's approbation) Yes, uh new job. Yuh know Watkins play dat cornet in uh orc'stra an' he say to me yestiddy as how dey needs uh mand'lin an' how he tol' ob me. I wen' wid him tuh de theayter tuh practice de music dis mornin'.

Marthy. Yuh practice music in uh theayter!

Sampson. (proudly) Yes, an' dey lak mah playin' an wants me tuh stay. I starts tonight—thirty-five dollar uh week. (Marthy drops in a chair exhausted.)⁴¹⁸

The admittance winds Marthy. She hates music *and* she's antitheatrical. Thankfully, these values were not definitive of New Negro personhood. However, her prejudices prove well-founded as the play nears its climax. Marty reinforces the spiritual nature of her denunciation, nearly crying at the thought of her husband "turnin' [his] back on Him fuh thirty-five dollar uh week."⁴¹⁹ Sampson's music playing is "cuss'd," in Marthy's eyes, in the eyes of God.⁴²⁰ Marthy then reveals the cause of her immediate concern, a dream she had the other night. Marthy tells of her premonition and Sampson attempts to comfort her:

Marthy. I dream I war all dress' up in white agoin' tuh de church tuh git married; but, funny lak dreams is, I thought I war carryin' our baby an' he war dress' in white tuh.

Sampson. Nuthin' bad 'bout dat, an' anyhow it ain't nuthin' but uh dream.

Marthy. I know but de ol' folks ustuh say as how when yuh dream of marriages dey war certain death an' dat white war uh sho' sign ob sorrow. You don't s'spose—

Sampson. I don't s'spose nuthin'. Our baby's acomin' heah biggah and stronger'n his pappy ebber war.

⁴¹⁸ May Miller. *The Cuss'd Thing*, 9-10.

⁴¹⁹ May Miller. *The Cuss'd Thing*, 11.

⁴²⁰ May Miller. *The Cuss'd Thing*, 12.

Marthy's dream has disturbed her, done more to convince her of her unborn baby's fate than Sampson's support can undo. Despite Sampson's assurance that this is *just a dream*, Marthy knows something's not right. She's dejected, begging of Sampson, "If yuh only warn't goin' tuh play. I's skeer'd. (Her voice has risen to a high pitch. She is hysterical. She groans and sits down in a chair exhausted)." ⁴²¹ Sampson's commitment to his music, the only gift he's ever had, continues to perversely, physically harm Marthy's health. Despite this, Sampson is self-assured and simply helps her into the next room to rest. When Jim arrives immediately thereafter, he welcomes him in and, in a moment of something like hubris, invites his friend to practice with him once more before the pair head off to their gig at the theatre. Instead of rehearsing "The Charleston," which always entices Jim to watch "them bare brown legs swing" instead of playing, the two start into "Old Fashioned Love" once more before a "terrified whisper" is heard from the next room – Marthy is calling feebly for her husband. ⁴²² Sampson drops his mandolin, rushes in to check on her, "returns hurriedly" and urges Jim to "go quick 'cross the hall an' tell Ma Banks tuh come." ⁴²³ Ma Banks, a midwife, *does* come, quickly, and delivers a powerfully assuring line before entering into Marthy's room to save her *and* the baby. ⁴²⁴ However, not even Ma Banks's unquestioned authority can undo a curse and the spite of God. Jim and Sampson attempt to fill the following page with strained conversation before Jim absent-mindedly begins to play his cornet to lift the mood. Sampson, "thoroughly aroused strides toward him and jerks

⁴²¹ May Miller. *The Cuss'd Thing*, 13.

⁴²² May Miller. *The Cuss'd Thing*, 15.

⁴²³ May Miller. *The Cuss'd Thing*, 15.

⁴²⁴ To the news that "something's happened," Ma Banks calmly responds:

'Course it has, but don't git so riz up. Marthy ain't the first an' las' woman tuh have trouble carryin' a baby. (She goes toward the bedroom door, and Sampson starts to follow. She opens the door and turns and pushes him back gently) Go lon' son, an' leave this tuh Ma Banks. She knows.

May Miller. *The Cuss'd Thing*, 15-16.

the instrument from his hand.”⁴²⁵ As Sampson surrenders to his will and plays “Nobody Knows De Trouble I See,” Ma Banks walks out to deliver the terrible news: “Marthy’ll be all right wid a little rest an’ good care. Only there won’t be no child now.”⁴²⁶ Worse still, Marthy will never be able to bear children. Jim is relieved, but Sampson is devastated:

Jim. Ain’t you goin’ now with Marthy all right?

Sampson. (Shortly) No.

Jim. Mus’ I tell him you’ll be there tomorrer?

Sampson. No. Tell him tuh git another man.

Jim leaves in shock while Ma Banks returns to Marthy’s room with a bucket of water and Sampson “remains staring at the brick wall” as the curtain falls.⁴²⁷

The Cuss’d Thing has obvious heft. It dramatizes a terrible tragedy and a quizzical curse which defies logic, yet it is no less confident in its own absolute certainty. The play carries multiple themes: Marthy embodies a faith deeply important to many individual members of the New Negro movement, if not definitive of the paradigm, per se; and, like *Plumes*, *The Cuss’d Thing* dramatizes the limits of liberal knowledge. In the play, Sampson operates logically. He has found the perfect opportunity to make money doing the one thing he loves, using the one skill he has. He acknowledges what he can observe and, when his wife tells him of a curse, he leans on what he deduces to be true. However, certain experiences or circumstances in life reject rationalization, they simply exist and occur whether we can explain them or not. Some believe in god despite having little or no hard evidence; some have experiences they can’t explain; and millions lived through slavery in a country guided by a Constitution which emphasizes the freedom of all individuals. Sometimes, one’s lived experience does not coalesce with the

⁴²⁵ May Miller. *The Cuss’d Thing*, 17.

⁴²⁶ May Miller. *The Cuss’d Thing*, 18.

⁴²⁷ May Miller. *The Cuss’d Thing*, 18.

commonly accepted narrative, and the New Negro paradigm (as exemplified here and in *Plumes*) makes room for these inconsistencies and, especially, these alternative ways of knowing. Also, heavily felt, Sampson changes in the final pages of this play. When it becomes (literally) painfully clear that his music has been, in fact, cursed, Sampson strips the cornet from Jim's hand as he goes to play, he gives up on the gig at the theatre that could've made his dreams come true. Presumably, he is likely to never play again. Sampson action is the theatrical embodiment of this New Negro valuation of alternative ways of knowing, although he (and Marthy) have been punished for Sampson's error in not accepting Marthy's knowledge sooner. In all, *The Cuss'd Thing* is deeply sentimental, while visibly espousing New Negro values and practice. I don't personally find it to be as consistently enticing or effective as *The Deep Regret*, but this play *did* make me cry. To me, this highlights the humanity of the play's character and their plight, but white tears such as mine throughout history could have inadvertently blunted the efficacy of the play.⁴²⁸

The last of the true domestic dramas within Johnson's collection, *Scion* by Eddie King, presents a similar interior scene, filled with truly liberal-sentimental citizens; and it leverages these empathetic in its frightful criticism of the anti-liberal act of lynching. Notably, the play is set in as generalized a location as possible, "A town in the Southern United States," on a "June

⁴²⁸ I borrow the concept of "white (women's) tears" from Robin DiAngelo, who coined the phrase in *White Fragility* (2018) in order to capture how "white fragility manifests itself through white people's laments over how hard racism is on us." Such tears, DiAngelo critiques, have led directly to violence against Black men (or boys – See Emmett Till) and indirectly hindered attempts at racial justice – as these tears often take proverbial centerstage over the more severe suffering of nonwhite people. Robin DiAngelo. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. Beacon Press, 2018, 131.

evening, the action beginning just before dark.”⁴²⁹ The playwright likely wanted this play to feel relevant, to feel as applicable to as many Southern readers as possible, as their enemy was pandemic. Notably, *Scion* presents very “pleasant” characters – we also see our first white protagonist(s) in Carrie (Mrs.) Sales, and arguably Richard Folding. Mrs. Sales is the first character discovered; she is described as “a medium-sized, very light complexioned woman, with straight, dark hair, slightly silvered, and decidedly Caucasian features, seated to the right of the table, sewing a baby-coat.”⁴³⁰ Her daughter, Jessie Mae, “a girl of about eighteen,” is seated beside her; the playwright notes that she has “the same general features of her mother, except that she is not quite so fair of complexion.”⁴³¹ Importantly, the playwright is keen to mention the setting, which includes both a “library table” and “a large bookcase filled with volumes” – highly specific furniture with decidedly liberal-sentimental overtones. The playwright wanted this family to appear immediately well-read, educated. “Pleasant.” Before any of the characters even speak, we know them to be allies of the New Negro movement – at least in value. Jessie Mae could be the New Negro paragon incarnate. The play begins with conversational exposition; mother and daughter discuss the baby Jessie Mae holds bundled in her arms – has he fallen asleep? Mrs. Sales reveals that the time is a little after seven o’clock and that “Alfred” ought to be arriving on the train this moment and will due home shortly thereafter. She urges her daughter to keep the baby quiet and hidden so that she may welcome Alfred in unawares. Jessie May cries back, “Mamma, won’t you tell Alfred that Mr. Richard loved me?,”⁴³² introducing an unknown, but now-named father. Mrs. Sales allows Alfred’s reputation to precede him, praising him before

⁴²⁹ Eddie King. *Scion*, c. 1925. Box 194, folder 2. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN, 1.

⁴³⁰ Eddie King. *Scion*, 1.

⁴³¹ Eddie King. *Scion*, 1.

⁴³² Eddie King. *Scion*, 2.

his entrance as “all finished now” and “something to be proud of.”⁴³³ Jessie counters that Alfred won’t want to see her, saying he will think she’s “terrible,” before returning to defend “Mr.

Richard:”

Jessie Mae. Oh, I was so weak! (With a sigh.) I couldn’t help it. It seemed that he loved me. I believe yet that Mr. Richard did care. I think, if he knew and if he could... Oh, mamma, I believe Richard Folding is good! Somehow I can’t believe that he mean to ruin me. Somehow I think he does not know this now.

Mrs. Sales. Oh, silly, be still! It seems to me that you’d be ashamed to mention his name. Loved you—the beast! And to think of what he would do to Alfred if Alfred only looked at one of their kind. It’s just awful. I hate to think about it! And you sit there and talk about his love.⁴³⁴

As Jessie attempts to rebut her, Mrs. Sales threatens to slap her, before stopping herself, apologizing, and blaming it on her headache. Beneficially, the sound of footsteps coming up the steps outside can be heard, and Alfred himself enters, but not before Mrs. Sales can quickly usher Jessie May and her baby into the other room.

Alfred’s description reveals him to be Jessie May’s brother:

*Enter Alfred, evidently more like the deceased father than like Jessie Mae or his mother, for in color and hair he more nearly resembles the average [Black American’s complexion] than they do. At once he is sharp and energetic. One would judge him to be about twenty-two.*⁴³⁵

Alfred, like the rest of his family, is “at once” recognizable for his (New Negro) values of learnedness and respectable self-presentation. As Alfred goes to pull out a cigarette later during that page of hellos, he notices the “baby coat, which Mrs. Sales in her nervous haste left lying on the table.”⁴³⁶ Mrs. Sales begins to tell Alfred the truth, when she’s distracted into chastising her

⁴³³ Eddie King. *Scion*, 2.

⁴³⁴ Eddie King. *Scion*, 2.

⁴³⁵ Eddie King. *Scion*, 3.

⁴³⁶ Eddie King. *Scion*, 3.

son for attempting to smoke in the house. Alfred deflects by beginning to speak in French. This bilingualism reifies his learnedness. The two continue their small talk before Alfred again mentions the baby coat. Alfred begins to sense what has happened in his absence, finishing his undergraduate degree, and he preemptively assures his mother of his commitment to the family:

Alfred. ...I'm not going on with medicine until Jessie Mae gets through [college]. I'm going to get a job and teach and send her to college.

Mrs. Sales. No Alfred, you've got to go on and finish for a doctor. Jessie Mae went to High school, and it don't matter so much about a girl anyway. We've got the two rent-houses, and you can work in the summer and spare time, and I can work, and just let Jessie Mae stay at home.⁴³⁷

This play's exposition (and early rising action, after the hook in either Alfred seeing the baby coat or Jessie Mae earlier revealing the baby's father) is dense with liberal-sentiment virtue signaling in the form of presented objects⁴³⁸ and theatrically held values. Mrs. Sales mentions the two rental properties they own to secure their livelihood. This property ownership is central to early liberal thought; and the Sales' ability to not only own a home but also make their living off additional properties places them firmly in an upper echelon of liberal personhood, warranting their respect (and then some). During their argument, Alfred has a two rather lengthy monologues and, in the second, he argues that "[Black Americans] are never going to get any

⁴³⁷ Eddie King. *Scion*, 5.

⁴³⁸ Erving Goffman, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, writes on the human use of objects to aid our curated performances of self; he refers to the tools we align ourselves with as our "front," the "expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during [their] performance." Through our intention, or through the happenstance association of the viewer, we humans use the *things* we value to perform those values. I have written on how Italian citizens employed postcards of Mussolini as their "front" in performing fascist (and later anti-fascist) citizenship during Mussolini's regime; so, too, did Black Americans employ tools in their presentations of self, and so, too, can we read the items in the Saleses' home as curated pieces within *their* performances of self. Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 13; and Shadow Zimmerman. "Mussolini and Marinetti: Performing Citizenship in Fascist Italy." *Theatre Symposium* 28, no. 1 (2020): 42–55.

respect until they can employ as well as be employed” and denounces the harsh socio-economic reality that surrounds him:

Why it makes me sick; every [Black American] that amounts to anything, pretty near, is a doctor a preacher, or a school teacher; the rest are all laborers; everybody else has the business and the money; and we’re going to be the tail end of creation until we get that.⁴³⁹

Alfred continues to lobby for greater economic freedom and increased public participation for Black Americans to give them true equality among their white peers. Powerfully, he does so along lines of not only education but employment: Black Americans, Alfred argues (perhaps a *raisonneur* for the playwright) must be businessmen, making and moving money and (cliché now) creating jobs, employing others, socio-economically asserting their ability to be hierarchically *above* – just like their white peers. Alfred’s entrepreneurialism here strictly bifurcates his liberalism from his sentimentalism, devaluing sentimentally valued careers in his defense of business as equalizer. As Mrs. Sales breaks down in the face of her son’s defiance of his father’s final wish, the baby cries and Jessie Mae is seen in the next room. In a tense moment, Alfred refuses his urge to hug her, instead turning away and crossing his arms. When Alfred quickly discovers the father’s identity, he shouts, “The damned white skunk!” and demands his sister reveal every detail from his absence.⁴⁴⁰ Jessie may reveals the baby’s birthdate (May 3, a little over a month ago) and recounts a very romantic(ized) tale of the night of her baby’s conception, defending Richard Folding’s race-consciousness,⁴⁴¹ before Mrs. Sales tells of the

⁴³⁹ Eddie King. *Scion*, 5.

⁴⁴⁰ Eddie King. *Scion*, 7.

⁴⁴¹ Jessie Mae recounts:

It was the night [the Foldings] gave the party, before [Richard] went away. I had been helping Mrs. Folding. She asked me to stay until everybody was gone. [Richard] was so nice to me that I liked him. He was always doing nice things. That night he said he would bring me home. When we got out in the car he said

fallout since. She reveals that she had gone to Mrs. Folding to explain to her what had happened, but she and her husband forced her out of their home. However, a few days later, Mr. Folding appeared at her door, apologized, and left some money – “we needed it,” Mrs. Sales sadly admits.⁴⁴² She also fearfully tells of a letter she had received from the Ku Klux Klan, which said that “they would give [her] until the fifteenth of June to get Jessie Mae out of town.”⁴⁴³ When Mrs. Sales had informed the sheriff, he simply said he had no authority, as no violence had been, encouraging Mrs. Sales to let him handle things.

Suddenly, there is a rap at the door, and a white man named Mr. Mayberry, a man of some esteem and a friend of the Foldings, enters with a message. He explains that he and the Folding men had spoken earlier and come to a “perfectly reasonable” proposition: under the promise of silently raising the new baby, Mr. Folding himself would offer Jessie Mae fifty-seven dollars per month, if she only stops by Mr. Mayberry’s office to claim it. Alfred is deeply offended by the offer, but Mrs. Sales understands the value of the money and the safety in keeping quiet, so she pleads with her children to consider the offer. Mayberry leaves and Alfred, in a huff, grabs his coat, hat, *and a gun* and goes to leave. Mrs. Sales and Jessie May attempt to

something about how warm it was and asked me if I would like to get a little breeze before I went home. I told him that I didn’t mind. So he drove up the pike until we came to the Red-rock Road. Then eh stopped the car and told me how the girls at the party bored him, and said that he was glad that he was going back to New York, where the people were broadminded and didn’t have the prejudice that we have here. He said that races didn’t make any difference to him. Then he told me that he had always admired me and that he wanted me to be his friend. I told him that I didn’t think we should talk about that, and that I wanted to go home. But he just kept sitting there. And then he told me that he loved me. And we were in the car for a long time.

Jessie Mae’s tale swerves between painting Richard Folding as a race ally and a sexual predator. Eddie King. *Scion*, 8.

⁴⁴² Eddie King. *Scion*, 8.

⁴⁴³ Eddie King. *Scion*, 9.

stop him, but, before he can leave, Richard Folding appears on the scene to plead his case, under threat of violence from a still-enraged Alfred. When Richard insists he has come to “satisfy” the family, Alfred asks if he has brought his checkbook, but Richard retorts: “Folks, do you think me a fool? Do you think I have come here to insult what I have already injured?”⁴⁴⁴ Richard’s humanity begins to shine through almost immediately. He tells Jessie Mae that, that afternoon, he had “fought the hardest battle I think a man has ever fought,” when, suddenly, *another* knock at the door is heard, and the full blazing force of the Ku Klux Klan is revealed behind its frame.

An imposing Figure in White, with his “deep, ceremonial voice,” appears at the door, backed by many men in white hoods and a blazing cross.⁴⁴⁵ The Figure accuses Richard of “incurr[ing] the strongest displeasure of [his] friends and [his] father by coming here tonight,” once again explaining the self-respecting offer made by Mr. Folding and finally commanding Richard to leave the house “[i]n the name of all that is Christian and decent.”⁴⁴⁶ Richard refuses, asking what right the Figure has to impose the vigilante justice on innocent citizens. The tense debate culminates:

Figure. The right that your father and this worthy order have vested in me, upon your unwise refusal to accept his most liberal adjustment of this affair; upon your flagrant insults to piety, and by the right of the duty sacredly intrusted [sp] to this noble body by the citizens of this town, state and country.

Richard. By right of the authority vested in me, to act as my own free-moral agent, as a full grown citizen of this Republic of America, I order you, or any other agency my father may detail to meddle in my affairs, to leave me to handle matters that effect my honor and the free exercise of my duty as I see and feel it. What right have you to come here? You violate the sacred precincts of a home – a house already bowed by the visitation of disgrace and sorrow.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Eddie King. *Scion*, 13.

⁴⁴⁵ Eddie King. *Scion*, 13-14.

⁴⁴⁶ Eddie King. *Scion*, 14.

⁴⁴⁷ Eddie King. *Scion*, 14.

Before promising to marry Jessie Mae and asking Mrs. Sales to make arrangements for their departure, Richard engages *deeply* liberal rationale in arguing against the supposedly “liberal” actions of his father. Richard – a man who believes in the equality of the races, remember – invokes liberal tenets such as individual autonomy and the rights vested in him as a citizen of the American Republic. Richard deserves to live (and live without his father’s undue influence) because he is human, and *especially* because he is an American. When Richard offers Jessie Mae (and her bastard baby) the name of Folding, the white-hooded figures shout, en masse, “Let’s have him! The [expletive]-lover! Lynch him!”⁴⁴⁸ And thus begins this play’s brutal conclusion, a visceral dramatization of the reality that even the peak of pleasantness cannot trump blind racial hatred – the latter thus requiring the diligence of all Americans until its proven dissolution. The Figure snatches off his hood, revealing himself to be none other than Mr. Folding, Richard’s father, come to exact his cruel familial vengeance. Richard engages one final plea of racial justice⁴⁴⁹ which lands on decidedly deaf ears, and the elder declares, menacingly, “Then, by God, there will be no more Foldings!”⁴⁵⁰ The final stage directions of the play, which conclude its final page, describe the terrible fate of the Sales in horrible detail.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸ Eddie King. *Scion*, 14.

⁴⁴⁹ Richard exclaims,

For years we have perpetrated this crime upon these helpless people. Look at these faces; they should be [B/b]lack; but see, they are almost the color of ours. Look at this girl, she is almost the color of myself. Our blood courses through these veins.

This is his final attempt at a liberal plea. Eddie King. *Scion*, 15.

⁴⁵⁰ Eddie King. *Scion*, 15.

⁴⁵¹ *[Jessie May] takes the child and hugs it to her breast. Richard struggles with the white, masked figures. Alfred is dealt a crushing blow with the butt of a revolver and sinks to the floor. Mrs. Sales becomes hysterical over him. Richard is seized by several men. They all crowd upon him and bear him struggling out into the night. Mrs. Sales is trying desperately to revive Alfred, who lies motionless. Jessie Mae hugs her baby and looks with horror out into the night, where, through the open door, which has been left open,*

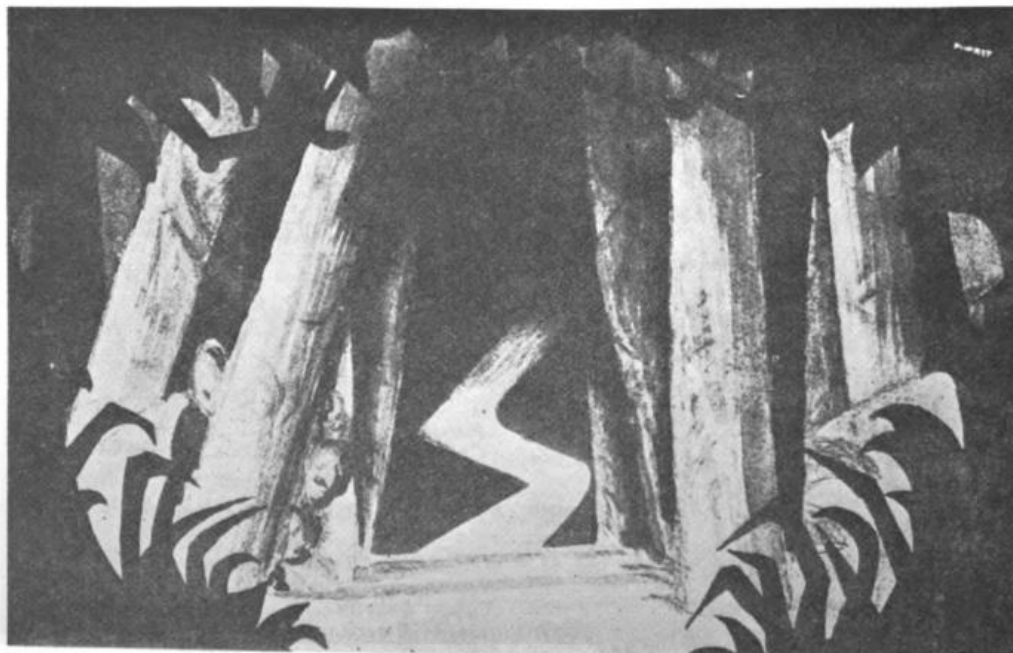
Thus, the play ends, capturing (at least some of) the violence of a lynching on-stage in a manner refuted by most playwrights from the era.⁴⁵² To me, this painful climax reads most immediately as a condemnation of simple self-actualization on an individual level as sufficient in ending the pandemic lynching had become. Without suggesting a solution, *Scion* thematically theorizes that the roots of racism require more immediate remedy. It is visceral in its dismissal. As such, it is a striking piece of drama; and, unsurprisingly, it did not place in the Literary Prize Contest. However, it is valuable in its uniqueness, and it offers a critical criticism of the New Negro movement and its drama: reading might end lynching in the long run, but, as the running lists in periodicals such as *Opportunity* and *The Crisis* were demonstrating, purchasing copies of these journals was doing nothing (not directly, at least) to end lynching. What *should* be done? Perhaps the lack of any suggestion on the playwright's part subconsciously reads: *what can be done?*

In all, the drama from *Opportunity's* Literary Prize Contests, and especially the other pieces of drama within the journal which were able to reach their way fruitfully to the stage in production, manifests the contest's goal in the creation of better, more numerous pieces of art

the blazing cross can be seen waving triumphantly above the heads of the retreating figures. Eddie King. *Scion*, 15.

⁴⁵² As Koritha Mitchell writes in the introduction to *Living with Lynching* (2011), anti-lynching plays (or, as she calls them, simply "lynching plays"), "served as mechanisms through which African Americans survived the height of mob violence" and weathered the constant publication of photographs of the horrific acts. Importantly, Mitchell highlights that plays from the genre "do not represent, or even describe, the brutalized [B]lack body," choosing instead to highlight the suffering of those who remain. The humanity of this approach is honorable and commendable, and the Black body does not deserve commodification; however, *Scion* demonstrates that the multi-vocal New Negro movement disagreed on how to best dramatize lynchings in a manner which might most effectively end the horrific act. There is certainly power in *Scion's* depiction; but, it might be the wrong kind of power (traumatizing Black audiences more than it persuades white audiences). Koritha Mitchell. *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*. University of Illinois Press, 2011, 2.

which meaningfully place the lives and lived experiences of Black Americans on the stage. Every example engaged familiar tropes, and many fell into similar genres with predictable plots, highlighting specific issues which were of particular importance for these dramatists and, truly, the New Negro movement at large: lynching, anti-miscegenation sentiment, socio-economic and political inequities, the limits of liberalism and Enlightenment reasoning, even the private gendered inequities within the Black modern home (among others). Although *Frances*, *Sugar Cain*, and *Plumes* were most recognized for their contributions and sanctioned as dramatizing the values of the New Negro movement, these unpublished, unappreciated iterations of New Negro drama from Johnson's personal archive deserve to be acknowledged for the contributions they brought to the movement, despite their lack of publication or production. *The First One* became one of many successfully published plays by Zora Neale Hurston, one of the most seminal playwrights from the Negro Movement. *A Bogus Hero* tells an enticing story of epic proportions with decidedly anti-Aristotelian structuring. *Her* could be *terrifying* in production and offers an interesting case study of early Black art which had little, if anything, to do with race-consciousness or the struggles/successes of Black Americans, and simply tells a good scary story about a haunted Black family. *The Deep Regret* and *The Cuss's Thing* (the latter receiving *some* recognition for its accomplishments) evoke similar themes and conflicts as seen in their more-recognized peers. And *Scion*, despite the difficulties of its production, offers a striking, and necessary, dramatic criticism of New Negro practice. On a larger scale, these plays are also worthwhile touchstones in the development of Black American drama and theatre, and, as such, they deserve to be recognized.

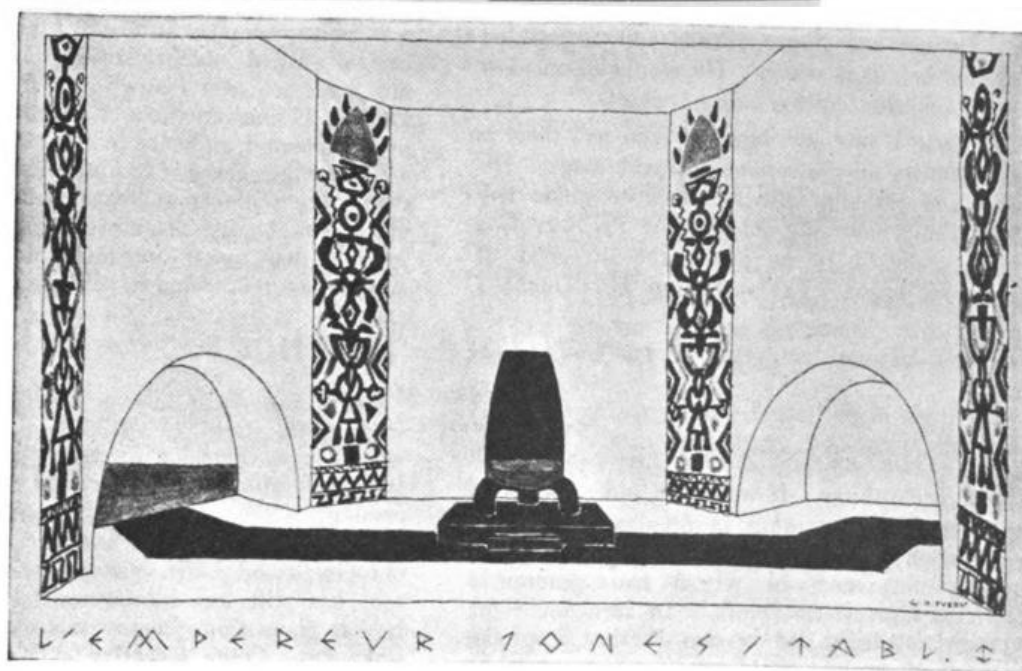


*Jungle Scene
from the
American
Production
of
"The Emperor
Jones"*

(Courtesy of
Theatre Arts)

*Palace Scene
from
the French
Production
L'Empereur
Jones*

(Courtesy
Theater Arts)



Chapter 4: Photography

Searching for the Significance of the New Negro Movement in Photo Portraiture

I have been inspired in this dissertation to read the New Negro movement, its component individual members and their multimedia performances of self, as inherently modern and *almost* avant-garde. Continuing that application, I have found the lens of the historical avant-garde has uniquely revealed certain central defining characteristics of the New Negro movement, which I will unpack further in this chapter. Once more engaging scholarship on the historical avant-garde to read the New Negro movement *as* avant-garde, the movement can be labelled especially avant-garde in two features: its acts of community-making, and its acts of looking hopefully toward the future, where its predefined population can actually exist. As discussed in the introduction, the New Negro movement defined and introduced itself through its many curated events, large-scale performances during which every individual in attendance could model their best representation of the New Negro paragon. Similarly, the movement *performatively* laid is requirements and expectations while *theatrically* embodying a certain brand of citizenship which might be emulated by future citizenry, hoping one day for greater public participation by better prepared Black Americans. In this chapter, I will continue to read the actions of New Negro movement *as* avant-garde, demonstrating the ways in which, through my personal acts of peering into the archive, the New Negro movement can be seen to have (conjecturally) predisposed later styles of self-representation in Black American photo-portraiture.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵³ The *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* defines “portraiture” by dense terms: “the portrait, the product of a portrayal, bears a significant relationship with some being, or entity, in the world that has, or had, both actual existence and some degree of singularity, sufficient for identification.” More simply put, portraiture is the physical capturing of an image of an identifiable individual, be they person, thing, or otherwise, in the object of a photo, a painting, etc. For the sake of this analysis, I am especially interested in the ways in which Black Americans captured their own image (or presented themselves to be captured) in

In addition to its group-making processes and the manifesto-like nature of its texts, the New Negro movement can also be read as avant-garde for its future-mindedness. Charles S. Johnson himself discussed the “significance” of the New Negro movement, its influence on the future, in the memorial collection *The New Negro Thirty Years Afterward* (1955), shortly before his untimely death a little over a year later.⁴⁵⁴ The essay is largely an appraisal – with an emphasis on “praise” – of the work done by artists from the New Negro movement. In fact, listing the *many* accomplishments of previously “unknown” Black writers from the movement is one of Johnson’s tactics for demonstrating its “significance.”⁴⁵⁵ But Johnson also considers the influence these individuals may have had on later generations. “Whether or not there has been a

photographs. The technology of photography become exponentially more commonplace in the years immediately preceding and following the New Negro movement; as such, it makes for an ideal point of observation for determining the laypersons embrace of new technologies in their presentation of self. Michael Kelly. “Portraiture.” *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. Oxford University Press, 2014, n.p.

⁴⁵⁴ Charles S. Johnson. “The Negro Renaissance and Its Significance.” *The New Negro Thirty Years Afterward: Papers Contributed to the Sixteenth Annual Spring Conference of the Division of the Social Sciences, April 20, 21, and 22, 1955*, edited by Rayford W. Logan, Eugene C. Holmes, and G. Franklin Edwards (Washington: Howard University Press, 1955): 52-72. Reprinted in *Remembering the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by Cary D. Wintz. New York: Garland Publishing, 226-234.

⁴⁵⁵ Johnson writes:

An anthology called *Ebony and Topaz* carried about twenty young [Black] writers, previously unknown to the great and critical public. Of those still living Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown are established poets, Arna Bontemps is a major novelist, having left his poetry with his youth; Aaron Douglas is one of the country’s best-known artists; Zora Neale Hurston is a writer-anthropologist; Allison Davis is a distinguished psychologist and Abram Harris an equally distinguished economist, and both are on the faculty at the University of Chicago. Ira Reid heads the Department of Sociology and Haverford; Frank Horne is a national housing official, E. Franklin Frasier is one of the nation’s most notable sociologists and a former president of the American Sociological Society, George Schuyler is a well-known columnist and John P. Davis is a publisher of *Our World Magazine*.

The combined curriculum vitae of the New Negro movement is interdisciplinary and impressive. No less impressive is its influence on Black Americans not highlighted here. Charles S. Johnson. “The Negro Renaissance and Its Significance,” 233.

reappraisal of the race over these past thirty years,” Johnson starts, “rests with our estimates of the contributions of those who began their career in the [1920s].”⁴⁵⁶ He continues:

It is my opinion that the great fire and enthusiasm of the earlier period, and the creative dynamism of self-conscious racial expression are no longer present. They have faded with the changed status of [Black citizens] in American life. With the disappearance of many of the barriers to participation in the general culture the intense race-consciousness has been translated into contributions within the accepted national standards of the special professional fields.

Unlike the fervor of consciously racialized self-representation which responded to the inequities evident in post-Reconstruction Black American life,⁴⁵⁷ Black Americans in the 1950s were exercising their abilities in respected professional fields, significantly further integrated than the artists and intellectuals of the New Negro movement. Johnson continues by (once again) quoting that excerpt on the value of Goethe’s lived experience, noting that “the shift in [Black] life and [Black] appraisals of life” lies in a communal awareness of the value of one’s lived experience. Black Americans, in Johnson’s opinion, had come to better understand the value of their own lives – likely, in no small part, because the value of their lives was finally being popularly acknowledged. Extrapolating this conclusion, somewhat, it follows that performances of Blackness after the New Negro movement may have been more pedestrian, more every-day, to embrace this sense of belonging and acceptance. In a sense, Black Americans had only accept their worth, no longer prove it. This, then, could be considered the significance of the New

⁴⁵⁶ Charles S. Johnson. “The Negro Renaissance and Its Significance,” 233.

⁴⁵⁷ Johnson explains that Black American life after Reconstruction was defined by:
almost total political disenfranchisement, economic disinheritance, denial of, or rigid limitation of, educational opportunity, complete racial segregation...,
cultural isolation..., and the torturous struggle to slough off the heave handicaps
in order to achieve more completely a new freedom.

Therefore, the New Negro movement was a period of “not only the quivering search for freedom by a cultural, if not a social and racial emancipation.” Charles S. Johnson. “The Negro Renaissance and Its Significance,” 226 and 230.

Negro movement, the successful integration of increasingly more liberally minded middle-class Black citizens. As such, I will be searching for this level of approachability, a performed sense of belonging (or the desire to belong), in the photographed presentations of self analyzed in this chapter, performed by Black Americans during and immediately following the New Negro movement.

Charles S. Johnson and his peers acted in their moment so that others may follow behind them, respected by society and treated publicly with greater equity. The movement inspired future practices of citizenship,⁴⁵⁸ as well as future artistic practices and future practices of self-representation – arguably as seen in this chapter’s photographs, and more demonstrably seen in

⁴⁵⁸ As Johnson argues in “The Negro Renaissance and Its Significance,” many figures from the New Negro movement went on to become professionals in academic fields, continuing their criticisms of American socio-political inequalities and educating/inspiring future Black thinkers to do the same. Lawrence Jackson writes in his entry in the *Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance* about the “legendary environment on the Howard [University] campus in the 1930s and 1940s,” which “nourished sharp critiques of society.” Johnson himself left *Opportunity* to teach and eventually lead Fisk University, a Historically Black University which today boasts exceptional Black graduation rates. This liberal self-actualization through the cultivation of education and reason among later Black Americans is also captured in *Opportunity*’s final issues. The Fall 1928 issue of the now-quarterly journal, issue 26.4, features a segment on “Youth on the Way Up,” which includes a biographical submission by Robert Herndon Jr, a Portland University student and aspiring engineer. Herndon writes that he was inspired by his upbringing to succeed academically and professionally, but that after his family encountered financially difficulty, only the Urban League’s contribution made his dream a reality. Importantly, Herndon thanks Edwin C. Berry for reassuring him that “an eminently well-prepared person can find a place regardless of race.” The New Negro movement, *Opportunity*, and Johnson’s work can all be seen to have impacted future generations in their acts of social self-actualization. Lawrence Jackson. “Aftermath: The Harlem Renaissance Twenty Years Later.” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 239-253; “Black Student College Graduation Rates Remain Low, but Modest Progress Begins to Show.” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 50 (2005): 88–96; and Robert Herndon Jr. “Youth on the Way Up: In Portland, Oregon.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 26, no. 4 (1948): 131. See also Howard Dodson. “Howard University, the New Negro Movement, and the Making of African Visual Arts in Washington, DC: Part 2.” *Callaloo* 39, no. 5 (2016): 1147–53.

individuals such as Ossie Davis (1917-2005), American actor who studied at Howard University under Alain Locke and worked with the Rose McClendon Players.⁴⁵⁹ In addition, the New Negro movement and its practitioners were true modernists, who espoused the use of new technologies for the sake of artistic self-representation and for the sake of articulating future worlds of (and for) Blackness. Across the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Black artists encountered new technology in the form of the radio, the personal photograph, and the filmed image.⁴⁶⁰ The aggregate, albeit likely indirect, influence of the New Negro movement can be seen especially embodied in the photographed portraiture of Black Americans throughout the early-to-mid-twentieth century. I have tapped photographic archives across the country, exploring early Black American portraiture at the Cleveland Public Library Special Collections, the African American Museum and Library at Oakland Special Collections, and the Special Collections at California State University, Dominguez Hills. First in one of the major twentieth-century cities of the Midwest, and then on the West Coast, I have had the pleasure of exploring

⁴⁵⁹ Dennis Kennedy. "Davis, Ossie (1917–)." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁴⁶⁰ Black Americans observing and experimenting with new technologies as means of self-presentation can be considered via the lens of Alan Liu's concept of a "new media encounter," an individual's first experiences with a new medium or method for communication, artistry, or expression. Because narratives of new media encounters, the ways in which we individually and socially understand our relationship to mediums, are powerful historiographic tools which mediate our understanding(s) of and approach(es) to history, our past, and our future, Liu writes that:

It might be hypothesized that all major changes in the socio-cultural order are channeled symbolically and/or instrumentally through narratives of media change – to the point, indeed, that such narratives often take on the significance of conversion experiences. New media encounters are a proxy wrestle for the soul of the person and the civilization.

The ways in which the first (Black) Americans approached, related themselves to, and utilized early technologies and the new mediums of radio, photography, and film inherently situated future (Black) American approaches and relationships to, and utilizations of, those technologies and mediums. Alan Liu. "Imagining the New Media Encounter." *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, edited by Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman. Vol. 50. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, 3-25, at 5.

these examples of curated, artistic Black American self-representation across the late-nineteenth and early-to-mid-twentieth centuries. Notably, I have found a recurring trend in decidedly liberal presentation-of-self, one influenced by the modernist, liberal(-sentimental) values and prescriptions from the New Negro movement (among other influences, certainly). As such, I will devote this final chapter of my dissertation to detailing one developmental narrative for the progressive change in Black Americans' personal portraiture. I argue the New Negro movement and its liberal values can be increasingly seen embodied in the portraiture of Black Americans as technology allowed them greater agency to curate their own presentation-of-self. Two archival collections demonstrate this growing access and widening embrace of New Negro values across America and the twentieth century: the Roberts Family Papers and the Montjoy Family Photograph Collection, both donated to and held by the African American Museum and Library at Oakland.⁴⁶¹ Black American photography, by innovators such as C. M. Battey and his predecessors, first made real change by changing the way white Americans saw the world and their non-white peers, showing the stark inequitable realities of Black American life. Later Black American photo portraiture also captured Black American life, first in staged imaginations of social aspirations where the photographer had fame-and-business-generating control over the images and then in increasingly intentional personal photography which allowed Black Americans to redefine themselves in the transferable image. Black American portraiture was the performance and creation of Black American citizenship and personhood. As these photos from the Roberts Family Papers and Montjoy Family Papers narrate, Black Americans engaged

⁴⁶¹ Roberts Family Papers. Collection number MS 2. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland, CA. <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8q24113/>; and Roberts Family Papers. Collection number MS 53. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland, CA. <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8rr20q3/>.

legible, culturally connoted (re)presentations of leisure, capital, and culture and other liberal-sentimental values in their photographed performances of self.

Before analyzing these photographs, however, I will present a brief history of portraiture and camera technology as a foundation. Such a history is necessary for understanding the provenance of the case studies and beneficial for evaluating their curated imagery. Skipping the prehistory of the camera (the camera obscura, viewing aids for perspective drawings, etc.), the earliest developments in camera technology are Thomas Wedgwood (1771-1805) and Joseph Nicéphore Niépce's (1765-1833) early experiments with capturing images by exposing silver-nitrate-lined paper and other treated surfaces to light. Most famously, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851) was the first to perfect the requisite mixture of chemicals and the proper surface to develop "commercially viable photography."⁴⁶² As Jeffrey Mifflin explains in his entry on photography in *Science and Technology in World History*:

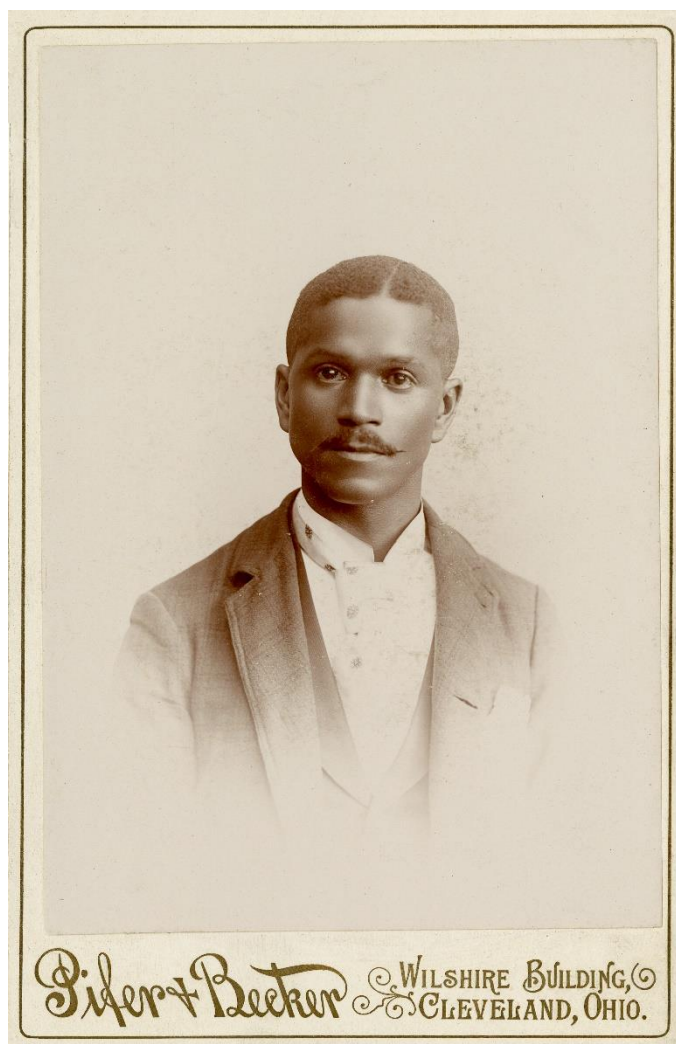
Daguerreotypes (first publicly announced in 1839 [by Daguerre]) used highly polished silver sheets, iodized for sensitivity to light. Light from the subject passed through the camera's aperture, creating a latent image on a silver sheet that was developed (brought out) by mercury fumes and fixed (made permanent) by immersion in hyposulfite of soda.⁴⁶³

The darkroom process for developing photographic film is complicated. The process for taking and developing a daguerreotype was *esoteric* – limitingly, so. The process was technical, expensive, and sensitive; it took a consummate professional (sometimes many tries and perfect conditions) to create a print. The process also proved difficult for the sitter. In order to ensure a clear, stable image, subjects would have to sit perfectly still for several minutes (in the best

⁴⁶² Jeffrey Mifflin. "Photography." *Science and Technology in World History: 1450 to the Present*, 2020, 488-490, at 489.

⁴⁶³ Jeffrey Mifflin. "Photography," 489.

conditions: bright, clear sunlight).⁴⁶⁴ Developments in plate and substrate technology made the process easier and more common throughout the late-nineteenth century. By 1851, the introduction of glass-plate technology “offered exposure times of a second or two” and endlessly repeatable reproduction of the images captured. With this development, photography became commonplace. Cartes-de-visite (small, paperbacked prints of 4x2.5-inches) became hugely popular in the early 1860s. John Rohrbach writes that “Americans shared these cards widely, leaving them in home entryways to announce visits, sending them through the mail, and saving them in specially slotted albums as records of family and friendship.”⁴⁶⁵ The small personal artefacts were perfectly portable, allowing individuals to use the cards as representations of themselves, preceding their arrival and remaining after their departure. The resulting popularity and ubiquity of the cartes-de-visite led to a surfeit of supply, with “most cities of any size [having] dozens of photography

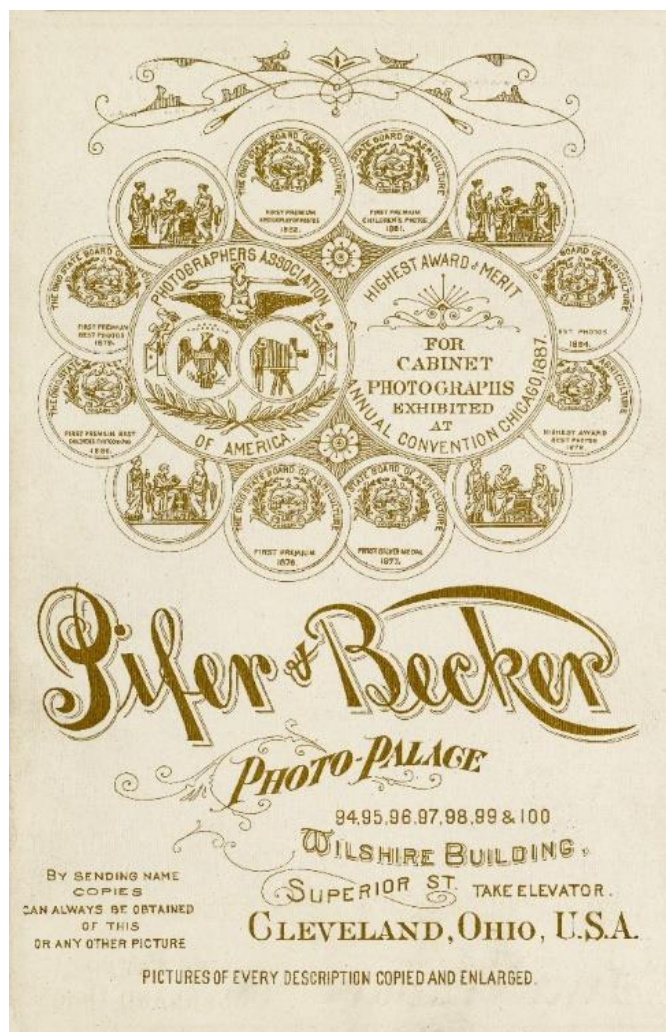


⁴⁶⁴ Ann Lee Morgan. “Photography, American.” *The Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists*. Oxford University Press, 2018, n.p.

⁴⁶⁵ John Rohrbach. “Introduction: Making Photography Modern.” *Acting Out: Cabinet Cards and the Making of Modern Photography*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020, 14-19, at 14.

studios.”⁴⁶⁶

To set themselves apart, photographers began searching for new technologies. During the late 1860s and early 1870s, American studio photographers began embracing a new style of print developed by the firm of Window & Bridge out of London, the “cabinet card,” so called for its idyllic placement atop Victorian household cabinets. These cabinet cards consisted of a 5¼x4-inch print mounted on 6½x4¼-inch cardstock backing for support (and, later, decoration). Importantly, this increased canvas size was “large enough to



show a sitter’s expression and surroundings,” introducing new depth to personal expression via portraiture.⁴⁶⁷ Cabinet cards sold for about \$1.50 per dozen prints, making each dozen worth an hour or two’s wages for unskilled laborers at the time.⁴⁶⁸ Cabinet cards were relatively affordable, but additional prerequisites (such as the leisure time to take the photograph and the need to do so – travel, visitations, etc.) did limit some working-class individuals from

⁴⁶⁶ John Rohrbach. “Introduction,” 14.

⁴⁶⁷ John Rohrbach. “Introduction,” 15.

⁴⁶⁸ John Rohrbach. “Introduction,” 15; and Edith Abbott. “The Wages of Unskilled Labor in the United States 1850-1900.” *The Journal of Political Economy* 13 (1905): 321-367, at 363.

representing themselves through portraiture. As seen in these anonymous cabinet cards from the photographic collections at the Cleveland Public Library, the new format allowed for enthralling images with great detail and a much more human level of connection between the photo's subject and its viewer. The "Pifer & Becker" logo beneath the portrait on this page, however, is almost as eye-catching as the sitter's expression, written in script and embellished in gold ink. The card's rear serves as an elaborate advertisement in its entirety. This printed relationship ought to be telling.

In choosing one's pose and surroundings, there was some agency on behalf of the sitter, but in this era, much of the power was retained by the photographer. Some photographers, notably Napoleon Sarony (1821-1896), rose to fame for their skills behind the camera. Sarony's success, Erin Pauwels writes after Rorhbach's introduction, "resulted from his personal artistic control over how the photographs made in his studios were composed and orchestrated."⁴⁶⁹ Consumers would likely seek out photographers capable of capturing captivating images, rather than entering the session with a curated image in-mind. The result was, largely, photographed portraiture which resembled painted portraiture: photographers such as Sarony would model their frame after familiar poses and tropes from Western art history. Subjects would be placed at attractive angles in chairs, stood beside desks or bookshelves or other props which connoted respectability, or otherwise manipulated to recall ionic figures such as Napoleon III or King Henry VIII (or, more liberal a likeness, George Washington). Powerfully, these new portrait technologies allowed one to capture not only their real self, but their ideal self. Pauwels writes

⁴⁶⁹ Erin Pauwels. "The Art of Not Posing: Napoleon Sarony and the Popularization of Pictorial Photography," *Acting Out: Cabinet Cards and the Making of Modern Photography*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020, 20-38, at 23-24.



Allen Cole
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that Sarony's portraits "provided a practical example of how photography could raise an individual's profile and transform personal appearance." She continues:

Though [Sarony] appears tall and imposing in many self-portraits, he was in reality barely five feet tall and almost completely bald... These attributes were so well disguised in his self-portraits, however, that contemporary commentators often expressed shock the first time they met him in person. That he could similarly transform his subjects persuaded many contemporary observers that it was true his "personal and individual" investment in photography could elevate it above its fundamentally mechanical character.⁴⁷⁰

Portrait artists such as Sarony lifted photography from the "fundamentally mechanical" to the field of curated self-representation. Though, as mentioned previously, much of the control during this era of photography was retained by the photographer.

However, this changed with the development of photographic film by George Eastman in 1888. Eastman's Kodak hand camera "democratized photography by making it possible for any amateur to produce snapshots."⁴⁷¹ With the development of the Kodak camera, and especially after the release of the Kodak Brownie camera, which sold upon its introduction on February 1, 1900, for only \$1,⁴⁷² the ability to curate and even create one's image via photographed portraiture was available to the masses. By the launch of the New Negro movement in 1924, photography was a personal practice, and case studies which remain from this period are more likely to be examples of presentation-of-self than a simple posed photograph, constructed by another. For this reason, I find an exploration of these self-representation practices worthwhile. Such an exploration should suggest a narrative for such development, the spread of purposeful portraiture from the upper to the lower classes. Two collections within the AAMLO archives

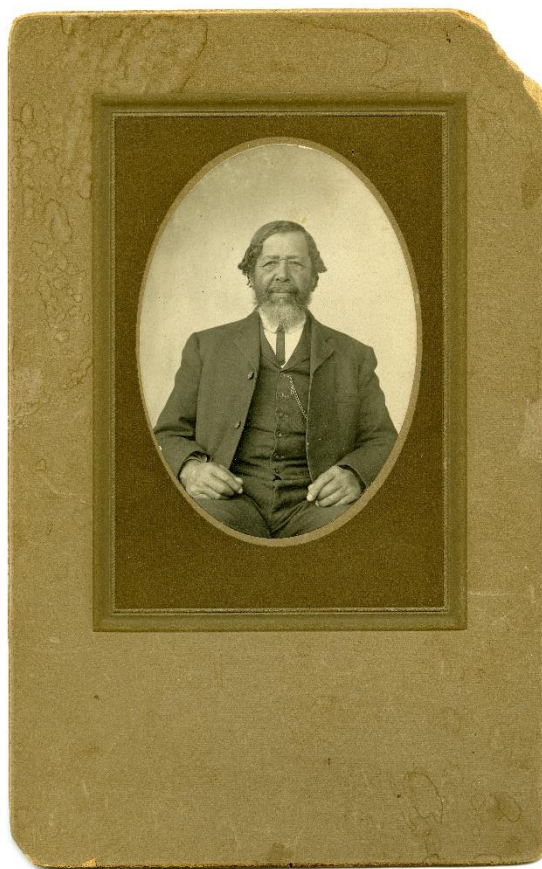
⁴⁷⁰ Erin Pauwels. "The Art of Not Posing," 25.

⁴⁷¹ Ann Lee Morgan. "Photography, American."

⁴⁷² Michael Pritchard. *A History of Photography in 50 Cameras*. Buffalo, New York: Firefly Books, 2015, 61.

serve as ideal points of comparison for this exploration: the upper-class photographs captured by the (Frederick Madison) Roberts Family and the relatively lower-class photographs of the Montjoy family.

Frederick Madison Roberts (1879-1952) was the first Black man elected to the California State Assembly. His mother, Ellen Wayles Hemings (1856-1940) was the granddaughter of Sally Hemings (c. 1773-1835), an enslaved woman – and Thomas Jefferson, the man who owned her. In 1921, Roberts married Pearl Hinds (1892-1984), the daughter of Wiley Hinds (1836-1919), a Black man who was born enslaved, became free, and ultimately died a *very* rich man.⁴⁷³ Richardson's father was a mortician, and the family became respectably wealthy through his practice. Pearl Hinds's family was astronomically wealthy. As such, the Roberts Family serves as an upper-class point of reference for this study. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the photographs in the collection demonstrate decidedly liberal values: private property, self-ownership, leisure through entrepreneurship in a capitalist paradigm. The photos also demonstrate the same historical development outlined earlier. The oldest photographs in the family's collection include some tintype portraits, an early film print of Roberts (as a boy) standing with his family outside their



⁴⁷³ "Wiley Hinds, Porterville, Calif., 1910." Tulare County Library, 2020. https://archive.org/details/cvicl_003015.

Los Angeles home,⁴⁷⁴ and a cabinet card portrait of Roberts on the day of his graduation.⁴⁷⁵ As with other photos from prior to the popularity of the Kodak Brownie, these photos were taken only on occasion, to celebrate special moments, the purchase of a house or the graduation of your oldest son. Wiley Hinds himself is most famously pictured in such an occasional photograph, a cabinet card portrait from 1910, a few years before his death, reprinted above. However, with the onset of personal photography after 1900, the photos within the collection become much more personal – *and* more purposeful. A set of candid captures from 1906, printed on the following page, shows the family in a moment of rest and levity, cutting and eating watermelon with friends. Wiley, a man of great wealth and respect, is no longer posed artificially atop your cabinet, he is now cutting melons in the palm of your hand. The annotation atop the photographs reinforces their pedestrian qualities: these are everyday moments, captured as they happened. They do not retain the artifice of the cabinet cards before them, but they do retain a sense of self-representation. The photographer chooses the correct moment, the subject presents themselves as they would like to be captured.

Notably, in these presentations of self the Hindses appropriate and occupy a minstrel tradition (intentionally or not), that of Black folks eating watermelons. Blackface minstrelsy was a powerful cultural force in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America, working even to define “Blackness” and certain racial characteristics among its white audiences.⁴⁷⁶ The tropes

⁴⁷⁴ See photograph MS2_B5_F1_021 in the Addendum of Additional Photographs at the end of this chapter.

⁴⁷⁵ See photograph MS2_B5_F7_137 in the Addendum.

⁴⁷⁶ Eric Lott has famously written of this “racial ascription,” the process by which “by the late eighteenth century [B]lackface had taken on representational force” in Britain and America. Through its popularity, and because minstrel characters were the only Black “people” seen by some Americans, the form, its tropes, and its characters usurped real Blackness as definitive in the minds of some white Americans. Eric Lott. *Love and Theft*:

and stereotypes of Blackface minstrelsy replaced actual Blackness in the minds of some Americans, so, for some, Black Americans were blindly assumed to be equivalent to the characters they had seen on-stage. As Carl F. Wittke writes in his early history of American minstrelsy, *Tambo and Bones* (1930), that the “plantation type” of Black character within minstrelsy was purposefully designed,

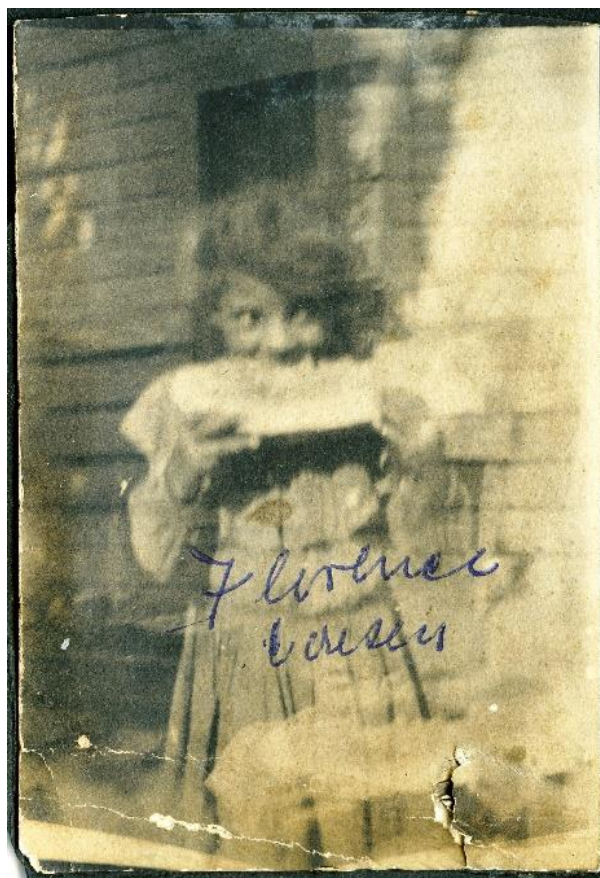
calculated to give the impression that all [Black Americans] were lazy, shiftless fellows, careless of the morrow. The stage Negro loved watermelons and ate them in a peculiar way. He turned out to be an expert wielder of the razor, a weapon which he always had ready for use on such special occasions as crap games, of which the stage Negro was passionately fond.⁴⁷⁷

Intentionally (and not), minstrel tropes misrepresented Black Americans as the embodiment of several social ills in order to artificially lift white Americans above their Black peers in the abolitionist era. In addition to being cast as scapegoats, Black Americans were attacked for their supposed lack of intelligence and ability, an attack encapsulated in the image of the watermelon. In “Minstrelsy and the Construction of Race in America,” Jason H. Lee evaluates minstrel Dan Lewis’s tune, “Moses Cart Dem Melon Down” (1880), in which “the main character sings jubilantly about the arrival of a cart of watermelons,” as a vengeful tool for white supremacy, an ulterior entertainment which “re-assured [white audiences] of their superiority to the ‘African race’ in all ways possible.”⁴⁷⁸ The Hindses portrayal here engages this tradition, whether they intended it to or not. Powerfully, the watermelon serves as a tool for

Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 29.

⁴⁷⁷ Carl Wittke. *Tambo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage*, 1930, 8.

⁴⁷⁸ Jason H. Lee. “Minstrelsy and the Construction of Race in America.” *African American Sheet Music*. Providence: Brown University Center for Digital Scholarship, 2004, n.p. <https://library.brown.edu/cds/sheetmusic/afam/minstrelsy.html>.



reifying the family's worth. The Hindses were Black, here they are seen enjoying watermelon – yet the tropes and stereotypes of minstrelsy do not apply to them, nor do they hinder the family from manifesting their dreams through hard work and capitalist expansion.

The photographs are charming in their domesticity and liberal in their portrayal of leisure. Leisure has a deep liberal lineage. To be able to partake in leisure prerequisites one to have risen far enough within a capitalist paradigm to *afford* to partake in leisure – to be able to take the time off from work, or to pay others to undertake the labor one would otherwise be doing during that time. Additionally, leisure, as a commodity, is a capitalist characteristic of the concept of “the good life.” Liberalism has long been concerned with the idea of “the good life.” John Locke himself defined the human, rational agent by its ability to discern “the true intrinsic good or ill that is in things” and its confidence that acting morally “right” is always “good.”⁴⁷⁹ Scholars of liberalism since the 1980s have debated liberalism's treatment and definition of “the good life.” In 1985, Charles Taylor argued that – while liberalism *does* concern itself with how one ought to live – this judgement “is mixed and varies from person to person.”⁴⁸⁰ As the rational agent is the true root of liberalism, and as the rational agent always orients itself toward the “good,” any liberal agent, by definition, must strive to lead a “good life.” Taylor espouses a traditionally individualistic view of liberalism here. Rawls later briefly gestured toward Taylor's conclusions in concurrence.⁴⁸¹ Later scholars have rebutted this claim with the counterargument that

⁴⁷⁹ John Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Essay 2, chapter 21, section 53. Hosted digitally at https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1690book2_3.pdf; and Antonia LoLordo. “Locke on the Guise of the Good.” *Philosophical Explorations* 24, no. 1 (2021): 21–33, at 21.

⁴⁸⁰ Charles Taylor. *Human Agency and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 105.

⁴⁸¹ John Rawls. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, 206.

liberalism *does*, in fact, carry amalgamated, accultured prescriptions for what, exactly, that “good life” is. Though the tenets of liberalism prescribe that no state or government should enforce a conception or valuation of “the good life” on its citizens, these values are innately carried within the mores and practices of a society. Scholars such as Joseph Raz and Will Kymlicka have argued for this intrinsic socialization of the concept of “the good life” because that very socialization is foundational for liberalism.⁴⁸² As mentioned in chapter 1, Locke and Hobbes and other early Enlightenment liberal thinkers legitimated society, despite limiting some individual rights, because such community more-greatly increased an individual’s quality of life. Kymlicka argues:

The first problem for liberal neutrality, then, is that some options about the good life must be discouraged in order to ensure a political culture that supports and defends the value of liberal freedoms. The second problem is that certain shared forms of life must be encouraged in order for the political culture to accept the demands of liberal justice. What lies behind the two problems is the claim, which strikes at the heart of liberalism’s political practice, that the stability of a just liberal society is not secured by the public recognition of certain principles of right or justice, but also requires some recognition and acceptance of principles of the good life.

In short, in order for a liberal society to best promote the good life for its citizens, it must first have a conception of “*the* good life.” Additionally, akin to the dilemma posed by Karl Popper’s famous “paradox of tolerance,” a liberal society must prohibit certain manifestations of the

⁴⁸² As Margaret Moore writes in her (supportive, dialectical) critique of Raz and Kymlicka, “Both Raz and Kymlicka regard their theories as recognizing the value of community, and, in both cases, this value is based on the essential contribution of the community to the good life.” Margaret Moore. “Liberalism and the Ideal of the Good Life.” *The Review of Politics* 53, no. 4 (1991): 672–90, at 680. See also Joseph Raz. *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986; and Will Kymlicka. *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

individual “good life” in order to safeguard more others.⁴⁸³ Kymlicka’s conclusion, then, is that a liberal society *must* – by requirement – endorse “some recognition and acceptance” of certain iterations of that “good life.” Largely, liberal-sentimental values have historically defined “the good life” by the ability to fully participate culturally and politically in society. To live “*the* good life,” one must have property sufficient to provide for oneself and one’s family (if not property sufficient to pay for labor to manage the properties, in the case of the Hindses); one must have the literacy, the education, the leisure time, the capital to digest and criticize and create pieces of culture; one must have an updated understanding of current events to criticize operations of state, and so on. “The good life” has a form for each culture – Think “The American Dream” in its most elaborate form. As such, I argue, the embodied presentations of leisure seen in these photographs are socialized in their moral alignment. Hinds and his family consciously celebrated their ability to partake in leisure in order to present a specific, culturally respectable, type of personhood.

Additionally, Marvin McAllister’s scholarship on early African American pleasure gardens reveals the racialized intention behind these photographed presentations of self. In his chapter on William Brown’s African Grove pleasure garden within *White People Do Not Know How to Behave at Entertainments Designed for Ladies and Gentlemen of Colour* (2022), McAllister argues that Black Americans have tactically (and tactfully) inhabited whiteness through “whiteface minstrelsy” for ages, especially in the nineteenth century, “to elevate socially, and perhaps politically, the position of Afro-New Yorkers in Manhattan’s cultural

⁴⁸³ Karl R. Popper. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. London: G. Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1945, 581.

landscape.”⁴⁸⁴ “In this ‘becoming’ phase,” McAllister continues, “Brown encouraged an extratheatrical performance of whiteness that allowed New World Africans to construct a distinctly [B]lack urban style and to rehearse their most coveted



social aspirations.”⁴⁸⁵ Per McAllister, Brown’s prescriptions encouraged African immigrants to socialize themselves by performing whiteness in their daily lives, especially in visible public places such as the African Grove. As society carries connoted best-practices for liberal activity (as discussed above), it follows that the Black Americans attempting to elevate themselves socially and politically would be performing within a repertoire founded, in part, in these early-nineteenth-century Black performances of whiteness. Complementing the themes of legibility and respectability central to *Opportunity* and the New Negro movement, Black Americans would “extratheatrically” perform their whiteness in front of white viewers and (to an extent) in their everyday life and values. To this extent, and because these photographs were taken in public and the photos themselves are public-facing (often meant to be shared or sent, perhaps to white friends), I argue this “whiteface minstrelsy” can be seen performed by the Roberts and Montjoy families in these photographs. First to garner respect in the early-twentieth century, and then to

⁴⁸⁴ Marvin McAllister. *White People Do Not Know How to Behave at Entertainments Designed for Ladies and Gentlemen of Colour: William Brown’s African and American Theater*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003, 11-12.

⁴⁸⁵ Marvin McAllister. *White People Do Not Know How to Behave at Entertainments Designed for Ladies and Gentlemen of Colour*, 12.

perform their more-pedestrian belonging in the 1940s and beyond.⁴⁸⁶

Reinforcing their liberalism, many photographs from the Roberts Family collection intentionally portray liberal values such as private property, education, and (the freedom from) labor (through entrepreneurship). Just as the Roberts photographed themselves outside their family home, Wiley Hinds and his family are regularly photographed outside their (regal) home. The massive two-story home dwarfs Wiley and his wife, Lucy, as they present themselves on their porch. The Hindses' poses here invoke the long-held liberal value of private property – as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy simply states, for classical liberals, “liberty and private property are intimately related.”⁴⁸⁷ John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and other early liberal



philosophers began to define the political philosophy by its reliance upon and tireless defense of private property rights. The Hindses defining their presented selves by their (upper-class) property establishes their liberal lineage and also warrants them respect

⁴⁸⁶ For other contemporary sources on race, liberalism, and leisure, see David E. Goldberg. *The Retreats of Reconstruction: Race, Leisure, and the Politics of Segregation at the New Jersey Shore, 1865-1920*. US: Fordham University Press, 2016; Robert Snape. *Leisure, Voluntary Action and Social Change in Britain, 1880-1939*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018; Alison Rose Jefferson. *The California Dream: African American Leisure Sites During the Jim Crow Era*. University of Nebraska Press, 2020; and Terry Anne Scott. “‘Lynchings, Not Bull Fights, Are Allowed in Texas’: The African American Press, Lynching, and the Discourse of Leisure.” *Lynching and Leisure: Race and the Transformation of Mob Violence in Texas*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2022.

⁴⁸⁷ Shane D. Courtland, Gerald Gaus, and David Schmidtz. “Liberalism.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Philosophy Department, 2022. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberalism/>.

by their peers under a capitalist system. Other photos from the collection depict Wiley “driving horse-drawn carriage on farm, pumpkins stacked to the right,” a laborer honestly working his land.⁴⁸⁸ Multiple other photos, however, show farm hands atop horses laboring for the Hindses.⁴⁸⁹ Wile and Lucy and their family embracing capitalism – making money off their property, buying a house, employing others – reifies their liberal values. Other photographs, such as that of Elizabeth Armstrong reading in the grass, included on the previous page, purposefully place the Roberts family on the timeline of American liberal-sentimental practice. Metatextual acts are *deeply* liberal *and* sentimental, and capturing Elizabeth such (or Elizabeth choosing to be captured such) photographically captures her liberal-sentimental genealogy, befitting a modern, twentieth-century (tangentially New Negro) citizen. In these many examples, the Roberts Family can be seen embodying a brand of personhood which would have resonated with the New Negro movement because of their shared liberal-sentimental values. These values were relatively compatible with the Robertses lived experience(s): Wiley Hinds and Andrew Jackson Roberts both embraced capitalism in their liberal rise to prosperity, and their families lived a life of relative privilege which met the socialized requirements for “the good life,” and, as such, the family was wont to perform this belonging through portraiture and photography.⁴⁹⁰ Though, as

⁴⁸⁸ MS2_B6_F5_225. Roberts Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1908.

⁴⁸⁹ See, for example, “Farmhand and horse standing next shed.” MS2_B6_F5_226. Roberts Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1908; “Three farm hands stringing up a hog to be butchered next to shed.” MS2_B6_F5_224. Roberts Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1908; and “Black cowboy riding a horse next to farm shed.” MS2_B6_F4_193. Roberts Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1910.

⁴⁹⁰ Though not yet considered more closely in this study, Frederick and Pearl’s daughter Gloria Roberts (1924-2011) was trained extensively in piano and played professionally for most of her life. The programs for some of her 1940s recitals are pieces of print worthy of investigation in their own right for the personhood they embody. Additionally, a portrait

with all Black Americans during the Jim Crow era, the Hindses' prosperity was precarious: anti-liberal white mobs could seize or destroy it at any moment. The modern, liberal presentations of self captured in these photographs were tools for overcoming white supremacist thought and social structure per McAllister's theory of performative whiteface, though these performances could also draw the ire of those who might challenge them. Comparatively, the Montjoy family of Alameda County, CA, captured and memorialized in their Montjoy Family Papers, were comfortably middle-class. Yet, despite these economic differences, the Montjoys *also* captured their belongingness by flaunting their liberal-sentimental values in very similarly legible embodied performances.

The Montjoy family has left a significantly sparser trace on the archive. Without the superlatives, the titles, and the notoriety of the Robertses, the Montjoys were of relatively lower privilege and, therefore, relatively lesser access to the public sphere. However, thanks in part to the advances of the New Negro movement, the advancements made within the Black middle class between the World Wars, the family *did* have access, and they recorded their participation with the technologies available to them. First, a suitable family tree. I will analyze photos from the generation of Darnella Odellia Montjoy (née Dorsey) (1908-1973) and her husband William Rothford Montjoy Sr., taken circa 1940, while the couple was in their twenties or thirties – the

(likely) of Gloria as a baby from the collection features her in a bassinet positioned in front of industrial buildings and a mess of telephone poles and cables – a truly modern first portrait for an exemplary liberal-sentimental citizen. “Gloria Roberts.” Getting Word: African American Oral History Project. Monticello, 2022. <https://www.monticello.org/getting-word/people/gloria-roberts>; “Gloria Roberts pianist in recital.” MS2_B3_F14_005. Roberts Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, 1948; and “Gloria Pearl Roberts [?] in baby carriage.” MS2_B7_21_002. Roberts Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1925.

dates of William R. Montjoy's life are unknown to me. Darnella's parents were William Nelson Dorsey (1860-1937) and Cornelia Theresa Dorsey (née Norman) (1881-1962). Darnella and William had four children: Lovetta Cornelia Montjoy (b. 1945); William Rothford Montjoy Jr. (b. 1946); Charise Lucinda Montjoy (b. 1947); and Darnella Rebecca Montjoy (b. 1949). Darnella was born in Louisiana but appears to have moved to the Bay Area (near Pittsburg, CA) before the birth of her four children, who were all born in California. It is fascinating to see this transition captured in these photos as archive: an early cabinet card from the collection was captured by Brennans Studio in New Orleans, LA; however, many of the photos are set at sights in California (Golden Gate Park, Lake Merritt in Oakland, etc.), and later cabinet cards were captured at La Perla and Gainsborough Studios in Pittsburg, CA.⁴⁹¹

Despite the class differences between the families, the Montjoys can also be seen to have photographically performed their espousal of similar liberal-sentimental (and recognizably New Negro) values – only, the Montjoys were practicing their personhood a generation or two later, in the late 1930s and/or early 1940s, after the prevalence of personal film cameras became even more pronounced. Continuing the trend seen in the Roberts family photographs, these photos are more impromptu than earlier cabinet cards, more personal and more purposeful. In the case of the Montjoys, they are also more *portable*: the family performed their leisure in public places and on getaway vacations. Each of the photos evaluated in this section were printed in photo books,⁴⁹² developed and printed by companies such as Bear Photo Service, a developer which

⁴⁹¹ See photographs MS053_529, MS053_533, MS053_549, and MS053_550 in the Addendum.

⁴⁹² For the structure of these photo books, see photographs MS053_469-473 Booklet and MS053_474-489 Booklet in the Addendum.

served San Francisco, Oakland, and Stockton.⁴⁹³ Circa 1940, the developer sold 4x6” “gift portraits” for fifty cents each, or three for a dollar, while (presumably smaller) “friendship photos” were sold for thirty-five cents each, or four for a dollar.⁴⁹⁴ With the average wage for “common labor” being between seventy-five and ninety cents per hour in Los Angeles in 1944 (minimum wage in California was sixteen dollars per week), these photo books would have likely cost a few hour’s wages for the working-class photo-performer.⁴⁹⁵ These photo books were (roughly) as affordable to working class consumers as the cabinet cards before them; yet, with the advancements in Black socio-political enfranchisement since the New Negro movement, one

⁴⁹³ Bear Photo Service has left a traceable impact on the archive, printing countless private archives during their operation circa the 1930s and 1940s. The studio developed proprietary brands of film prints such as “Krystal Gloss” and “Super Pak Snaps.” These brand names are notably featured on their advertisements and even the photo booklets themselves. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as the University of California, Santa Cruz Humanities Institute, have photographs in their collection printed by Bear Photo Service; and privately kept photos dot the archives as well. Retired photographer and developer William Yohe keeps a digital blog with updates on his growing collection of private photographs. Yohe has multiple photos taken at Stinson Beach, near San Francisco, which were developed by Bear Photo Service. The photos in these collections date from 1933 (in Yohe’s collection) to 1943 in the Montjoy Family Papers. Bear Photo Service. *Untitled*. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1936. <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/2005.618/>; Unknown Maker. *Untitled*. Art Institute of Chicago, 1938; Unknown. *A Group of Manongs*. University of California, Santa Cruz Institute of Humanities, 1937. <https://wiith.ucsc.edu/items/show/272>; and William Yohe. “Outdoor Life in California.” *The New Found Photography*, May 17, 2010.

⁴⁹⁴ Bear Photo Service also sponsored a local baseball team, which has warranted the studio and team’s inclusion in John M. Ward’s digital archive of historical Bay Area baseball artifacts, “Good Old Sandlot Days.” The team’s page figures several team photos, a photo of a company banquet held in San Francisco, as well as several promotional materials – one of which is a pricing guide. John M. Ward. “Bear Photo Service.” *Good Old Sandlot Days*, 2020. <https://www.goodoldsandlotdays.com/gallery/bear-photo-service>.

⁴⁹⁵ Bureau of National Affairs. *Manual of Going Wage Rates: Guide to Rates Approvable by the Regional War Labor Boards. All Going Wage Rates Established by Regional War Labor Boards as of March 15, 1944*. Washington: The Bureau of National Affairs, 1944, 496; and United States Women’s Bureau. *State Minimum-Wage Laws and Orders*. Washington: US Government Publishing Office, 1939, 4.

could argue these photo booklets were increasingly more affordable, as increasingly more Black workers were rising into the middle (and upper) class(es). For the sake of this study, I am fascinated by the fact that each of these small photo books is a private archive in and of itself; and I am especially intrigued by the presentations of liberal personhood performed by the Montjoys within.

From the very first of these booklet photos, the Montjoys present themselves as liberal-sentimental citizens. The first photo features six men and women lounging in the grass at Golden Gate Park, enjoying a picnic lunch.⁴⁹⁶ This photo depicts Black American leisure, and – notably



– it depicts Black American leisure recognizably defined. The lounging picnic lunch has been famously portrayed in Western art for centuries, famously since George Seurat's *A Sunday on La*

⁴⁹⁶ Unfortunately, each of the photos in these booklets is anonymous. But one can reasonably assume, given their provenance and date taken, that these photographs portray Darnella Odellia Montjoy, her husband William Rothford Montjoy, and their friends and family.

Grande Jatte (1884-1886). Walter Levy has undertaken a helpful, exhaustive evaluation of the picnic's portrayal in Western art historically, in which he defines the qualities of a picture-perfect picnic and promotes the aspirational abilities of the picnic as tool for social self-actualization.⁴⁹⁷ Levy writes that picturesque picnics were abundant by definition and that, no matter the class of the subjects portrayed, their guests are always pleasantly entertained. Picnics are sites of pleasure and privilege. Such leisure was also racialized with a bourgeois whiteness. Knowing this, Black Americans could performatively (and, in a sense, performatively) inhabit this whiteness as a tactic for ensuring their public respectability – while also publicly and photographically celebrating their shared Blackness, and the beauty and inherent worth therein. Additionally, Levy cites the literary case study of Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) as an example of Black Americans occupying or employing the picnic as a tool for performing resilience and belonging. He writes that the fictionalized Angelou's "customary 'summer fish fry' has a menu that 'would have found approval on the menu of a Roman epicure,'" and that the extensive selection of delicious food is presented by Angelou's character, she suggests, as a "public display of happiness and resilience beneath which lies the deep anxiety and hurt that African Americans must suffer in an antagonistic... society in the 1940s."⁴⁹⁸ Some Black Americans seized picnics, and especially posing at picnics in photos, as a powerful prop in

⁴⁹⁷ Introducing his chapter on picnics' portrayal in Western art, Levy includes a list of "the most famous picnics:"

Édouard Manet's painting *Luncheon in the Grass* [1862-1863], George Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess* [1935], William Inge's play *Picnic* [1953], Fernando Arrabal's one-act drama *Picnic on the Battlefield* [1959], Kenneth Grahame's juvenile novel *The Wind in the Willows* [1908]...[,] Mickey Mouse's *The Picnic* [1930], and Ian Fleming's last book, the juvenile novel *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* [1964].

Walter Levy. *The Picnic: a History*. Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, a division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2014, 56.

⁴⁹⁸ Walter Levy. *The Picnic: a History*, 71. Levy cites Maya Angelou. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. New York: Random House, 1969, 113-116.

their performances of liberal self, photographically presenting their ability to consume and enjoy themselves despite the systemic inequities of their lived experiences. The Hindses above captured themselves eating outside their home, occupying and appropriating a minstrel trope; the Montjoys here can be seen occupying, or employing, the picnic as they perform their leisure.

The individuals in the photo are well-dressed and presentable, the picnic they've created is idyllic, and each person pictured appears happy and comfortable. This photo *feels* like a good time, and it feels welcoming, familiar. Given the personal nature of the photographic process in 1943, and given the curated image presented by the picnic and its attendants, this affect is likely intentional. The Montjoys here have purposefully presented themselves as comfortably middle-class, well-dressed, whimsically lounging surrounded by all the requisite accoutrements. Other photos from the set of booklets from the trip to Golden Gate Park continue to demonstrate the Montjoys' ability to curate an image: many of the group photos are well-constructed, with the bodily topography well-blocked; several more feature the men and women posing by familiar touchstones within the park, including Arthur Putnam's *Sphinxes* and Thomas Shields Clarke's *The Apple Press* sculptures, and the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum.⁴⁹⁹ By photographing themselves picnicking at and visiting notable destinations within Golden Gate Park (the most recognizable park in the area) – and especially by printing the photographs on such a portable media as the SuperPak booklets, meant to be shared and easily transported – the Montjoys created pieces of what could be called a Goffmanian “front,” or standalone objects which performed (and continue to perform to this day) the family's belonging, resilience, and California-branded patriotism.

⁴⁹⁹ See photographs MS053_447, MS053_458, MS053_461, and MS053_464 in the Addendum.

Unique in these travel-photo booklets from Golden Gate Park, one photo depicts a Black man standing proudly by (presumably) his vehicle – or, perhaps, a vehicle he found admirable, a 1940 Oldsmobile Series 70 Business Coupe.⁵⁰⁰ The man rests against the car with a charismatic



swagger. He is dressed nicely in a three-piece suit and sharp hat. The car is sleek, clean, and shining – and, potentially, it is the more affordable version of Oldsmobiles which had recently appeared on the silver screen.⁵⁰¹ The background is recognizably

Californian. This picture oozes WWII-era Americana. It is *cool*. It also reinforces the Montjoys' liberal values, particularly conspicuous prosperity as an illustration of meritocracy. The man in this picture is an American and a consumer. He has earned enough to purchase nice clothes and a modern vehicle – and he has chosen to do so. And now he poses with his purchases to perform legible leisure in a capitalist country with predominantly liberal and individualistic, sometimes also sentimental, values. Other photos within additional booklets from the collection continue to embody the argument: the Montjoys are American, capably and proudly so. These photos, too,

⁵⁰⁰ Original MSRP \$865 in 1940, equivalent to \$19,079 today according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. National Automobile Dealers Association. “1940 Oldsmobile 70 Prices and Values: 2 Door Business Coupe.” *NADA Guides*, 2022.
<https://www.nadaguides.com/Cars/1940/Oldsmobile/70/2-Door-Business-Coupe/Values>.

⁵⁰¹ The Oldsmobile Eight (and Six) appeared in many 1930s films, such as *Super-Sleuth* (1937) and *Dick Tracy* (1937). See the amateur database, Internet Movie Cars Database, for examples:
<http://imcdb.org/vehicles.php?make=Oldsmobile&model=Eight&modelMatch=1&modelInclModel=on>.

speak in terms of liberal values. The small green Super Pak photo booklet contains five photos of a group of Black women outside a simple home. Though these anonymous women do not have the capital of the Robertses before them, they are no less capable of performing their liberal belonging in this photo, albeit with increasingly pedestrian imagery.



These women own and present their nice clothing. At least one of them likely owns the plain property which comprises the background of the photograph. They are liberally participating citizens. They are American in every right.

A third photo booklet from the collection is also exclusively devoted to domestic shots of everyday life – with capital and Black men and women placed in tandem to perform a legible liberal Americanness. One

photo of a Black man and woman outside (perhaps) their home echoes the aforementioned presentation of self practiced by Wiley and Lucy Hinds. The man wears a



three-piece suit and suave hat. The woman is similarly well-dressed, in a neat black pencil skirt and strikingly white blouse. Her hair is simply, but beautifully, styled; she wears eye-catching earrings. Their sturdy house stands proudly behind them (and they proudly before it), at home in a neighborhood of similar houses on a typical American street. This photo both performs a sense of belonging and demonstrates the equitable Black American growth Johnson highlighted in 1955. The friends and/or family of the couple in this photo also perform their pedestrian



belonging beside them in additional photos from the booklet. In another photo, an older woman, wearing a nice, but basic, patterned dress, poses atop a 1939 Oldsmobile Series 80 four-door sedan, this vehicle even sleeker and more impressive than the last.⁵⁰² Potently, that sedan, the Oldsmobile Series 80, mirrors in its creation the aspirational presentations-of-self by the Montjoys witnessed in these photographs. With its forty-second model year, Oldsmobile advertised a “\$33 to \$106” reduction in price for its 1939 models.⁵⁰³ This ten-percent cut in price for the top-of-the-line model, the Series 80 four-

⁵⁰² Original MSRP \$1,043 in 1939, equivalent to \$22,075 today according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Advertisements from the era advertised the new 1939 models’ affordability, as compared to other mid-range manufacturers presently and historically. “OLDSMOBILE CUTS PRICE: Company Enters Low Cost Field With Its Models for 1939.” *New York Times* (1923-). 1938, 68; and “Oldsmobile Presents Three Cars for 1939: Company’s New Line Contains Two Sixes and An Eight--Enters Low Priced Field.” *Wall Street Journal* (1923-). 1938, 2.

⁵⁰³ “OLDSMOBILE CUTS PRICE: Company Enters Low Cost Field With Its Models for 1939,” 68.

door sedan, seen in these pictures, meant that increasingly more Americans could partake in the luxurious life promised them by auto manufacturers and other advertisers. It is unclear whether the Montjoys purchased this vehicle (and the Oldsmobile Series 70 Business Coupe before – the cheapest respective model from that year’s class) new or used, because these photographs are undated. But, no matter the car’s history, it served as the perfect tool for the Montjoys to use in performing their consumerist, American aspirations.

In the next photo, an older Black woman poses with the car and the same man as before. The woman stands toward the front of the car, her hand balancing her casual pose against the car’s frame. She is wearing a somewhat dated skirt suit (for the time) and more-modern hat and she carries a purse. She wears hose and her shoes are relatively old-fashioned. The man behind her carries more swagger in this photo. He stands with one foot on the car’s running board, one hand on the car’s headlight and the other in his pocket. His outfit as sharp as before. Though I, unfortunately, do not know the identity of the individuals in these photos; their poses suggest a familial relationship – perhaps a couple and her mother and aunt? The photo also depicts a relationship between these Black Americans and their white peers – and an aspirational presentation of self in which the Montjoys can be seen to *perform*, not “rehearse,” “their most coveted social aspirations,” per McAllister’s scholarship. In the century between the Montjoys and the African Grove pleasure garden



before them, Black Americans had claimed and been granted far greater respect, public access, and socio-political equity. To reference Charles S. Johnson and his love for that Goethe quote, Black American life had come to be recognized for its value, not just by Black Americans but also white Americans – and these photographs capture one family’s ability to perform that value, a sense of belonging, and liberal values instilled by the Enlightenment and promoted by modernism and the New Negro movement.

I would like to draw attention to one final photo within the Montjoy family photograph collection, a perfectly candid interior shot of a young Black woman snapped in the 1960s.⁵⁰⁴ The photo is distressed from years of wear, but it is quintessential in its pedestrian charm. It depicts a Black woman in a black sweater and white pants, lounging in a room, perhaps her room, on a bed. She is reclined back, her left arm supporting her, her right arm gesturing out of frame. Her expression is exquisite in its candidness: her gaze is cast just over the photographer’s shoulder, the shape of her mouth caught half-open mid-speech; the smoothness of her skin and the shimmer of her pearl earrings shine in the natural light. The photo’s setting is plain and somewhat untidy, obscured by dense chiaroscuro and streaks of sunlight. This photo proverbially leapt out to me when I first saw it, and it has etched itself into my mind since. There is something inexpressibly endearing about its normalcy. I don’t know this woman, but I feel as though I could have easily been in this space, with her, when this photo was captured. Additionally, this photo has resonated with me because of the unquestioned liberalism in its banality. This photo depicts a 1960s Black Everywoman in an Everyroom, captured with no pretext and only the slightest level of self-presentation. Thanks to advances in equitable racial socialization;

⁵⁰⁴See photograph MS053_633 in the Addendum. “Young woman sitting on bed.” MS053_633. Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1960s.

individual Black public and private work, liberal self-actualization, and realistic artistic expression; *and* photograph technology, this woman was able to perform herself via this photograph in that/this moment. As much as the almost-avant-garde artistic action of the New Negro movement, especially that of *Opportunity* and especially *Ebony and Topaz*, envisioned a later population of artistically skilled and motivated Black lay-people; the realities of the Black American lived experience after the country's recovery from the Great Depression, as Johnson wrote in 1955, had rather inspired Black Americans to perform a less theatrical, more pedestrian sense of Black identity – one which still promoted liberal values and carried on the ideals of the New Negro movement, even tangentially, in American cities (literally) across the country.

Noticeably, the preceding photographed performances by the Roberts family and the later performances by the Montjoys both embrace values (and apply practices) espoused – and possibly proliferated or inspired – by Charles S. Johnson and his peers within the New Negro movement: those familiar liberal(-sentimental) values of self-ownership, capitalist consumerism, and cultivated interiority; and its modernist exploration and application of new artistic technologies. Use of new media technologies was of central importance to *Opportunity*, which regularly published news pieces with accompanying photos and featured such prominent Black photographers such as C. M. Battey on its covers and frontispieces, and which regularly called for additional photographic submissions in ongoing advertisements since volume 1, issue 8.⁵⁰⁵ In a piece of correspondence published in issue 1.9, C. M. Battey himself discusses the Photographic Division at Tuskegee Institute – of which he was then head – and praises *Opportunity* for publishing such a “clean” and “refined” periodical any Black American would

⁵⁰⁵ The first such advertisement can be found on the table of contents for issue 1.8. “Contents.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 8 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 225.

be unashamed “to uncover for perusal in any place, private or public,” a journal that made space for “inspirational pictures” which instill “IDEALS BEAUTIFUL” in young generations and aspiring Black artists and which reinforce the “true beauty of the [Black American]’s own individuality” in new minds.⁵⁰⁶ Crucially, Battey charges:

We must develop a media that will teach something of the language of art in which we bid the artist speak, be it music, oratory, sculpture, painting or what other. Noble artists will be born, and they will continue to give us art noble; and instead of neglect and criticism, we would have them interpret our own ideals; we must have ideals truly worthy of such interpretation.

As Battey here captures, *Opportunity*, Charles S. Johnson, and his peers, attempted to both prescribe best-practices for Black Americans’ lived experiences *and* to recommend stylized artistic expression among Black artists. Battey, like Johnson, argued Black Americans ought to embrace and flaunt their inherent self-worth legibly through increased public participation; and the pair believed it was the duties of journals such as *Opportunity* to teach the “language of art in which [they] bid the artist speak.” As such, the journal’s pictorial embellishments exemplified the realism and later abstracted expressionism Johnson believed most effective in manifesting the movement’s objectives of increased Black respect, representation, self-actualization, and liberal public access (as discussed in chapter 2). Later advertisements for *Ebony and Topaz* within the journal hailed the collectanea as an “Eldorado of Art and Literature by Distinguished Artists and Writers” – the term “Eldorado” referencing the original “El Hombre Dorado,” making *Ebony and Topaz* “The Golden Man” of art and literature.⁵⁰⁷ Johnson had always envisioned his acts of

⁵⁰⁶ C. M. Battey. “The Photographic Division: Tuskegee Institute.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 9 (1923, Klaus Reprint 1969): 279.

⁵⁰⁷ The first advertisement for *Ebony and Topaz* was printed in the table of contents for issue 5.12, in the month of its publication, December 1927. “Contents.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 5, no. 12 (1927, Klaus Reprint 1969): 349. The term “El Hombre Dorado,” shortened to “El Dorado” (and sometimes “Eldorado”), translates literally to

publication as acts of creation, creation of an iteration of the paragon for New Negro personhood.

These dimensions of personhood and the values embodied within *Opportunity* and *Ebony* and *Topaz* prescribed best-practices and recommended artistic expression and encouraged New Negro technological experimentation on an individual level. Battey himself taught photography at the Tuskegee Institute and proclaimed (and practiced) its merit in the pages of *Opportunity*, encouraging Black Americans to embrace the technology as a means of modernist, realist self-expression; and the journal broadly supported the adoption of photography among its audience, as referenced earlier. Johnson also utilized the relatively new and increasingly accessibly technologies of radio and film to spread New Negro (and derivative) values to ever-larger swaths of the American population.⁵⁰⁸ Johnson even helmed a fruitless 1934 endeavor by the National

“The Golden Man” and John Bierhorst writes in *Folktales and Fairy Tales* that “the term ‘El Dorado’ itself may be understood as referring to a native ruler covered in gold” and that “[a]s an emblem of the fabulous—a beacon of either the foolhardy or the enterprising—El Dorado [has] found a place in literature” and the American cultural memory. John Bierhorst. “El Dorado.” *Folktales and Fairy Tales: Traditions and Texts from Around the World: A-F*, 2016, 292-293, at 293.

⁵⁰⁸ Johnson personally advertised *Opportunity* on the socialist radio programming station, WEVD, out of Queens, NY, in 1928 after passing its editorship to Elmer A. Carter. In the speech delivered, Johnson captured the journal’s objective as:

To make available for students, writers and speakers general dependable data concerning [Black Americans] and race relations for their discussions, with the thought that truth carries its own light; that accurate and demonstrable facts can correct inaccurate and slanderous assertions that have gone unchallenged. It hoped to provide for those who inform the public generally, a constant source of information on the many angles of the race situation upon which too little is known.

Johnson also spoke on behalf of Fisk University at the opening of the WSOK radio station in Nashville in 1945, celebrating the new-media opportunity for the station to “release new reservoirs of wit and wisdom, of art and entertainment, of information and technical skills” among the community – liberally, and for free to anyone with the requisite radio. Lastly (at least, as preserved in his archive), Johnson’s presentation to the Collector’s Item Program was aired on NBC radio in New York City on March 10, 1954,

Education Association to create an “educational picture” about Black American life.⁵⁰⁹ He wrote to W. E. B. Du Bois for his opinion on the prospects for such a film on June 23, 1934 – a plan Du Bois simply called “feasible.”⁵¹⁰ The letter contains no plot or production information or other plans or stipulations for the project, yet in it Johnson argues for the utility and hypothetical success of such a film – simply because of the medium itself, because of “the intoxication of emotions pleasantly aroused by such art and music” as could be brought together in [this] film.⁵¹¹ Johnson certainly believed in and employed (or attempted to employ) the power of new media technologies such as radio and film, a modernist, New Negro value and practice. If the “significance” of the New Negro movement, as Johnson saw it, was an increased recognition of

in which Johnson argued for the need to better entice talented, educated individuals into the profession of teaching to inspire similar greatness in future generations. Charles S. Johnson. “On the Opening of Radio Station WSOK” (1945). Box 169, folder 20. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN; Charles S. Johnson. “[*Opportunity* magazine, untitled speech via station WEVD on radio]” (1928). Box 169, folder 23. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN; and Charles S. Johnson. “NBC Radio Script, read in New York City for Collector’s Item Program” (1954). Box 166, folder 15. Charles S. Johnson Collection (Original), Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

⁵⁰⁹ For more on the New Negro movement’s relationship to film and photography, see Floyd C. Covington. “The Negro Invades Hollywood.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 7, no. 4 (1929, Klaus Reprint 1969): 111-113 and 131; Loren Miller. “Hollywood’s New Negro Films.” *The Crisis* 45, no. 1 (1938): 8-9; Anna Everett. *Returning the Gaze: a Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2001; Richard A. Courage. “Re-Presenting Racial reality: Chicago’s New (media) Negro Artists of the Depression Era.” *Technoetic Arts: a Journal of Speculative Research* 10, no. 2 (2012): 309-318; Henry Louis Gates. “Frederick Douglass’s Camera Obscura: Representing the Antislave ‘Clothed and in Their Own Form.’” *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (2015): 31-60; and Emilie Boone. “Reproducing the New Negro: James Van Der Zee’s Photographic Vision in Newsprint.” *American Art* 34, no. 2 (2020): 4-25.

⁵¹⁰ Charles S. Johnson. “Letter from Charles S. Johnson to W. E. B. Du Bois, June 23, 1934” (1934). W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b070-i484>; and W. E. B. Du Bois. “Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Charles S. Johnson, June 27, 1934” (1934). W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b070-i486>.

⁵¹¹ Charles S. Johnson. “Letter from Charles S. Johnson to W. E. B. Du Bois, June 23, 1934.”

the value of Black life among white *and* Black Americans, this multimedia production and engagement of mass media technologies must have been a powerful tool for the proliferation and manifestation of this respect. The realist photographs of C. M. Battey and the abstract illustrations of Charles Cullen celebrated the inherent worth of and foundational work done by earlier generations of Black Americans while also separating the New Negro paragon and paradigm from the restraints of these predecessors, imagining greater future Black freedom so as to enact it in later reality. The drama and performance from *Opportunity's* Literary Prize Contests opened this performance to larger, even illiterate audiences. And Johnson's radio speeches and hypothetical film production directly broadcasted liberal values to tens or hundreds of thousands of listeners and prospective viewers. Because of the breadth of this New Negro mass media's reach, Black American presentation of self was a national discourse, with publications and individuals from Harlem to California debating best-practices before, during, and after the New Negro movement from 1923-1929. And through this national discourse, Charles S. Johnson and his peers, the embodied personhood and artistic style of *Opportunity* and *Ebony and Topaz* influenced (directly or indirectly) these mid-century photographed performances of Black beauty captured in archives across the country.

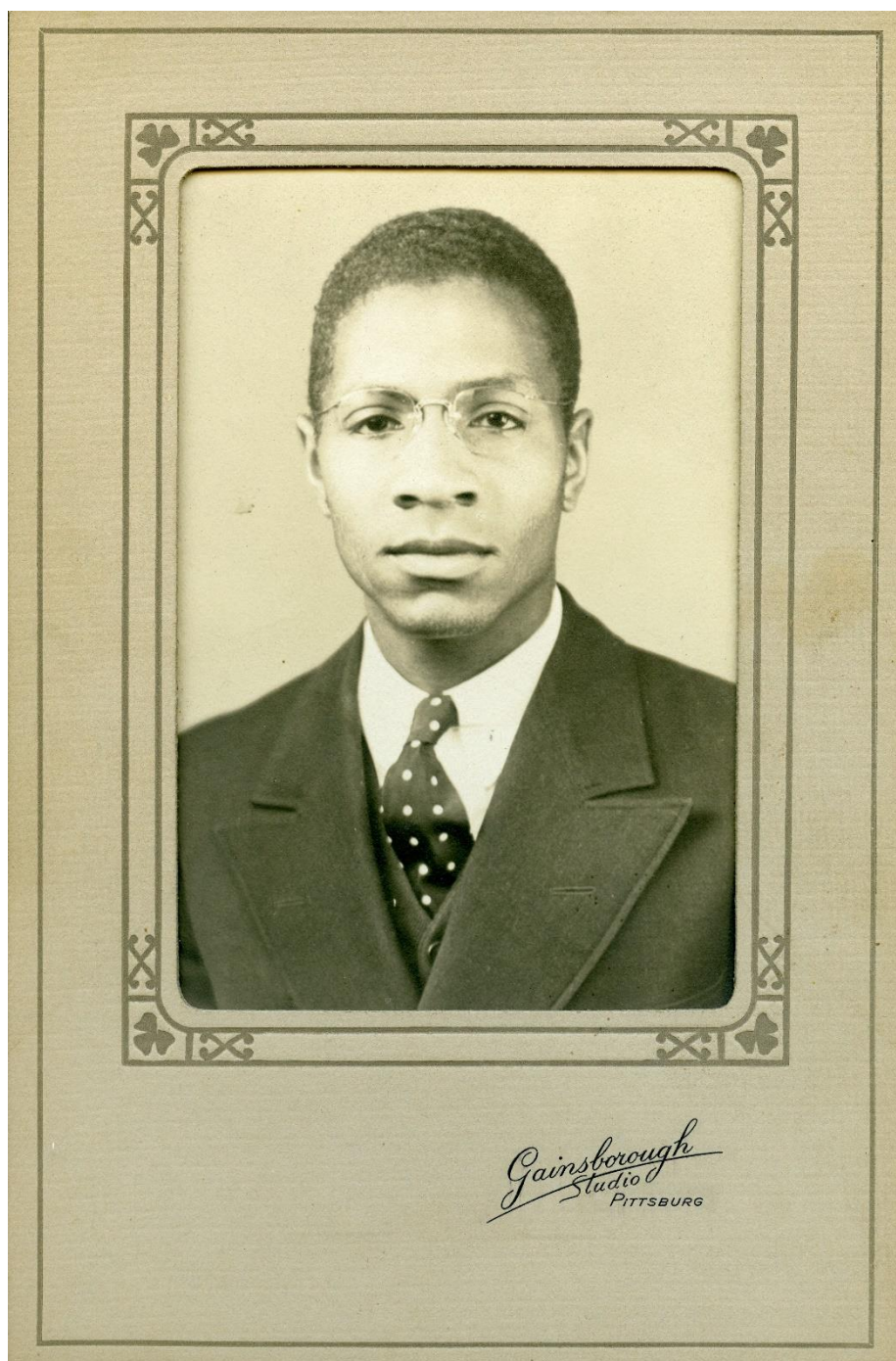
Addendum of Additional Photographs



“Myrtle Roberts, Ellen Wales Roberts, Frederick M. Roberts, and William Roberts standing in front of house Los Angeles, California.” MS2_B5_F1_021. Roberts Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1894.



“Frederick M. Roberts graduation portrait.” MS2_B5_F7_137. Roberts Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, 1900.



“Portrait of man in suit and tie, Gainsborough Studio, Pittsburg, California.” MS053_529.
Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1940s.



"Cabinet card portrait of a young woman posing next to ornate wicker chair, Brennans Studio, New Orleans, Louisiana." MS053_533. Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, undated.



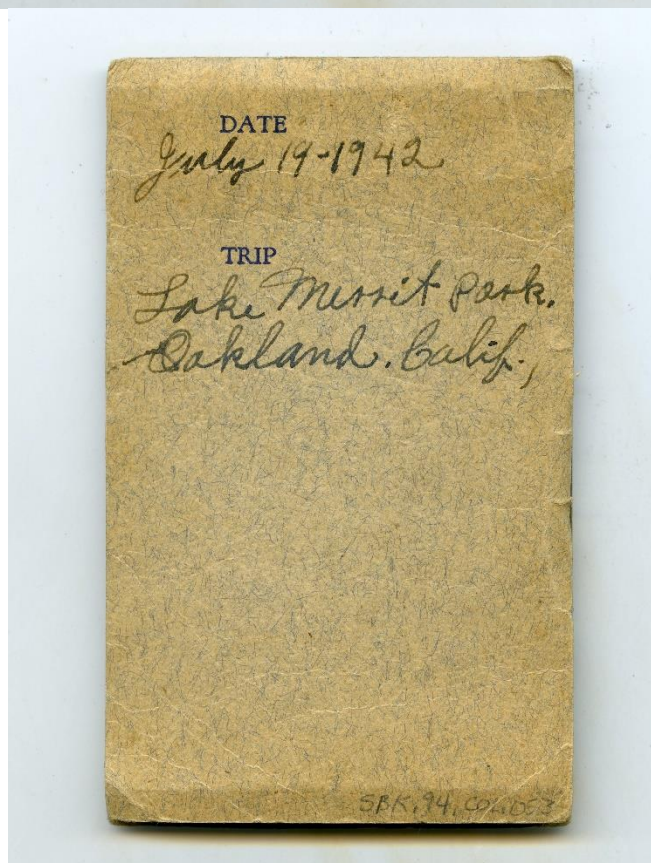
“Portrait of a young woman, LaPerla Studio, Pittsburg, California.” MS053_549. Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1940s.



“Portrait of a young man in suit and hat posing with his hands in his pockets, LaPerla Studio, Pittsburg, California.” MS053_550. Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1940s.



“Booklet for Photos MS053_469-473.” Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1940s.



“Booklet for Photos MS053_474-489.” Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, 1942.



“Five men and women lying on grass in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California.”
MS053_447. Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at
Oakland, 1943.



“Five men and women sitting on Arthur Putnam's Sphinxes in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California.” MS053_458. Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, 1943.



“Man in suit standing next to Thomas Shields Clarke's *The Apple Press* sculpture in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California.” MS053_461. Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, 1943.



“Man and woman standing next to pond with M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in the background.” MS053_464. Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, 1943.



“Young woman sitting on bed.” MS053_633. Montjoy Family Papers. African American Museum and Library at Oakland, c. 1960s.

Conclusion:

A Postscript on Performance; or, “Modernism was Intersectional!”

Now that the Negro as an integral part of the American theatre has come into being there must be standards by which to judge his ability and achievement.⁵¹²

Gwendolyn Bennett (1902-1981) opens her article, “The Emperors Jones” (1930) in *Opportunity* 8.9, by concluding that Black Americans had already become an “integral part of the American theatre” as of September 1930. Less than a decade after Black actors exploded popularly onto the stage in *Shuffle Along* in 1921, and only seven years since Willis Richardson’s *The Chip Woman’s Fortune* (1923) became the first Black-authored drama on Broadway, and just before Black Tuesday and the Great Depression marked the unofficial, uncelebrated end of the New Negro movement the following month, Bennett was ready to write the concluding chapter on Black advancements in American theatre. Bennett’s argument is solid: she predicts that “for many a round year [Black] actors will be spoken of in terms of their ability to do O’Neill’s hectored character” – and Charles Gilpin (1878-1930) and Paul Robeson’s (1898-1976) portrayals of Emperor Jones *are* still lauded for their exceptionalism nearly a century later.⁵¹³ However, from the perspective of this theatre historian that century later, the sense of resolution Bennett confidently captures in this piece appears unfounded. Despite the immediate and generational impact or “significance” of the New Negro movement unpacked in the previous chapters, we understand in 2022 that the work of “racial uplift” undertaken by Charles S. Johnson (1893-1956) and his peers in *Opportunity* (1923-1949) did not end with the stock market crash in 1930, nor did it end with Johnson’s death in 1956, nor did it end with the Civil Rights Movement or the election of our first Black president. Similarly, BIPOC artists and

⁵¹² Gwendolyn Bennett. “The Emperors Jones.” *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 8, no. 9 (1930, Klaus Reprint 1969): 270-271, at 270.

⁵¹³ Gwendolyn Bennett. “The Emperors Jones,” 270.

theatre-makers, especially off-stage, remain disproportionately and inequitably underrepresented today.⁵¹⁴ Despite this distance between the final waning moments of the New Negro movement and the ideal American system it envisioned, Charles S. Johnson and his peers within *Opportunity* and the movement at-large – especially those underrepresented within and underappreciated by scholarship – deserve to be recognized for their advances in Black American modern artistry and for facilitating the development of Black American publics and counterpublics. I believe reading the New Negro movement as avant-garde (after necessarily interrogating the lens) calls unique attention to the residual influence of the New Negro movement even after its unceremonious dissolution: though Black Americans hadn't *quite* become an “integral part of the American theatre” by 1930 and the end of the movement as Bennett claimed, progress *has* been made since – progress envisioned by Charles S. Johnson and his peers.

By reading the New Negro movement as avant-garde, I have been able to emphasize the citizen-making qualities of the movement and the ways in which its texts prescribed best-practices for its citizens as manifestos in their own right. I have highlighted the importance of group-making to the foundational of the movement, especially its launch at the Civic Club Dinner on March 21, 1924. And, as noted above (and practiced in-depth in chapter 4), this avant-garde lens has allowed me to make an exceptional argument for the impact of the New Negro

⁵¹⁴ The Asian American Performers Action Coalition *Visibility Report* from 2017-2018 reveals that “61.5% of all roles on New York City stages went to white actors” during that year’s season, a marked overrepresentation of the 54.7% white population of the city. The Asian American Performers Action Coalition. *The Visibility Report: Racial Representation on NYC Stages*, 2020, 12.
http://www.aapacnyc.org/uploads/1/1/9/4/11949532/aapac_report_2017-2018_single.pdf;
and United States Census Bureau. “QuickFacts: New York,” 2020, n.p.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NY/>.

movement in spite of its temporal limitations: as an almost-avant-garde collective, the New Negro movement operated beyond time and space, enacting its change on the future, directly and indirectly. Tangentially, this avant-garde lens has also rooted my analysis in modernism and, in tow, liberalism, as the avant-garde was modernist, in parts, and both modernism and the avant-garde are centrally concerned with liberalism (modernism in upholding it and the avant-garde in undoing it). The modernism of the New Negro movement and Charles S. Johnson's criticisms of liberalism and social assimilation in the early twentieth century have especially informed my understanding of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. Teaching the two concepts and their schism in the past, I have stressed modernism's emphasis on the new and its resurgence of Enlightenment liberalism: as Christopher Butler writes in his *Very Short Introduction*, modernism's "[d]iversity of style is liberal democracy in art."⁵¹⁵ Modernism was committed to the liberal project. John Carlos Rowe offers a more nuanced relationship between modernism and liberalism in his monograph, *Afterlives of Modernism* (2011). Countering the simple assumption that what he labels "avant-garde modernists" such as T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) and Ezra Pound (1885-1972) "relied on a political liberalism that marginalized issues of race, class, and gender/sexuality" – thus rendering all modernism unprogressive when applied to the style – Rowe instead argues:

high modernism often addressed these questions in progressive ways, calling for specific reforms symbolically enacted in many literary works. Distinct from the deeply conservative politics of avant-garde modernists like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, John Dos Passos, William Faulkner, and Ralph Ellison took seriously the social inequities of U.S. racism, sexism, and classism. Each tried to identify with the situations of peoples marginalized in these ways and offered the literary imaginary as a possible means of calling for and proposing specific social, legal, and economic reforms. Employing avant-garde styles and forms to disrupt

⁵¹⁵ Christopher Butler. *Modernism: a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 12.

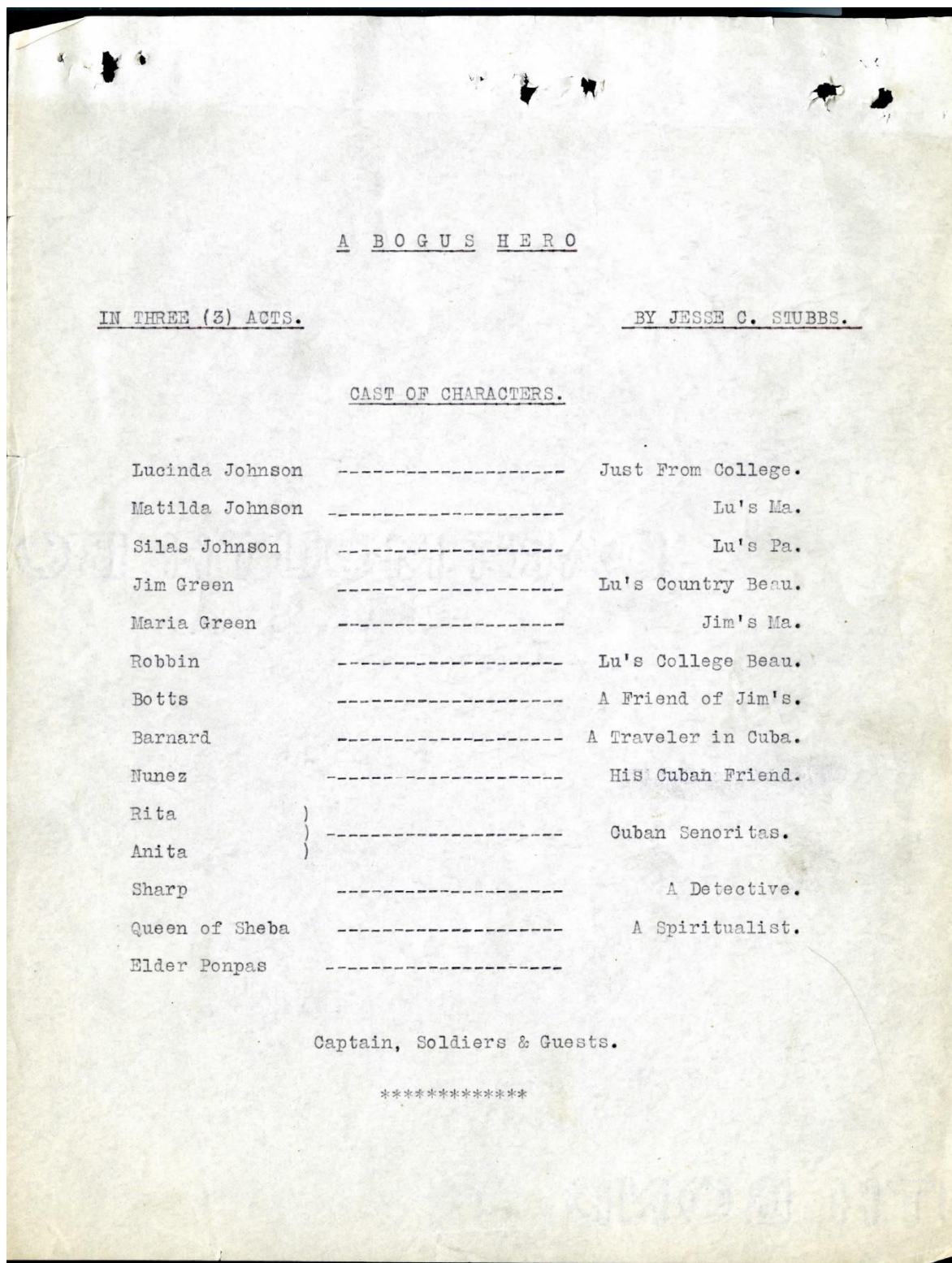
the conventional modes of cultural representation, they also worked to include minorities as participants in the debates of the avant-garde.⁵¹⁶

Rowe argues that, while “avant-garde” modernists such as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot *were* more conservative in their application of liberalism, many (high) modernist artists such as Gertrude Stein and William Faulkner – *and* Ralph Ellison and John Don Passos – applied the tenets of modernism (the emphasis on the new, new artistic subjects or practices, and a celebration of stylistic freedom) in order to consider and promote marginalized experiences. Modernists, then, embraced and employed Enlightenment values to realize the liberal project (self-ownership, private property, representative government) among unrepresented, underprivileged populations. Postmodernism, thereafter, dialectically developed through the postcolonial and intersectional interrogation of modernism’s narratives and limitations. In short, postmodernism was intersectional modernism, the extension of the liberal ideal to *all* people... for real this time. However, reading the philosophy of Johnson and advocacy of his peers (alongside other racial interrogations of equity from the era) deconstructs this arbitrary boundary and urges the realization: modernism *was* intersectional (at least prototypically) – for nonwhite thinkers. That is, nonwhite modernists – *especially* nonwhite women – were considering the multiplicity of their identity long before postmodern thinkers such as Kimberlé Crenshaw solidified this line of interrogation academically and before postmodernism came to be defined, at least from a “101” perspective, as modernism intersectionalized.

⁵¹⁶ Rowe builds his argument atop scholarship such as Michael North’s *The Dialect of Modernism* (1994) and Ann Douglas’s *Terrible Honesty* (1995). John Carlos Rowe. *Afterlives of Modernism: Liberalism, Transnationalism, and Political Critique*. Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2011, 9; Michael North. *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; and Ann Douglas. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.

I believe this analysis of New Negro multimedia artistic production, centered around Charles S. Johnson and his editorship of *Opportunity* and *Ebony and Topaz* (1927), has drawn necessary attention to the artistry and influence of relatively underrepresented figures from the movement: Charles S. Johnson himself, and especially photographer Cornelius Marion Battey (1873-1927) and illustrator Charles Cullen (1887-?), the latter who has remained essentially invisible to scholarship until the work of Julie Mellby at Princeton's Special Collections. I have been enthralled by their artistry, impressed by the breadth of Cullen's untapped archive (and similarly disappointed by the loss of Battey's to deterioration), and proud to analyze and emphasize their work in this dissertation. Battey has been recognized, though only to an extent, for his impact on early Black American photography; but he and Cullen deserve greater celebration for their modern artistry and their work in valuing and lifting up Black Americans and their lived experiences across social strata. Johnson, too, ought to be recognized in the same breath as Alain Locke for kickstarting and facilitating the concept of the New Negro and its corresponding movement – arguably no figure played a larger part in organizing the Civic Club Dinner than he (though Locke was its public face as emcee and later editor of the anthology that gave the movement its name). Additionally, it has been my true honor to read the archived, unpublished plays from Johnson's collection and the 1925 *Opportunity* Literary Prize Contest. These works beautifully dramatize the complexities of New Negro identity nearly (or just) as well as their awarded peers; and *Her*, in particular, though anonymous, continues to enthrall me for its early take on Black American horror. I look forward to continuing to emphasize this piece in more-focused research. I am especially proud to finally give these plays their moment in the sun, including them in the appendix at the end of this dissertation. I can only hope this (relative) publicization can spread these plays necessarily among new audiences.

This dissertation has positioned Johnson within the histories and paradigms of Western liberalism and, adjacently, sentimentalism, as well as traditions of sociological theory. In so doing, I have emphasized the specifics of Johnson's appropriated use of each paradigm and its tenets, how Johnson separated himself and *Opportunity* from the sentimental appeals and tropes of earlier twentieth-century drama and literature, instead harkening back to Enlightenment liberal values, asserting that Black Americans deserved equal rights and representation not because of their human ability to suffer, but because of their higher faculties and ability to reason, their (liberal) *personhood*. This New Negro, tangentially liberal, personhood held metatextual acts of reading and writing as centrally important tactics for manifesting white respect and actual social change, functioning as an almost-avant-garde entity: hoping for and relying upon future authority in order to enact change, while not embracing the conservatism or, frankly, racism of the avant-garde. The New Negro movement, like a historical avant-garde, employed art and embodied practices to spread its values among its members and potential converts. This presentation of New Negro personhood can be seen captured, embodied, and performed in the literature, drama, and theatre of the New Negro movement, and even in publications such as *Opportunity* and *Ebony and Topaz* themselves, as unpacked in each of this dissertation's later chapters. Additionally, the New Negro movement can be seen to have left purported marks on the future, inspiring acts of citizenship and methods of self-representation by Black Americans after the movement had ended – again, in an (almost) avant-garde fashion. Ultimately, Charles S. Johnson and his peers published and performed almost-avant-garde art in and around *Opportunity* in order to manifest the legibly liberal, distantly sentimental, values of the New Negro movement and its modernist project: equitable public access within a liberal system that means the same thing (discursively and conceptually) to all citizens.

Appendix: The Unpublished Plays from *Opportunity's* 1925 Literary Contest*A Bogus Hero* by Jesse C. Stubbs

-1-
SCENE I.A BOGUS HERO

ACT I.

Parlor: Matila seen dusting furniture and putting things in order.

ENTER AUNT MARIA.AUNT MARIA.

Howdy sis Tildie, how you be?

MRS. JOHNSON.

Just as well as I can, sis Maria.

MARIA.

Fixing things orderly for Mandy I see. We all sho' will be glad to see her.

MRS. JOHNSON.

Mighty glad we will sis.

MARIA.

Jim can't do no work fer talkin' 'bout Lu. He's gone plum crazy. He's sho' got his eyes set on Lu. I never see'd a boy so daffy.

MRS. JOHNSON.

Lu better not be thinkin' 'bout boys yit. She ain't old enough to git married yit. Me an' Silas has dug and stinted to make Lucinda somebody, and we ain't goin' to let her throw herself away.

MARIA.

Sister Tildy, you don't mean to say she'd be throwin' herself away to marry my boy. Jim's as good as any and a sight better than some of his betters.

MRS. JOHNSON.

I don't mean no reflection sister Maria, but you know it's always better to marry your equals and ----- Well, whut's this comin'.

Enter crowd of neighbors, both sexes, all ages. Lively scene of greeting and hand shaking and gossip.

4 -2- 1

Enter Lu with Silas Johnson. Song by Lu.

Lots of hugging and hand shaking. Neighbors gradually disappear.

Interval filled by chorus and after which -----

MRS. JOHNSON.

Lucinda, Jim will be here terrectly. Now don't let him set too long 'cause you need some rest after comin' such a long ways on the cars.

LUCINDA.

Yes Mam. Pa told me Jim would be up. I'm a little anxious to see my old beau.

MRS. JOHNSON.

Your what? Don't you go talkin' 'bout no beaux gal.

LU - (Embarrassed)

My old friend.

MRS. JOHNSON.

Well then.

(Exit Mrs. Johnson) (Enter Jim).

JIM.

Oh, Miss Lucinda, I'se awful glad ter see you; awful glad, awful glad, I is. (They shake hands).

LU.

I am glad to see you, Jim. I'm glad to see all of my old friends.

JIM.

As soon as I heard that you was here, from your pa, Miss Lucinda, I told him ter tell you I would be here sho' ter-day. So, I jes bridled up old Becky this mornin' an' come over.

LU.

I'm so glad you came over, Jim.

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JIM.

Yes'm, I gits up this mornin' and lows ter myself, I ain't gwine ter do much work ter-day, cause I'm gwine over ter Pap Johnson's ter see Miss Lucinda. So I gits up at five o'clock and feeds ther hosses, milks ten cows, feeds ther five old sows with their litter uv shotes, cuts up a load uv wood, totes fifteen buckets ur water frum the spring over ther hill, ketches three old roosters whut done lost their usefullness, fur mammy to cook fer dinner, then I gits er bite er two an fills my pockets full ur apples and me an old Beck skips out.

LU.

I'm glad you didn't work too hard before leaving home, Jim.

JIM.

Oh, That wus jes like play ter me, Miss Lu -- How does things look 'round here Miss Lu, does they look nat'ral?

LU.

I feel reticent about expressing my opinion Jim. Of course this is my home you know, and we are usually blind to the faults of our home town.

JIM.

Miss Lu, what is red as a cent?

LU. (Haughtily)

I said RETICENT. I'll get vexed in a minute. Suppose we change the subject Mr. Green. You are really exasperating.

JIM.

Sasperatin! Now Miss Lu, I never sasparated you in my life. I'se jes' trying ter tell you how scrumptious you looks.

LU.

But your remarks are equivalent to an insult.

JIM.

My marks is equidulent to insult? I ain't made no sich marks; I'se

-4-
a gentleman and I always prospects a lady Miss Lu.

LU.

Why you couldn't prospect me Mr. Green. What do you think I am, a gold mine or a coal mine?

JIM.

Fergive me Miss Lu, I ain't meant no harm.

LU.

Well I'll fergive you this time, but be very careful.

JIM.

Thanky, thanky Miss Lu. As I was saying, does things look nat'ral round ther old farm? Cummin up ther walk jes now, I seed yer pa's old nanny goat. Gee! aint she getting big and fat? When I hitched old Becky, my mule to the fence out thar, she looked at old Beck jes like she knowed Beck. I wonder if she members that ^{time} ~~me~~ Beck swatted her in the belly with his hind foot?

LU.

Mr. Green, Mr. Green, Stop! I'm surprised at you using such language in my presence. Never make use of that word again. Say abdomen, when speaking of that part of the anatomy.

JIM.

'Scuse me Miss Lu, please ma'm. Youse see I aint never been arway ter college an' learn't all them fancy word^s. But tell me Miss Lu, I heard you say somethin' about er knat. Whut is er knat get ter do with it?

LU.

I did not say knat, I said, ANATOMY.

JIM.

Oh, thats different. As I was sayin', when Becky kicked the nanny in the abdogal -----

LU.

Mr. Green, what are you talking about, I said abdomen.

-5-

JIM.

ABDOMEN! Oh, I see. But I'se not talkin erbout men goats, this is a nanny; just a girl goat.

JIM. (After a pause). Miss Lu, le's tell tales.

LU.

Oh, Jim don't say tales, say anecdotes.

JIM.

Miss Lu, aint you exhausted them jaw breakin' words yit? Ef yer spends two more years at that Frisk College, I spose we'll haf ter make signs to understand each other. --- Does you member, Miss Lu, the good times we uster have fore you went ter college? when we uster go to all the baptisms, Church, cornshuckings and dances, and all sich ter-gether?

LU.

Yes, I remember quite well, Jim.

JIM.

Does you member when old Aunt Chole got to shoutin' and yelled -- been weighed, been weighed, been weighed wid er two ounce pound, and wid her 300 pounds er fat, fell over on Aunt Lydie, who weighed jes 90 pounds.

LU.

Oh, yes, that was the time Aunt Lydie stuck a pin in her.

JIM.

Yes'm that the time. Some folks was mean enough to say Aunt Chole fell on Aunt Lydie on purpose, 'cause Mrs. Jakes said Mrs. Brown told her that Mrs. Black said that Aunt Jemina said that Aunt Lydie said that Aunt Chole took the white folks cold vitals home to her chilluns.

LU.

Aunt Lydie always would talk too much.

A-6-
JIM:

And does you member 'bout the city side that was here visitin', takin Susana Legpull ter church and jes cause he did'nt give her a nickel ter put in the collection, she gits mad and gits on a shoutin' spell, jumps up, lets his beaver hat fall out of her lap on the floor, sticks her foot in the hat, lets her arms swing back and biffs him in ther mouf.

LU:

Yes, that was real mean of Susana.

JIM:

But the duds was a dog-gone fool, why did'nt he give her er nickel ef he had it and he would'nt er had ter spend er dollar to git the wrinkles took out'en his beaver.

LU:

Say Jim, Elder Fatmus, he was a fine man.

JIM:

Yes, he was. Elder Fatmus was er honest man tho' I member once he was exhortin, does you catch ther word? - exhortin agin lying. Finally he said, "Thar is a member ur this congregation whut has been guilty uv lying and so as ter pint out that member, I'm gwine ter hurl this hymn book at his head. Every body in that church ducked but me.

LU:

And you were the only truthful person in the church?

JIM:

Well, you see I did'nt hear him, I wus sleep. Kin I set over there wid you, Miss Lu?

LUCINDA:

Oh, I ~~have~~ no objections.

JIM:

Neither has I. (Takes seat with Lu on settee). Lets his arm steal around Lu's waist).

(ENTER MRS. JOHNSON).

MRS. JOHNSON:

Look her Jim, whut's comin over you? Whut you doin so close ter

-7-

Lucinda? I'll tell yer now ter start wid, I aint gwine ter stan fer no bear huggin 'round here. And whut's the matter wid you gal, aint you got no more sense than ter let Jim dirty up that clean waist wid his greasy hands?

LU:

Why ma, please don't talk so.

MRS. JOHNSON:

Hush! hush up gal. Jim, ef you caint behave yerself I'll make yer an your old Beck break ther record of Maud S. gwine down the pike. Lucinda there's er pin legged dude wid er cuff eround his neck and a suit er clothes on, lookin like its gwine squeeze him ter death; sez he jes stopped off ter see you on his way home frum Frisk College. Now Lucinda, ther's one thing shore, you is got ter cut all these here College loafers, they's bad eggs.

LU:

Who is he, ma?

MRS. JOHNSON:

I believe he sez his name is Robbin, he looks like some sort o' thief.

LU:

Oh, Mr. Robbin, show him in at once, ma. He is wuite a favorite with all the girls at school. He is the author of the College Yell and he led the foot-ball team.

MRS. JOHNSON:

Uh huh, I knowed he was good fer nuthin. I'd would do him more good ter follow er mule team.

(Exit Mrs. Johnson)

(Enters Robbins).

ROBBIN: (Over polite)

Good afternoon, Miss Lucinda. Delighted to see you, I assure you.

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Delighted!

LUCINDA:

The pleasure is mine, Mr. Robbin. It was so thoughtful and kind of you to stop to see me on your way home. Mr. Robbin, meet an old time friend of mine, Mr. Green.

ROBBINS: (Shaking hands)

Mr. Green, I am charmed to meet you. Charmed! Charmed!

JIM:

Yes, I believe in charms too. I always carried a buckeye and the left hind foot uv a rabbit wid me everywheres I goes.

ROBBIN:

Why I mean, I am glad to meet you when I say, I am charmed to meet you.

JIM: (Aside)

If you hang erround here long it might be harm ter meet me.

ROBBIN:

Mr. Green, do you live in these parts?

JIM:

Parts? Naw man, I lives iner house, whut yer talkin erbout?

LU:

Jim, Mr. Robbin means, do you live in this vicinity; this neighborhood

JIM:

Oh, he means, does I live in this here neighborhood? Well, why dont he explanatory his self? --- (To Robbin) --- Yesser, I lives in parts uv the cornfield back uv old Mr. Cranberrys farm. Does you live in this viciminy?

ROBBINS: (Perplexed) I don't quite understand.

JIM:

You been to College and cah't translate a little word like that?

ROBBINS:

Let's see is that a Greek or Latin work?

JIM:

Viciminny? (Jokingly) Oh, that's jes a little African word. (Laughter by Jim)

ROBBINS:

Ah? ah! I see. How long, Mr. Green, since you left the jungles?

JIM:

Whut jungles? I don't know nothing bout no jungles.

ROBBINS:

Then you left Africa quite young, I presume.

JIM: (Excitedly)

Look here man, does you mean to insult me? Does I look like one of them things whut comes from the jungles uv Africa? I'll take a punch at you fer that.

LU: (Rushing between them)

Gentlemen, shame on you; don't fight.

JIM:

They aint goin to be no fight, I'm jes goin ter shet off his wind, that's all.

ROBBIN: (Bowing apologetically)

Miss Lucinda, I beg a thousand pardons.

JIM:

An I am going ter make you see a thousand stars.

LU:

Calm yourselves gentlemen, and be seated. (Robbins takes seat on on settee beside Lucinda).

JIM:

Yes, make that set down, ef you don't he might have ter lay down. (Aside) -- I wonder whut these stiff neck dudes is always comin here after our girls anyway? We aint got no more than we need ourself. Now he thinks he's goin ter run over me, I'll jes spoil

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his game. --- (To Lucinda) --- Aint there room fer one more Miss Lucinda?

LU:

The settee will only hold two, Jim.

JIM:

Well I'll jes put my hat in the middle and we'll play it's me and I don't want the party on the right (Referrin to Robbin) to crowd me neither.

LUCINDA:

Mr. Robbin, tell me about yourself. What are your prospects for the summer?

JIM: (Aside)

Yes, let him tell it all now, cause this is the last chance he'll git.

ROBBIN:

Well, I'm going to run down home and see the old man and folks. The old man wants me to stay at home and take charge of the farm, but what's the use of letting the knowledge I got at Fisk go to seed on the farm? No, I'm going to Chi and get a position as Pullman car attendant just like the rest of our college boys do.

JIM:

Why don't you jes say, PORTER. Everybody knows that's whut you mean.

LU: (Not noticing JIM)

Position on a Pullman car! Is that not a rather humble position for a college graduate? How could your learning be practically applied in such a position?

ROBBIN:

That's just where a man's learning comes in handy. Only the man who has studies languages can read the French and Latin names on the bill of fare.

LU:

Then you should not have taken a collegiate course, you should have

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taken a servant's course. There are too many educated fools now roaming about the country with a head full of thousand dollar education and a dimes worth of sense.

ROBBIN:

Oh, Miss Lucinda, I think you are rather severe. (Listening)

What is that awful noise I hear?

JIM:

(Jim who has fallen asleep, snoring heavily, talks in his sleep).

Yesser, yesser, I fed them hogs this morning. -- (Awakes suddenly).

LUCINDA:

Mr. Green, you sleep rather loudly, don't you?

JIM:

I caint help it Miss Lucinda, since I got the guitar.

LUCINDA:

Oh, do you play the guitar? What's that got to do with sleeping?

JIM:

Play the guitar? I aint said nothing bout playing no guitar.

I got the guitar in my thoat.

LU: (Laughing)

Oh, you mean you have the catarrh, Mr. Green you are really comical. Your expressions may be sometimes be ambiguous, but no one could say you are not original.

JIM:

Now there you go again Miss Lucinda. Why don't you speak the constitution of the U. S. so's I can understand what you is talking erbout?

LUCINDA: (Startled)

Mr. Green, I hear your mule neighing. I wonder what can be the matter?

JIM:

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JIM:

I reckon Becky is jes happy, cause she knows she don't have to work to-day.

LU:

Suppose you go and see. Maybe the flies bother her.

JIM:

It takes more than flies to bother old Beck. I'll go and see though. (Makes repeated efforts to rise from seat, but finds he is stuck). (Chair being freshly varnished). (Mrs. Johnson hearing commotion, enters). (With Robbin's aid she finally separates Jim from the chair).

(EXIT JIM)

MRS. JOHNSON:

I told Silas this mornin not to set these chairs in the sun, cause they's jes varnished yisterday. Now Silas will have the work to do all over again on account of Jim wearing that tissue paper suit or clothes.

(EXIT MRS. JOHNSON)

ROBBINS: (Kicking Jim's ancient beaver across the room).

The impudent fellow. What does he mean by such a flagrant breach of etiquette. He needs to be taught a lesson.

LU:

Take care Mr. Robbin, Jim knows more about fighting than he knows about etiquette. He might want to give you a few lessons in his specialty when he sees his hat.

ROBBINS: (Getting closer to Lu)

Now is my chance, Miss Lucinda, to tell you how much I love you. Ah, if you will only return my love, you will make me the happiest man alive.

LU:

What have you to offer besides yourself, Mr. Robbin?

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ROBBIN: (Aside)

It is lucky I got that ring before I left college last night, that I gave Jane Gray last winter. --- (To Lu). -- I have it here, Miss Lu, the engagement ring. Was'nt I thoughtful to bring it along?

LU:

You were more than thoughtful. You were presumptuous. Are you in the habit of purchasing the ring before asking the girl, or has the ring seen service before? Anyway, that is'nt what I meant. What are your prospects for your future life?

ROBBIN:

Well, I am a Frisk graduate, you know. I was champion checker player at school, I won the medal for the 100 yard dash, I have committed to memory 100 pages of Virgil, I -----

LU:

But hold! you are telling of your accomplishments at school. What have you to offer a girl in return for her love? Wives can't live on learning you know.

ROBBIN:

Now my old dad owns 15 acres of valuable land down in Georgia, and he's getting old.

LU:

I understand it is nothing but a cane break.

ROBBIN:

That's what makes it so valuable. I was thinking of going in to business selling fish poles. Now my mother's second cousin owns a rich orange grove in Florida. She has'nt any children and she might leave it to me.

LU:

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LU: (Laughing)

"Oh, death, where is thy sting?" Sting these two old folks quick and make this poor man happy.

ROBBIN:

Miss Lucinda, you can't afford to refuse me. My great, great, grand-father was an Irish Count, and my mother's half brother was a full blooded Indian.

LU:

No Negro blood?

ROBBIN:

Well, a little.

LUCINDA:

Poor Negro blood! Everybody's ashamed of you.

I think I hear footsteps approaching. I believe it's Jim.

ROBBIN: (Casting a glance at Jim's battered hat).

I guess I did treat his hat kind of mean, didn't I Miss Lu?

(Gets hat, smooths it out and places on seat between them).

I know you would advise me to humor him and put his hat where he left it.

LU:

Mr. Robbin, knowing Jim better than you do, I would beg of you to do so.

(ENTER JIM)

LU:

Well Jim, what ailed your steed?

JIM:

She aint that kind of er mule Miss Lu.

LU:

You stayed quite a while, something must have been wrong.

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JIM: Aw nothing much, your old nanny was jes eatin off all my mule Becky's anecdotes.

LU: All the what? (Laughing).

JIM: Why didn't you tell me not to say tail; but old Beck got even. She kicked the stuffin out of that old nanny. I never seed so many rags and tin cans come out of a goat. (Picks up hat, looks at it critically). I aint cusin nobody, but dis hat don't look zackly the same as it did before I went out. (Looking at Robbin) -- You didn't tech it, did you?

ROBBIN:
Why, who would want to do anything to your hat?

JIM: Nobody, ef they knowed whut was comin to em. I don't low nobody to do nuthin to whut belongs to me. (Making gestures, knocks book out of Lu's hand which she had begun reading) Yes, I'll take up fer my things all the time, and I'll fight fer 'em. I wish dis pore little hat could speak and tell me whut's been doin sense I went out. I'd die fightin fer my things. I'd fight fer old Beck and she ken fight her own battles. Yesser, I cum frum er family uv fighters, my old grand-daddy could fight off the best watch-dog that ever lived and my daddy will fight anything frum elephants to bed-bugs.

LU: (After Jim has knocked book out of hand repeatedly).
Jim, please don't practice your fighting tactics on me or this book. Stand out further and fight the air all you want to.

JIM: Well, I'll tell you Miss Lu. -----

(ENTER MRS. JOHNSON)

MRS. JOHNSON:
Here! here!! whuts all this fuss erbout? Look here Jim, whut

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is you trying ter do anyhow?

LU:

Ma, Jim is just telling us of the exploits of his ancestors.

MRS. JOHNSON:

Of his Aunts sisters?

LU:

Ancestors, his ancestors, ma. His fore parents.

MRS. JOHNSON:

His fore parents. What does you know 'bout your fore parents Jim?
Why, your fore parents wus monkeys, boy. Where does you think you is,
Jim; hollin and makin all this fuss? You aint in no corn field.

JIM:

I fergot Aunt Tildy.

MRS. JOHNSON:

Well remember not ter forgit next time.

(EXIT MRS. JOHNSON)

JIM:

Why is your ma always pickin on me Miss Lu? I aint done nothin.

LU:

You are very uncouth in your manners, Jim. Indeed your behavior is reprehensible.

ROBBIN:

Simply outrageous.

JIM: (In beligerent attitude).

Don't talk to me man.

ROBBIN:

Abominable.

JIM:

No man can call me names like that. (Jim rushed at Robbin.
They tussle and Mrs. Johnson reappears with broom and beats Jim,
who makes a hasty exit).

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MRS. JOHNSON: (To Jim)

Go home and never come back.

(Mrs. Johnson exits in opposite direction).

ROBBIN:

I'll go too, Miss Lu, and return and talk further on the object of my visit when things are more tranquil.

LU:

Very well, Mr. Robbin, I think it would be better. Be careful, Jim may be waiting around the corner.

(EXIT ROBBIN)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2 ----- STREET.

BOTTS - (A country friend of Jim's)

Hello Jim, I see your girl's back in town. You're a lucky dog, Jim. No use talking, these colleges certainly do knock all the rough edged off. She's as fine as silk.

JIM - (Sadly)

Well, I guess I must be one of the rough edges.

BOTTS -

What do you mean, old man?

JIM -

I got shook off. Lucinda done give me the mitt.

BOTTS -, (Surprised)

No! you don't say so?

JIM -

Yes, I did say so.

BOTTS -

You don't mean to say that Lu threw you down for some other fellow?

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JIM - Did you ever hear tell uv a woman throwin down one feller till she had her eyes sot on another? Yes, The main squeegee is one uv them bandy legged college dudes.

BOTTS -

Well, well, I never thought Miss Lu would ever treat you so badly.

JIM -

Aw that aint nothin, you never can tell whut a woman will do. I was always good to Lucinda.

BOTTS -

Yes, you certainly were. I remember the nice Xmas presents, and birthday presents you used to send her.

JIM -

Yes that's all passed now.

BOTTS -

And the pretty boxes of candy all tied up in blue ribbin, why it was the best candy I ever ate.

JIM -

Best you ever ^{eat} at? When did you eat it?

BOTTS -

Why I used to drop by there once in a while and she'd bring out a box and say, "Have some candy on Mr. Green", then she'd take the ribbin off and tie it around Fido's neck.

JIM -

Did she do that?

BOTTS -

That was a pretty watch you gave her, though, and it was good stuff.

JIM -

Botts let by-gones be by-gones. Whut do you know about that watch?

BOTTS -

Why she asked me to take it down to Goldsteins and have it tested.

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It stood the test too.

JIM -

Did she do that?

BOTTS -

Oh, she meant no harm. She told me she always liked you because you were generous.

JIM -

That's right rub it in. I know I'm a dog gone fool. I was born on Friday and on the 13th of the month and I reckon I aint never goin ter be nothin but Jonah.

BOTTS -

Cheer up, Jim. There's as good fish in the sea as ever were caught.

JIM - Yes, an ef I went fishin the durned fish would pull me in an I'd git soaked agin.

BOTTS -

Don't be downhearted Jim, you may get Lu yet. She can't forget you as good as you were to her -----

JIM - .

Now cut it out Botts. That's all done with.

BOTTS -

Take courage Jim. Be a man. What's worth having is worth fighting for. Die game.

JIM -

Die game? If fightin would git Lucinda, I'd wipe up every street an alley in town with that chappie.

BOTTS -

You don't understand. Not with fists, but with your brains.

JIM -

Oh, a sorter brain-storm.

BOTTS -

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BOTTS -

No, no, use your wit; out-wit the other man. Use your head.

JIM -

You mean butt him. Oh, I'll fight him any way you say.

BOTTS -

Then, so shall it be. Man against man, and woman, eternal woman the stake; but let the fight be fair.

JIM -

All is fair in love and war.

BOTTS

You've heard of Don Quixote?

JIM -

Who's he? Did he ever live around here?

BOTTS

Why no, he lived in Spain.

JIM-

How do you speck me to know some man in Spain?

BOTTS -

Well Don Quixote was a ----- Come on some people are coming this way. I'm your friend and I'm going to help you win the girl from Robbin. Now Don Quixote was ----- (EXIT BOTTS AND JIM TALKING)

CHORUS DURING INTERVAL.

CURTAIN

SCENE 3, same as SCENE 1.

(Enters Lucinda).

LUCINDA

Oh, I'm so sorry the disgraceful scene between Mr. Robbin and Jim should have occurred. I feel for Jim, but I believe Mr. Robbin's company agter all is a bit more congenial. I could learn to love him. He'll be

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a good sort of a fellow when he gets rid of his conceit. I believe I will
----- (Heard knock on door).

MESSENGER - A note for you Miss LU.

LU -

A note for me? (Opens note and reads).

I regret that I must leave town tonight. I must see you privately
before I go. I will call at the house at 10 o'clock on my way to the
station. No one else must see me. Will explain. Yours, "Robbin".

What can this mean? I hope no misfortune has befallen Mr. Robbin.

(EXIT LUCINDA)

CHORUS.

Clock striking ten. (Lu creeps down stairway into dimly lighted room in
which man is hidden. A cloak is thrown over her head by a masked man from
behind, who hastily carries her out. Lu screams; the household is alarmed
and all rush in).

AUNT MATILDA -

Lu! Lu! where are you? where is my daughter? My poor chile has been
bodily carried away.

SILAS *

What does this mean? (Neighbors enter) Hurry boys, give the alarm,
get my gun. If harm comes to that gal, they's ter be er new black box
out in the grave-yard.

ELDER POMPAS-

Calm yourselves my children. They cannot be far. This house has
been entered by cold-blooded out-throars, but the villains will be hunted
down.

NEIGHBORS

Yes, for he cannot, must not, escape.

BATES - (A neighbor picking up note with Robbin's name attached, which
Lu in her fright let fall on the floor). Ha! What's this! A note.
(Reads aloud)

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ONE OF THE NEIGHBORS -

Robbin, that city man. You caint trust em. None of them city folks is honest nohow. I knowed it. I knowed it.

SILAS -

Yes, we all knowed it, but too late. (Matilda is screaming and wringing her hands) Quiet yourself Tildie, go back to your room and we will search the town through and through. Not a minute will I rest till I find the scoundrel.

CHORUS

CURTAIN

SCENE 1, Somewhere in Cuba.

ACT II.

BOTTS

Well Jim, we've walked a little, have'nt we, are you tired?

JIM

Am I tired? My legs feel like two chunks er lead hitched to a feather-bag. Oh, how I wish I was home.

BOTTS

Loves labor lost. You certainly made a bungling job of it.

JIM

I made a bungling job of it. Is you got the nerve an audaciousness ter look me in the face and say I made a bungle of it when you yourself led me into this fine work?

BOTTS

I did it because I was your friend. You loved the girl and I wanted to help you out.

JIM -

I loved the girl? When did you ever git it into your nut that I loved anybody? They aint no sich thing as love - no-how.

BOTTS -

Why then, did you kidnap her? Why do mem make such folls of them selves about women?

JIM -

Yes, why do they? with so many uv em in the world? That's whut I've been workin my think-factory to find out.

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BOTTS -

If you didn't love the girl, why did you want to marry her?

JIM

Well, I wanted a good house keeper and cook.

BOTTS -

And you thought this nice refined tenderly raised girl would want to marry a counterfeit sample like you to be his servant? You're too slow for a girl like that. Why you're so slow you couldn't keep up with the hour hand on a clock.

JIM -

The ^{poet} ~~past~~ says the race aint always to the swift.

BOTTS -

I'm pained to see a friend of mine act such a fool. Jim, I'm disgusted with you. You know you have'nt any business trying to join that club.

JIM -

Club! what club? I aint joined no club.

BOTTS -

You're trying to butt into a worry club.

JIM -

(With surprised look) Oh, I never thought of that. I remember my old daddy used ter say that ~~when~~ a man got married the statue of liberty shed tears.

BOTTS -

That's right, when a man gets his eyes set on a skirt, she dopes him with a lot of baby talk and he gets a funny feeling they call love. He won't be satisfied till he's tagged himself to this yard of lace. It's an awful scene (acting). Here comes the bride stepping slow trying to keep time with Lohengrin's Wedding March. She's looking at the floor sheepish and shame faced, wrapped all up in two bolts of cheese cloth and tied with 25 yards of ribbon. She can't hold her head up cause she aint got the nerve to look the poor fellow in the face. They all cry out "Here she comes". Every eye is focused on her. She wears a veil.

JIM -

Do all uv em wear veils?

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BOTTS

No, not all of them. Some of them aint got no shame and don't wear them. Then here he comes. This canidate for a Carnegie hero medal looking the victim he is, marching to his doom. Every man who's been stung in the same place wants to holler out! "Get the hook"; "Beat it"; "Run for your life"; "You're rushing in where angels fear to tread"; "Don't make this another fatal wedding"; "Leave her waiting at the Church"; "He who loves and runs away may love a fresh girl every day, but he who weds and tries to stick is sure to meet his finish quick". But it's no use. She's got him body and soul and pocket book, and he can't get away. He meets her at the altar; the parson puts the yoke on; puts him in the Holy Bondage of Matrimony. "Do you take this woman for better and for worse?" and he swears he will. Yes ser, he begins to swear right there in church, and he never quits swearing for the rest of his married life, because it's a hundred to one he's got the worst thing he ever had in his life.

JIM

new Whut us men make **fools** of ourselves about women fer? They aint nothin new. They's been here as long as we has, and you cant drive em away frum us.

BOTTS - Well I cant say about that, I never tried.

JIM -

They's jās as old in the world as we is. I'm fer men's rights. Let men quit makin idols uv women and they'll git down where they belong.

BOTTS - Where's that?

JIM - At man's feet. Why man is ahead uv women in anything, - everything

BOTTS - What is your proof?

JIM - Well me and Sal Jenkins, at home wus born on the same day. Now I'm 28 and she's jes 22.

BOTTS - You must have lived a fast lift while nobody was looking.

(Hears gun shots)

JIM

What's that?

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BOTTS - Another Cuban war broke out I guess.

JIM - War breaks out here in Cuba as easy as pimples on a country girl's face. If I don't git to break into some pig ankle joint soon another war is goin ter break out.

BOTTS - What's the matter, aint you tramp enough?

JIM -- They's goin ter be whole lot the matter ef I don't git these wrinkles out of my bread-bag soon.

BOTTS - We're sure to suffer, you brought us to this.

JIM - Now Botts, out out this argifyng. Who put all this devilment in my head to steal this gal? YOU did. Who toted her away from home that night? YOU did. Who said les hike to Cuba? YOU did.

BOTTS - (Diddainfully) Yes it was the best thing that ever happenad -- fer her. She dropped the note in the parlor that night with Robbin's name signed to it. That made our escape easy, for it left a false clew; but now that she has got away, she'll show you up for fair.

JIM - Well after we landed in Cuba whut did y u want to go stragglng off and leave me with the girl all by myself fer anyhow? You know I come frum a speculatin family, and when I seen that bettinggoin on over that there rooster fight, I jes could'nt keep frum speculatin.

BOTTS - Did you have any money?

JIM - Yes man, I had ten cents. While I wus trying to win somethin, she skiddoes. I wish I had that dime now. I'd treat my feet to a ride.

BOTTS - Now it's skiddoe for you, and I bet when you are presented with that suit, the number willbbe 23.

JIM - What suit man?

BOTTS - That striped suit. You're a kidnapper. You'll be lucky if they don't hang you.

JIM - A kidnapper, whut's that?

BOTTS - The judge will tell you all about it. They say that you are a

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member of the black hand.

JIM - Is that a colored society?

BOTTS - Oh, you go from bad to worse.

JIM - Oh, I'm so sick, home-sick, I believe I'll go back an throw myself on the mercy of the court and tell him I don't know nothin bout no black-hand, but these two (holding out his hands), and I aint sponisible for hav-ing these.

BOTTS - Why do you want to go back home? This island is a Paradise. Since you lost Miss Lu, stay here and be a free man, and if you must marry, marry one of these dark eyed senoritas.

JIM - Aw I cant. I hear the voice of the wild. I want to git back to the jungles with the rest of my tribe, to the corn field and melon patch. Oh, how I'd like to hear some uv them familiar tunes I used to hear in possum Hollow. (Hears singing)

BOTTS - Well, how are you going to get back, you're broke.

JIM -- I'll go down to the big water and I'll ship on the first water tub whut sails fer Florida.

BOTTS - You're foolish Jim, you'd better stick. This is a lively town.

JIM - Lively? Why there aint nothin stirrin wound here but the wind, and they aint nothin lively, but the mosquitos.

BOTTS - Man this is one of the grandest spots on earth. The women do all the work on this island and the men have nothing to do but go to war and enjoy life.

JIM - Is that so? Why didn't you say that at first. This argiment would er stopped then and there. Then the women do all the work. Well I guess this is Paradise. Wonder why I never heard uv this place before.

BOTTS - Wait here until I come back, I'm going foraging for a handout.

(EXIT BOTTS)

JIM
(Come back, come back, somethin tells me somethin else is sho to happen to me while you're gone.

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JIM: (continued)

(To himself). -- The women do all the work. Why didn't I hear bout this place sooner. I'll lay down under this tree and take a snooze and dream erbout the good times while Botts hunts some fodder. (Jim is aroused from sleep by firing. He jumps hastily to his feet and starts on a run but is interrupted by a soldier who captures him after he has run in the opposite direction from the first soldier. They tussle and the two soldiers finally get him down and sit on him.)

(REENTERS BOTTS LOOKING ABOUT)

BOTTS - (Calling) Jim, Oh, JIM.

JIM: (With a grunt). Whut.

BOTTS - Where are you.

JIM - Here I is, down here.

BOTTS - Well! Well! What are you doing down there Jim?

JIM - (Sarcastically) Nothin. These here fellows is friends uv mine. We got tired playin and I let em sit on me instead of settin on the damp ground.

BOTTS - You look like you are under arrest.

JIM - You see good. You sho is right. I'm under a devil uv a rest.

BOTTS --Now you have got yourself in it. What have you been doing? Did you break the law?

JIM - I aint done nothin, help me git em off an I'll break their hard heads.

BOTTS - What do you two duffers want to sit on a little man like that for? What did he do?

SOLDIER - He ees our prisoner.

JIM - Git em off Botts, please git em off and argify afterwards.

BOTTS - Lay still. I'll go get the captain and get him to release you.

(Botts returns with captain who orders soldiers to lift Jim to his feet).

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CAPTAIN - Your name, it is what?

JIM - Howdy Cap. I'm Jim Green, don't you know me?

CAPT - And you are who it is?

JIM - Jim Green the spy.

CAPT - Spy: Ha: Ha: a spy. I thought it to be so. Take him men.

(They tussle throwing Jim to the ground and all three sitting on him).

JIM - (Panting to Botts). My friend, you done me good. Go out and get a few more er these heavy weight strong arm men to set on me. Let em all take a rest.

BOTTS - Captain, this man at his home sometimes acts as a spy on Moonshine distilleries for the government. He knows nothing of the term spy as used in the army. He has misunderstood you. I give you my word of honor that he is no insurgent spy.

CAPT - (Letting Jim up). We will see, men take him to headquarters. He is one good scrapper, but I have tamed him.

BOTTS - Yes, he is so tame not that he will eat out of your hand.

CAPT - We will take him before the General, and see, and if he ees satisfactoree, we will let him join the army.

JIM - I aint no soldier, Mr. Man. I never did shoot nothin but ducks and possums.

CAPT - That is enough. We will make you ze one grand soldier.

JIM - Well I'm a hound! Man I caint fight in this country. I'm a free born citizen of the United States of Florida.

CAPT -- Tut, tut. Give him a gun my man, we will drill him.

(They drill him) (Jim tires of drilling, gets mad and routs capt, and soldiers with point of bayonet)

(EXIT ALL)

(ENTERS BARNARD WITH LU)

BARNARD -- Calm your fears my dear young lady, I shall protect you from all harm. I am inpatient to hear the rest of this wonderfully romantic

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story of how you were kidnapped and brought to Cuba by those heartless villains.

LU - When they brought me aboard the ship, I was blindfolded and of course I could not see who my captors were.

BARNARD - But did not your coming aboard in this manner excite any suspicion whatever?

LU -- Oh, yes, indeed so. The captain asked, "What ails the lady"?

BARNARD - And what did they answer.

LU - One of them never spoke while in my presence above a whisper, seemingly for fear I should know his voice. The other told the Captain that I was going blind and they were my guardians taking me to Cuba for treatment by a specialist.

BARNARD - The coward! and why didn't you then call upon the Captain for protection?

LU - I was about to do so when he hurried away to give some orders and I never again had the opportunity.

BARNARD - You are sure that this fellow Robbin was not one of the conspirators although his name was signed to the note you received?

LU - I am sure Mr. Robbin would never do anything quite so desperate. Mr. Robbin is a nice young man, just a little silly, but a nice, very, very nice young man.

BARNARD - Really Miss Johnson, I believe you care for this fellow and I am almost inclined to believe you half-way wish he had been the real kidnapper.

LU - Oh, Mr. Barnard, you misjudge me.

BARNARD - When I look into those pretty eyes, I feel like saying anyway that the fellow who did steal you had jolly good taste.

LU -- Why Mr. Barnard, I'm surprised.

BARNARD - Don't you know you are quite an interesting little girl, and aside from a sympathetic feeling you have aroused in me some new

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emotion.

LU - Big strong men don't cry, do they Mr. Barnard?

BARNARD - This is an emotion of a different sort. What if it should be love?

LU -- It really can't be though, It's nice to have you talk like that. You have travelled all over the world you say, and I know you must have met many girls, refined, cultured and talented, and I am only a green country girl.

BARNARD - That's just it. I'm a man of the world and most of the women I have met were worldly women. To meet a pure sweet girl, a child of nature, is indeed a rare pleasure, but alas, most of your sex are nature fakers.

LU - You spoke of love Mr. Barnard: What is love?

BARNARD - Love is an intoxicant, making of the earth a paradise in which we see and hear nothing but the object of ^{our} ~~your~~ affection. Love is a robber which like a thief in the night, steals into our hearts and robs us of the power to think and act rationally. Love is a Will O' the Wisp, and enchantment leading us to dizzy heights of happiness, or dragging us in the mire of degradation. Love is a sweet sorrow, a moment of heaven and an hour of hell.

LU - If love is all that, Ugh! it must be a dreadful thing.

BARNARD - Dreadful it is, and yet we cannot live without it. We will talk more about it later. Come I must take you to the American Consul and he will communicate with your people in America.

LU: - You are so good, but really you must tell me some more about love before they come and get me.

CURTAIN

SCENE 2: A ROOM.

(Room in semi darkness, Jim having become an attendant at a spiritualist's meeting.)(Jim is disguised with false hair and whiskers).

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JIM - Well ser, I aint been in Cuba a week yet and I got me a swell job already. The fellow next door told me terday they was some good spirits in this house. If they is, the queen is certainly got a good hidin place, cause I is searched this here house frum celler ter garret and I aint found nothin but water an I jes caint poison my stomach drinking them microbes. Now the queen- Everybody calls her queen; Queen Shaba. I wonder if she's kin ter King Solomon? They tells me the queen is gifted with second sight, whut ever that is. I reckon one is ter see in day time and the other in the night time. A man aint got two sights till he gits drunk, then sometimes he sees things double.

ENTERS SLEEPY JAKE (A BUM)

SLEEPY JAKE - Hello Jim.

JIM - Well if it aint Sleepy Jake. Whut you doin way out here man?

JAKE - I'm takin a little walk for my health.

JIM - Where you goin?

JAKE - I'm on my way to my summer home.

JIM - Summer home (Laughing). Is you got a summer home?

JAKE - Yes, I got a little villa up in the mountains.

JIM - Well you better blow into your little villa, the queen told me not to have no loafers round here.

JAKE - How you like your job, Jim?

JIM - Oh! "jes medium".

JAKE - What do you do?

JIM - I'm the queen's manager.

JAKE - Her manager?

JIM - Yesser, I manage all her spiritual meetings.

JAKE - Is that a good job?

JIM - They tells me it keeps a man in good spirits.

JAKE - Is there a chance for me to get a job?

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JIM - Not a ghost uv a chance while I'm here. The queen wants wite awake folks to work around here.

JAKE - How is the queen?

JIM - Beat it. I aint got no time to talk, be on your weary way. (Leads Jake to door and pushes him out). The queen holds a seance tonight, whut ever that is. They tell me they's lots er graft in this job, almost as much as being a Waiter in a Cabaret. I guess ef I stay here them fool soldiers won't find me. I'll jes -----

ENTERS TWO LADIES

JIM - Walk in ladies, is you come to the seance meeting?

BOTH LADIES - Yes sir.

JIM - Well leave just a little somethin with the manager. -----(I'm the manager) for the queen to git your influence.

LADY - What must I leave?

JIM - Oh, anything, the queen aint particular, your pocket-book will do. (Lady give him purse).

JIM - (Aside) Oh, man: aint this a juicy one? I'll have ter look in- to this case. The ghost is sho goin ter walk ter-night. (To 2nd lady) Whut kin you leave lady?

2ND LADY - I have'nt anything.

JIM - Oh well, this will do fer both uv you. (To himself) well whut dodo you think? -----

ENTERS 3RD LADY

3RD LADY - Is this where the seance is held to-night?

JIM - Yes'm this am where you see aunts, cousins, uncles, husbands, and --

LADY - Well I want to talk to my departed husband's spirit.

JIM - When did you and him part, Miss?

LADY - That's my business.

JIM - That's right. The queen will call him up. Leave a little some- thin so the queen kin get your influence.

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LADY - Have you change for a fifty dollar bill?

JIM - No mam, not yet.

LADY - Well, I'll see you later. (Walks in).

JIM - That must be Cassie Chadwicks the second.

TWO GIRLS ENTER TALKIN LOUDLY

JIM - Fare please. FARE PLEASE. (They do not notice him. Continue talking and take seats). I'll get a horn next time.

ENTERS 4TH LADY

JIM - Howdy do lady. I'm the manager, walk in. Some little token fer the queen to git your influence.

LADY - I have'nt got anything.

JIM - Nothin a-tall? Lady, Not anything? Did you make a mistake and think this wus a rest room? I caint let you in if you aint got nothin, you is a 'spicious character. (Lady whispers in Jim's ear) alright then, walk in, way did'nt you say so at fust? Meet me at the Cabaret.

ENTERS TOUGH MAN

JIM - A little present for the madame, Mr. Tough Man.

MAN - Out of my way, you shrimp. Let me pass.

JIM - This aint no crap game, mister.

MAN - Did I say I thought this was a crap game?

JIM - Well whut is you talkin about passin fer then?

(Tough man pushes Jim aside and walks in).

JIM - Well ser, whut do you think uv that?

ENTERS TIMID LOOKING SAD*FACED WOMAN

LADY - I've come to the seance.

JIM - Yessum, fifty contimes please. (Lady gives Jim coin) -- Is you got any more lady?

LADY - Yes, why?

JIM - Well this pays for you to come in, but the spirits is feeling fine ternight and they is goin ter do some extra stunds so we ask a

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little somethin extra.

LADY - How much?

JIM - Jes five dollars.

LADY - Well I'm a pore lady and thats a weeks wages, but I want to see the queen cause I've an awful load of trouble on my mind.

JIM - Yessum, this is the place to git it took off. If the queen leaves anything, come back and see me. ----- (Lady is about to sit down) ----- Jes a minute, please. The queen is got ter have somethin to git your influence please.

LADY - How much?

JIM - Two dollars more will do I guess. (She gives him \$2.00 and handkerchief and sighs).

JIM - I feel sorry fer that lady, and I'm gwine ter do all I can ter keep her frum goin way frum here with her load.

(ENTERS Mr. & Mrs. Johnson. Jim recognizes them and trembling-
^{as} ly turns away though he dose 'nt see them).

MRS. JOHNSON - Look here man, is this the place where the woman called Queen Sheba gives a seance to-night?

JIM - Nome, next house.

OTHERS - (In chorus) What's that. This aint the place?

JIM - (Changing his voice). I mean yessum. This is the place, but lady the Queen's got too much work on hand. She told me not to let no more in. Come back to-morrow night.

MRS. JOHNSON - You're a fool man. I'se goin to see this queen whether anybody else sees her or not. Cause I got ter find out somethin about Lu.
(Jim starts at mention of Lu's name).

JIM - Takes seats, you all. I'll see the queen but I know she caint tell you nothin ter-night.

MRS. JOHNSON - (Eyeing Jim closely) Somethin bout that man, Silas, looks powerful familiar.

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SILAS - Oh, Tildie you know you don't know nobody in Cuby. Les take these front seats.

(Room in semi-darkness).

JIM - Let there be silence, the queen approaches.

(ENTERS serious faced woman with faraway look in her eyes, and silently takes seat on small platform).

JIM - Ladies and Gentlemen. We is gathered here this evenin to git manifestations, execrations, and purifications from the spirit world. You all know there is two kinds of spirit, astral spirits whut come from heavenly places like Astor House, and toxicatin spirits like me and you gits sometimes. But the kind we wants to night is astral spirits and I wants to say right now that I hopes nobody is come here with the other kind. If they is, I want you to pass it right up to the manager and he'll take keer of it. The Little Bright Eyes is the control. The queen works through Little Bright Eyes you know, but maybe some of you don't know who Little Bright Eyes is. Well Little Bright Eyes is a nice little spirit called Bright Eyes. She's a cute little cuss and I know you will all like Little Bright Eyes.

Is there a disbeliever on spirit present? If there is, take the back seat. Spirit don't like strangers cause sometime they gits too doggone inquisitioning. You see this little cabinet. Well this Cabinet makes -- makes -- goo--Goo Eyes.

(Whispers to medium). Whut do they make?

QUEEN SHEBA - Materialize.

JIM - Yes, make them kind of eyes. The Queen will now materialize -- (Medium rises and picks up piece of jewelry) -----

QUEEN SHEBA - I feel a powerful influence when I pick up this piece of jewelry. The lady that sent this up has got six sweethearts and she's afraid that they will find out what a flirt she is.

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I get it that this lady is going to get in trouble if she isn't good. If you can't be good you had better be very very careful, my dear. I see hovering around your head the letter N. My dear, do you know somebody in spirit with a name that begins with N? I seem to get Nathan.

WOMAN - That was my dear husband's name.

SHEBA - I thought so. He's shocked at your actions. I also get 4-11-44 which tells me that you are a policy player. Your husband wants me to tell you to quit playing policy and cut out flirting. It's dangerous. He wants me to say he has met your three other husbands and they all tell some awful tales about you.

SHEBA - (Picking up purse) This pocketbook belongs to a young lady and (looking in it) a very careful young lady at that, as she took good pains to empty it. We pore mediums have to take so much off of these suspicious people. When I picked up this purse I seemed to get a sweet-hearts influence. You believe it when he tells you that you are the "Apple of his eye, but I want to tell you there are also several peaches hanging around. He took you to a dance the other night, didn't he, dear? And while you were tripping the light fantastic he was off in a corner with his first best. Come and see me privately and I'll tell you how to handle a man like that. The wife, of that married man you wrote to is going to show that awful letter you wrote to her husband, to your ma, but you are slick enough to lie out of it.

(Picks up handkerchief)

I get the influence of a woman in deep trouble. She's got some women friends that aint friends. They talk about you but you wouldn't want to hear what they say. It's too bad. You are going to get a package.

LADY * A package?

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QUEEN SHEBA - You had a man rooming at your house. When he left he took your face bleach, hair straightner and your false shape, about the meanest thing he could do, but he feels sorry for you without these beauty helps and is going to send them back.

LADY - The low down rascal!

QUEEN SHEBA - (Growing wild eyed and excited) Lu! (With sweep of hand) Who's LU?

AUNT MATILDA - Where is she? Where is my pore child, Lu?
(Jim becomes visibly excited).

QUEEN SHEBA * I see the name faintly above the heads of the old lady and old gent. Do you recognize the name, my dear?

AUNT MATILDA -- Dog take the name, where is she? Bring back our Lu and you'll never have to tell another lie as long as you live, queen.

QUEEN - I got the influence of a girl who has been kidnapped, brought to Cuba from her home in the States.

MATILDA - Who done it, was his name Robbins?

QUEEN -- Wait, the influence is strong. She is going to materialize.
(The figure of Lu gradually comes into view and all are breathless with amazement).

QUEEN - The kidnappers name. I'll try to get it. I see a J --- Jim - Jim! Jim Green.

(Jim yells RATS! RATS! and turns lights out. All make scramble for entrance amid great confusion. When lights are turned on Jim is seen struggling with the Tough Man with his false whiskers torn away, finally releasing himself, runs hurriedly out).

CURTAIN

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SCENE 1.ACT III.

A garden party in Havana in honor of Barnard, the American Traveler. Japanese ^{luminous} lanterns are strung beneath the trees and a general air of life and happiness pervades the atmosphere.

NUNEZ - And so Barnard leaves tomorrow. He's a jolly good fellow and everybody will hate to see him go.

ROBBIN - Yes, he's a positive hit with the girls. I don't know how he's ever going to get away from them.

NUNEZ - That's usually the penalty of being popular. It's like a library filled with books by unread authors. You can't read them all at once and you can't be contented with one for fear there may be a better one still on the shelf.

ROBBIN - That was Our dilemma, Nunez, at college. You remember with the girls I never dreamed of talking over our college days with you in Cuba, but weren't those happy days, Nunez?

NUNEZ - You bet. Say what do you think of this newly created idol Gonzalez? Nobody seems to know who he is or from where he came. The papers are filled with his heroism in demoralizing and routing the Insurgent forces. He has driven them all to the tall timber.

ROBBIN - But have you heard of his latest exploit? Have you read the Evening papers?

NUNEZ - No, tell me about it.

ROBBIN - Say, waiter -- waiter can you get me the evening paper?

WAITER - Yes Sir. (Returns with paper).

ROBBIN - Here it is. (Reads)

The new recruit to the Cuban Forces, known as Gonzalez, whose memory will live in Cuban History to be revered by posterity for his valiant services in fighting for Cuba's cause has added to his renown by the rescue of a pretty American girl who was in imminent danger of

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death by a runaway horse. The lady was horse back riding with a Mr. Barnard, an American traveler when her horse took fright at an automobile. Gonzalez with his staff was reconnoitering when he saw the horse dashing at breakneck speed toward him. Gonzales dragged the girl from the saddle just as the frightened horse plunged headlong down the steep embankment, the horse so seriously injuring himself that ~~he~~ ^{it} was afterward shot. Gonzales and the young lady escaped with slight injuries. The lady is supposed to be Miss Lucinda Johnson of Florida, who was kidnapped and brought to Cuba by a villain from whom ^{she} escaped.

NUNEZ - By jove, Gonzalez is probable in Havana tonight. I wish we could locate him. We might get him here tonight. I hope someone invited him.

ROBBINS - (Aside) Well! Well! I wonder if it's my Lucinda who was kidnapped in the States. ---- And the girl, I hope Barnard brings her tonight.

NUNEZ - Girls again, eh. Say Robbins you've never told me why you go under and assumed name.

ROBBIN - My name is Chase for the present. I'm doing a little detective work.

NUNEZ - Detective work, eh? Tell me about it later. Come lets get the girls and take a stroll.

ROBBIN - That's a go ---

EXIT ROBBIN AND NUNEZ.

ENTER RITA AND ANTINA

^{Antina}
ANTINA - Oh Rita, I speak of him all the time because I think of him all the time. I am quite sure I shall never love anyone else.

^{Antina}
RITA - But ~~Antina~~, how could you have fallen so deeply in love with the popular hero, Gonzalez, when you have only seen him twice.

^{Antina}
ANTINA - True I have only seen him twice in the flesh, but I saw him

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before three times in my dreams and a voice seemed to whisper, "This is your affinity".

RITA - Most men of fame are like bits of glass in the sun. They glitter like diamonds at a distance and you see the blemish only when you draw near.

ANTINA - You cannot discourage me, Rita for I positively adore him and shall never be happy without him. How noble he looked in his Gold braided uniform as he rode past our house to-day.

RITA - Did he remember being introduced to you by your brother.

ANTINA - He did not see me but I must see him again and tell him of my great love.

RITA - Anita! could you be so bold as to -----

ENTERS ROBBIN AND NUNEZ

ROBBIN - Girls we have been looking for you high and low. Come lets take a stroll.

BOTH GIRLS - With pleasure.

EXIT

ENTERS BOTTS AND JIM WHO IS DRESSED IN ILL-FITTING
GOLD-BRAIDED UNIFORM.

BOTTS - Jim brace up. Remember you are a hero now, try to look the part.

JIM - I don't feel right Botts, all this shiny stuff hurts my eyes. What is these two pieces of board nailed on the shoulders for?

BOTTS - They are epaulets. They show your rank. You have been given the rank of General.

JIM - An this bucket? (Takes off cap and examines). With a tawssel on it.

BOTTS - Only the Generals can wear a cap like that.

JIM - It 'minds me er the cap elephant's trainers years.

BOTTS - Spruce up now. Remember you are a specially invited guest. Your name is on every tongue.

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JIM - That's what I hates about it. Some o' them pesky Florida 'Rec-tives is sho to hear bout me and spoil everything.

BOTTS - That's no way for a hero to act. You're afraid of your shadow. Suppose these people see what a coward you are. How would you like that?

JIM - Look here Botts, now don't you go doin no knockin round here.

BOTTS - Be dignified in every move and action, and you can get anything you want.

JIM - My stomach is jes growlin now fer something. I hope they wont be late serving.

BOTTS - You aint supposed to eat at a party you know. You just get enough to tease the stomach.

JIM - You said they'd give me what I wanted.

BOTTS - They will. But a General and a Hero is not supposed to go to parties hungry. These Cubans are liable to present you with a fine house and lot out of gratitude like they did in the U. States to Dewey.

JIM - House and lot? Do you think I'd take it and kill my chance of being President?

BOTTS - Get dignified now, you must practice now. Remember every eye will be on you.

JIM - I don't want no eyes, give me some eggs.

BOTTS - Hurry, I must announce your presente shortly, and then ----- Hide! A man is coming this way. Looks like a detective.

(Jim hides, Detective Sharp enters, glances around).

BOTTS - Are you hunting some one, my man?

SHARP - I'm looking for Jim Green, do you know him? I've got a little check for him, as this party is given in honor of an American, I thought I might find him here.

BOTTS - No, I don't know him. Would you know him if you should see him?

SHARP - Sure from this circular, but I never saw him.

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BOTTS - Describe him. What does he look like, I might help find him.

SHARP - The circular says he's a little short sawed off dingy with a bullet head, big feet and flap ears. He's bout the color of a cloudy morning just before sunrise, and he's got a scar on the back of his hip where a mule kicked him.

BOTTS - How would he be dressed?

SHARP - Whe he left home he had on blue jeans and bed tick shirt and brogans. He's a trifling cuss and I know he aint got no other clothes.

(Jim walks out strutting).

BOTTS - (To Sharp) er, what's your name?

SHARP - Sharp is my name.

BOTTS - Mr. Sharp shake hands with Gen. Gonzalez. (They shake hands).

JIM -- What does this man want, Mr. Botts?

SHARP - Gen. I'm in search of a kidnapper named Jim Green. I have papers authorizing his extradition.

JIM - Mr. Sharp this is a party given in honor of me, Gen. "Gon'les," and it's an insult to look for kidnappers or any other kind uv nappers here. Let me see your papers. If you is a imposter I'll deal with you 'Gordingly.

SHARP - See for yourself. -- (Gives papers).

JIM - (Taking papers) Hold one er them lanterns Mr. Botts, let me 'xamine these 'extra edition papers". (Botts holds lantern and Jim carelessly holds paper so close to blaze that it catches fire and burns up.

SHARP - (Jumping at Jim, but restrained by Botts). What do you mean by burning those papers. You shall suffer for this Sir.

JIM - You shall suffer first fer the impertinence of telling me, the General, he'll suffer. (Jim blows whistle, two soldiers appear). Take this man to the guard house and lock him up. He has dared to offend your officer.

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(Sharp struggling and protesting is carried out).

JIM - (Laughing) Botts, home aint nothin like this. If I'm dreaming I hope to die fore I wake up.

BOTTS - Say Jim, did Lucinda know you when you rescued her from the runaway horse?

JIM - Sh! I don't know. She fainted dead away. I dont know whether it wus the horse or me.

BOTTS - Look dignified, here comes two senoritas.

ANTINA - Ah! This is the Great General, I would know him anywhere.

JIM - Yes, I'm him.

ANTINA - I think of you by day and I dream of you by night, you are my star, my sun.

JIM - (Perplexed) I'm your son? Aw! gwan quit you kiddin.

ANTINA - Cuba's Hero! I could hug you (Hugs him), I could kiss you (Kisses him several times).

BOTTS - Young lady you forgot yourself.

JIM - Leave that to me. I'll tell her when she fergits herself enough. Quit buttin in Botts.

ANTINA - General pardon me I, -----

JIM - That's all right peaches. I'll pardon you every time you do it.

ANTINA - I cannot control this powerful, this great love, you, you are my affinity.

JIM - You fergit the name. Not Finnerty. Jim. -

ANTINA - Oh! may I call you Jim? Then you are my Jim and I'm your Anita.

JIM - Anita, I'm ready to pardon you again.

ANITA - (Throwing her arms about his neck) Oh! what rapture it is to love and be loved.

NUMEZ - (Anita's lover appears, is horrified) Anita, what does this mean? False creature. I have found you of for what you are. I shall

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(Sharp struggling and protesting is carried out).

JIM - (Laughing) Botts, home aint nothin like this. If I'm dreaming I hope to die fore I wake up.

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JIM - Anita, I'm ready to pardon you again.

ANITA - (Throwing her arms about his neck) Oh! what rapture it is to love and be loved.

NUNEZ - (Anita's lover appears, is horrified) Anita, what does this mean? False creature. I have found you of for what you are. I shall

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publish your disgrace all over Havana.

JIM - Who is this feller who presumes to call it a disgrace for a girl to hug a General? Remember Sir who I is.

NUNEZ - I don't care who you are, I cannot condone Anita's shameful indiscretion.

ANITA - Say no more Jean. I hate you and I love the General.

JIM - See! There it is in a peanut shell.

NUNEZ - (Walking up to Jim). I will not stand this insult, this humiliation; I will die first. (Slaps Jim in face with glove) Now you Bogus Hero, fight or prove yourself the coward that you are.

JIM - Oh! Oh! (Holds hands over face).

BOTTS - Resent that insult General. Young man, the General will fight you on the field of honor. (To Gen.) When General?

JIM - I caint fight him.

BOTTS - Why?

JIM - He aint got no rank.

BOTTS - What! You refuse. Who will uphold the General's dignity?

JIM - You will. You rank as low as him.

ROBBIN - (Looking at Jim searchingly) Nunez, I know that man. He is Jim Green who kidnapped Miss Lucinda Johnson.

JIM - You're mistaken man. You must er got me mixed with somebody else. I aint seen you before.

ROBBIN - I know you. I've been hunting you night and day to clear my name of this serious charge.

NUNEZ - Then he is an imposter?

ROBBIN - An imposter and a cheap mountebank. I did not at first recognize him in that cast off uniform. But that is he. There's a warrant out for him.

NUNEZ - As I suspected. He is really a bogus hero.

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JIM - (Trembling) Botts tell these fellers who I is.

BOTTS - Gentlemen, the General will not parlay with you. He can prove his identity and innocence when the time comes.

JIM - Yes and prove it by proxy.

ROBBIN - Come Nunez, I'll call the police. He'll get what's coming to him.

(EXIT ROBBIN & NUNEZ)

JIM - This dream is turning to a nightmare. Trouble is comin in bunches. It's that Friday the 13th hoodoo. I got to drown it.

Botts I'm goin to leg it. Where's the nearest bar room.

BOTTS - Keep your nerve; they haven't got you yet.

(EXIT BOTTS & JIM)

Guests and introductions. Guests gather quickly and mingle sociable. A flutter of excitement as Lucinda enters with Barnard.

Greetings and introductions.

LU - My heart is just thumping with excitement. I'm so impatient to see and thank my famous rescuer Gen Gonzalez. I owe him a debt of gratitude, impossible for me to repay.

BARNARD - The General is expected any moment. You shall see ----- Ah! he is here.

(ENTERS JIM WITH BOTTS)

LU - (Amazed) Jim! Jim! Can I believe my eyes? Jim a great General and my life preserver? How can I ever repay you? How can I ever show how sincerely grateful I am?

JIM - Git your folks to call off them human hounds so I can go home, and I'll call it square.

LU - Nothing more? Can you demand nothing greater?

MR. & MRS. JOHNSON, AND ROBBIN ENTERS

ROBBIN - There he is. There's your man, officer. (Officers grab *Jim* *Bumbo*).

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MATILDA - Yes, that's him. That's Jim sho. The onery cuss.

LU - Stop! If Jim kidnapped me he must have loved me. Not many men have the courage to take such desperate chances for a girl. Besides he has saved my life which is more than ample reparation. If you love me Ma, do not prosecute him.

MATILDA - Gal, is you gone crazy? We'll have him behind prison bars quicker'n lightin.

LU - Then I refuse to return home with you.

MATILDA - Whut! You won't -----

SILAS - Widdy, if Jim is the man that saved LU's life and is made a man of hisself, I reckon we'll have to fergive him.

MATILDA - Did Jim save her? I thought it was a General.

SILAS - Well Jim's the General.

JIM - Miss Lu, whut was you goin to ask when the folks butted in?

LU - Now that you have been pardoned, have you no other request to make?

JIM - Jes one more. I saved your life; let me pertect and care fer the life I saved.

(Lu goes into his outstretched arms).

CURTAIN

END.

Her by Anonymous

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HER

(A Mystery Play in One Act)

Time: About eight o'clock one rainy night in spring.

Scene: Martha's living room.

To describe this, we must describe Martha--old, black Martha who takes in washing for some "very old families", who is, herself, always immaculate in her grey dress and white apron. Martha, who takes care of Pete, her husband--crippled and an idler for more than fifteen years--Martha, who irons in the living room--eats there for the accommodation of Pete, and spreads her clothes horse there on rainy days. Martha, who is the oldest tenant in the house--who rents the rooms for John Kinney, and collects the rentals, as well.

We must also describe old Pete in his invalid chair--his steel rimmed spectacles and his Bible lying open on his knees.

No modern living room, this--just Martha's room--with her cheap prints on the walls--religious, every one of them--and her odd tables and cast off chairs--hand-me-downs from the "white folks". All we really need to know about the construction of the room is that a door at back, left, opens upon the hallway.

MARTHA

(Picking up some of the clothes from the horse, rolling them into a bundle, and putting them into a pillow case on the chair beside her ironing board.) They's most as wet as they was when Ah hung'em out. Ef this weather keeps up Ah doan see how Ah's goin' git these clothes out by Saturday. Weather what's good fer farmers doan help us wash-wimmen none.

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Pete

(Looking up, surprised) 'Tain't lak yuh, Martha, complainin! Reckon yuh back's bad ter-night.

Martha

(Tho punctuates her remarks with little emphatic clamps of her iron) No wuss'n usual.

Pete

Then somethin's on yuh mind.

Martha

Mebbe.

Pete

Yuh wuks too hard, Martha. Ah wish--(He ends with a sigh)

Martha

(Looking up, quickly) What yuh wishin' fer, Pete?

Pete

In them magazines yuh brung home last week there was a piece 'bout some cripple fellers--how they's learned how ter make money--plenty money. Ah ain't read nuthin' so mirac'lus in a long time, Martha, an' Ah got ter thinkin'--Ah might er bin helpin' yuh all these years, ef Ah'd knowed how.

Martha

(Clamping her electric iron down with alarming energy) Pete Alexander, ef yuh ain't got no better sense than ter pick out pieces 'bout cripples, Ah'm goin' stop bringin' home them no 'count books. Now doan lemme hear no more er that trash.

Pete

(Humbly) Ah was only thinkin'--

Martha

(Still irate) Yuh ain't got no business thinkin'--'bout sech trash.

Her page 2

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Yuh's puttin' yourself with these here young fellers what's bin hurt in the War. It's high on fifteen years yuh bin settin' there an' Ah ain't done no complainin's Ah knows uv.

Pete

(Proudly) Thar ain't no woman lak yuh, Martha, nowhar. Ah knows it an' Ah thanks Gawd fer yuh, day an' night.

Martha

(Somewhat mollified) Well, doan lemme hear no more talk 'bout yuh earnin' money. (After a few seconds) Ah ain't slep' good these two nights, Pete.

Pete

Ah heard yuh movin' long 'bout five this mornin'.

Martha

Five! Ah didn' close mah eyes all night.

Pete

(Anxiously) What's the mattuh, Martha?

Martha

Pete. (Martha lowers her voice which is pregnant with meaning) Ah seen Mr. Kinney this mornin'. He's got some folks fer up above.

Pete

Fer upstairs? (Pete's voice, like Martha's, has acquired a new note, not unmixed with dismay)

Martha

They's ter come ter-night ter see the rooms.

Pete

Ter-night?

Martha

Ah'm ter show them 'round--so he said. Reckon ef it keeps on rainin' they won't come.

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Pete

(Uneasily) Reckon they won't...Martha, did yuh tell him?

Martha

Yuh bet Ah tole him. But it didn' do no good, Pete. Nobuddy
ain't goin' change him.

Pete

Ah reckon yuh's right, Martha.

Martha

(Significantly) 'Lessen it's Her.

Pete

Her?

Martha

She's kep' me awake these two nights.

Pete

(Moving restlessly in his chair) It ain't natural--this talk
'bout Her.

Martha

'Course it ain't natural, but it's real. What yuh hears is real,
ain't it?

Pete

(Stubbornly) Ah ain't never heard nothin', Martha.

Martha

But they's them what has heard. Yuh knows that, doan yuh?

Pete

So they says, but mah ears jes' good's yours, Martha. Ah ain't never
heard nothin'.

Martha

(Scornfully) Then they ain't so good's yuh thinks, Pete.

Pete

Yuh ain't heard Her in more'n a year--

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Martha

The place ain't bin rented in more'n a year.

Pete

'Tain't honest rentin' them room after what's happened.

Martha

Ah tole Mr. Kinney's much.

Pete

An' what he said ter that, Martha?

Martha

He says ef Ah doan want ter show them rooms ter people, he kin git somebuddy else. 'Course Ah needs the money, little's it is.

Pete

(Clinging to a forlorn hope) It's rainin' so hard Ah reckon they won't come ter-night.

Martha

Ah 'spee not, 'lessen they wants 'em real bad.

Pete

(Resentfully) Ef Mr. Kinney's so set on rentin' them rooms he oughta show'em himself.

Martha

(With one of her energetic swoops on the ironing board) Him! He ain't bin near them room in eighteen years, an' Ah reckon he ain't never goin' up thar!

Pete

Ah reckon not, sence he doan never go higher'n the ground floor.

Martha

He's lookin' powerful bad. Looks 'though he bin worryin' plenty 'bout somethin.

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Pete

(With a rare chuckle) Worryin' 'bout how he kin spen' some er that money uv his.

Martha

More likely worryin' 'bout Her.

Pete

Her? What good'll it do him ter worry 'bout Her, now?

Martha

Yuh kin call it conscience, or yuh kin call it HER! 'Tis one and the same thing, Ah reckon. But he's worryin' powerful hard. (A loud peal of the door bell. Martha and Pete exchange glances. Martha puts down her iron) Ah reckon it's the folks ter see the rooms. (Pete nods. Martha opens the door. Standing upon the threshold, silent, gaunt, austere, is John Kinney. His yellow face is gaumed and somewhat haggard. His eyes are burning with a strange fire. Martha, evidently astonished, just stands there gaping. Pete fumbles for his spectacles, finds them, puts them on-- and still no word is spoken)

John Kinney

Well, are you going to let me in? (Such a cold ironic voice with a world of weariness behind it. Martha silently draws back and the visitor enters. Pete recovers his wits a full second before Martha does)

Pete

Take a seat, suh! 'Tis a bad night, Ah reckon.

Martha

(Placing a chair for John Kinney) Ah's powerful 'sprised ter see yuh, Mr. Kinney. Ah stared lak Ah'd seen a ghost, sure'nuff. (The moment the words are out, Martha recognizes her blunder. Pete looks

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at her reproachfully. John Kinney, however, merely smiles his little mocking smile)

John Kinney

No ghost, this time. (Takes a seat) And that brings me to the subject of my visit. I'm expecting a young couple here, this evening. They ought to be here at any minute. (Looks at his watch) They wish to see the rooms above.

Martha

Yes, suh. Yuh's tole me 'bout showin' 'em.

John Kinney

Well, I've changed my mind. When they come I'll show them the rooms myself.

Martha

Yuh goin' up thar? (Consternation is plainly written on her face)

John Kinney

Yes. If you will give me the keys--

Martha

But, good Lawd, suh! Yuh ain't bin up thar goin' on twenty years!

John Kinney

Then it's time I did go up. The place may need a few repairs.

Martha

Yuh did it over last year ferthem other folks. They didn' stay more'n a month.

John Kinney

Ah! To be sure. Well, I'll just take a look around and see for myself. I told Mrs. Smith to bring her husband and meet me here at eight o'clock. Don't let me interrupt your work, Martha. I see you are busy.

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Martha

(Returning to her ironing board, reluctantly) Ah ain't so busy, but what Ah kin show them rooms fer yuh, suh. Ah hopes you ain't mad 'count uv what Ah said this mornin'. Ah's allus done mah best 'bout rentin' them rooms.

John Kinney

Perhaps you have, in the past. But you don't want to do your best now. (Martha is silent) That, however, is not my real reason for wanting to see those rooms. Looking back over the years twenty you say--Twenty! I can see what a fool I've been--what a fool you've helped me to be. (Nothing moves in the room now--not even Martha's iron) You--with your talk of signs and omens--sound and night alarms. You've filled my mind with superstitious fears. I, who used to laugh at fears! (An additional sternness creeping into his voice) Well, you've frightened away my tenants long enough with your gossip and your fancies. I won't say that you've done these things out of malice, but--By God! some men might!

Martha

(Slowly) Then--Then yuh doan believe nothin' Ah's ever tole yuh?

John Kinney

(Grimly) I did, once. Now I know they're lies or fancies.

Pete

(Moved to resentment) Martha ain't no liar! Ef she says she's heard goings on, she's heard 'em!

John Kinney

I suppose you've also heard these goings on, as you call them?

Pete

(Reluctantly) No. Ah ain't never heard nothin'. But lawd, Ah ain't got the ears Martha's got. Thar ain't a tennant what's lived

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up thar that ain't left, 'cause uv Her.

John Kinney

(With a faint smile) But you've slept--

Pete

(Stoutly) Mah ears ain't nowhere ez good's Martha's.

John Kinney

Nor mine. How is it that in all these years she's never bin back to disturb my slumbers? How do you account for that?

Martha

(Angrily) Ah ain't no call ter account fer nothin' but what Ah knows 'bout.

John Kinney

Very good. Now with the best of intention, perhaps, you've frightened away my tennants. The power of suggestion is a greater force than we realize. I can forgive this, but I can't forgive your filling your mind with your fancies. I've come to the conclusion that the only way to wipe the incident clean from my mind-- except as we have occasion to remember some unfortunate happening-- is to go up there tonight and show Mrs. Smith those rooms myself.

Martha

'Tain't fer me to say yuh shouldn't go up thar. Only Ah doan lak it none. The's bin plenty goin' on up thar these two nights. Ah doan lak it none (With a shake of her head) Ah reckon it means somethin's goin' ter happen.

John Kinney

Something is going to happen. I'm going to brush a thousand cobwebs from my brain. I haven't felt happier about anything in a long time. I ought to have done this years ago instead of avoiding the place.

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Pete

Mebbe yuh's right suh. Mebbe yuh's right.

John Kinney

Of course I'm right. (Looking at his watch) Eight on the minute. I hope they don't keep me waiting--Oh, by the way, I may as well tell you good people that I expect to sell this house.

Pete

(Almost dropping his spectacles in surprise) Sell this house!

Martha

Ef yuhs goin' sell it suh, why yuh wants to bother goin' up thar?

John Kinney

(With his one sided smile) Just to prove to you that you've been wrong and that I've been as gullible as a child. It's my once chance of being a free man and I'm not going to lose it. (The door bell rings) Ah! Here they are (Martha opens the door) (On the threshold stands Alice Smith, a good-looking brown girl and her husband Sam, somewhat browner. Alice wears a trickey little felt hat and yellow raincoat. Sam wears--well--brown hat, coat and shoes, a very trying harmony for one of his complexion)

Alice

(Nodding to Martha, but addressing herself to John Kinney) Ah reckon we ain't more'n a minute late. (To Sam) Sam this's Mr. Kinney. Mr. Kinney this's mah husband, Mr. Sam Smith.

John Kinney

(Shaking hands with Sam, a cordiality which surprises Martha) Glad to meet you. You're certainly on time.

Sam

(Pleased) We's colored through an' through, Alice an' me 'sceptin'

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that we's allus on time. When we says eight, we means eight, not half past nine. (Sam chuckles as if at a huge joke)

John Kinney

Well, as a man of business I appreciate that. This (Waving his hand in the direction of Pete and Martha) This is Mrs. Alexander and her husband. (Nodding in Martha's direction) Mrs. Alexander usually rents my rooms--shows them to visitors--But I'll show you these myself. Martha, if you'll get me the key--(Martha dives into an old jug and produces the key. Very slowly she hands it to John Kinney who pockets it.) (To the Smiths) I have a powerful search light (tapping his coat pocket) So if you're ready, we'll go up and inspect the rooms. (Martha and Pete exchange glances. Perhaps the smile on John Kinney's lips is just a shade more mocking than usual as he turns to Martha) I will stop in on my way down, Martha. There is a little matter I want to see you about. (In about another second Martha and Pete are left alone. Martha spreads another garment on the board and takes up her iron. Pete looks at her timidly and clears his throat)

Pete

I reckon he's right 'bout goin' up thar. A man ain't got no right actin' so scared bout nothin' (Hastily) Ah mean 'bout--(His voice dies away under the fierce glare in Martha's eyes)

Martha

Yuh doan need say nothin' more. Yuh's allus bin a disbeliever, Pete, an Ah reckon yuh'll never change 'lessen yuh's give a sign.

Pete

(Uneasily) Ah doan need no sign, Martha.

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Martha

(Pointing to the Bible on Pete's knees) Yuh ain't read that thar Book frum cover to cover 'thout comin' cross signs an' wonders a-plenty.

Pete

Sure they's signs. But--

Martha

'Taint you Ah'm thinkin' uv, Pete, nor John Kinney. It's that girl Ah'm thinkin' uv--her an' that young feller. She's got a sweet face. Ah took ter her right off. She ain't a bit older than she was when she come here. They ain't goin' have no happiness up thar.

Pete

Ah hope yuh ain't right 'bout that Martha.

Martha

Pete Alexander! (Perhaps Martha's iron as well as her tone causes Pete to draw himself up with a start) Pete Alexander. Ah ain't never tole a soul 'bout what happen up thar. Yuh knows that.

Pete

Sure. Ah knows that.

Martha

Mr. Kinney thinks Ah's tole all them other folks an' that scared 'em way frum here.

Pete

Ah reckon he does.

Martha

Well, Ah ain't never tole nobuddy, but Ah'm goin' tell that little gal 'fore she moves up thar. 'Taint fair lettin' 'em move in.

Pete

(Curiously) When yuh goin' tell her Martha? Yuh ain't goin' tell

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her 'fore Mr. Kinney?

Martha

Ah doan know. Ah reckon the lawd'll 'pint the time. (A knock on the door, and John Kinney and the Smiths come in once more. Perhaps Kinney's face is a bit more pale, but his mocking smile is more pronounced as his eyes encounter Martha's)

John Kinney

Everything is quite ship shape, Martha.

Alice

It's jes' lovely, Gimme large rooms every time. Everything looks nice an' clean, too.

Sam

Ah reckon we'll settle fer them rooms now. How 'bout it, Alice?

Alice

Sure. We'll pay a deposit right now.

John Kinney

Half a month, please.

Sam

Right. (He takes a wallet from his pocket, extracts two bills and hands them to Kinney. Pete glances anxiously at Martha, but the latter is standing downcast, her eyes on the floor. Kinney seats himself at one of the little tables, reaches into an inner pocket, produces a receipt book, then jumps up with an exclamation of annoyance)

John Kinney

My wallet! I'm afraid I've dropped it! (He searches his other pockets feverishly--but the missing wallet is not forth coming. Everyone looks at him uncomfortably)

Sam

(Sympathetically) That sure is tough!

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John Kinney

(Angrily) Tough! There were over five hundred dollars in that wallet! And what's more, I had it when I came in here tonight!

Martha

In here!

Pete

(Echoing Martha's words blankly) In here!

Alice

Yuh might uv dropped it in the hall, or upstairs.

John Kinney

A note-book! I wonder if I could have dropped my wallet then!

Sam

It doan do no harm lookin'. Ah'll go with yuh ef yuh wants.

John Kinney

(Sharply) No, thank you. Wait here a few minutes, if you don't mind. I prefer going alone.

Sam

Sure we'll wait.

Alice

It's too bad. But yuh'd better look upstairs. Yuh might er dropped it sure 'nuff. (Kinney goes out, giving the door an angry slam)

Sam

Ah hope he doan think we found his ole wallet. Bee! Five hundred dollars! Bet that guy's got money ter burn.

Alice

(With a little laugh) Bet he doan burn none, though.

Martha

(In a tone of suppressed excitement) Listen! He'll be back any minute, an' Ah's got somethin' powerful important ter say. (Paying

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no heed to the surprised glances of Sam and Alice) Yuh musn' take them rooms, 'lessen yuh wants ter have more trubble than yuh knows 'bout. They's--they's haunted!

Alice

(In a shrill voice) What's that yuh said?

Sam

Good Lawd!

Martha

(Her voice containing a deadly seriousness) Haunted! They ain't nobuddy bin able ter live in them rooms longer'n they could git out!

Alice

(In a faltering voice) Yuh ain't jokin'?

Martha

Before the good Lawd, Ah's tellin' yuh the truth!

Sam

But--Listen here! Ef what yuh says is true--Does this landlord know 'bout what yuh's tellin' us?

Martha

He knows alright. Ah reckon he'll tell us ter leave, when he knows Ah's tole yuh. Well, Ah'm thinkin' 'tis we did quit. Doan yuh think so, Pete?

Pete

(Loyally) Ah thinks same's you does, Martha.

Alice

I can't believe it.

Sam

Nor me. (Becoming suddenly suspicious) Say! Yuh ain't tryin' ter scare us outer them rooms in favor uv somebuddy else, are yuh?

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Martha

(Tensely) Listen. It's nigh on twenty years ago when we first seen Her. She was one of these here Phillipine gals. John Kinney met her when he was soljerin' in them parts. He was young then, an' handsome. She was pretty's a picture, with her big, black eyes an' a head uv hair lak we doan never see no more. An' she had plenty money. Well, John Kinney marries her an' 'bout a year later they comes ter New York. He quits the army, then, an' goes inter real estate. He tole Her he's goin' buy her a beautiful house--an' he takes her money--she was only a furriner--an' young. She didn' know no better. But he doan buy the pretty house he tole her 'bout. He buys this apartment house. That's when she first commence ter see through him. He uster live then, in two little rooms back uv his dingy office. 'Tweren't no place fer the likes uv Her. She pined fer the country an' the grass an' the flowers. She wanted him ter fix up one uv these floors so's she could have some place ter breathe in. But he figgered on the rent from them apartments, an' he wouldn't let her have one.

Sam

Gee! What a brute! (Alice slips her hand into his)

Martha

She uster come here ter collect the rents. Many's the time Ah's seen her big, black eyes a-swimmin' in tears. She jes' took ter me right off--An' Pete an' me thought the world uv her. We didn' always understan' what she said. She didn' speak no good English lak Pete an' me, but we could make out she was lonesome an' scared uv New York--scared too, uv that husban' uv hers. She missed her folks back home powerful bad. She was jes' a little wild bird, caught an' put in a cage in a dark room.--Well, seems lak John Kinney tole her one time that she could have the next floor that

Her page 15

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got vacant. She runs up here ter tell me--jes' laughin' an' cryin' all together. She uster come here whenever she got a chance--an' sit here an' plan how she'd fix them rooms. Such funny ideas she had, too, 'bout fixins--but pretty. Well, 'bout three months later, the folks on the top floor move away an' she tole John Kinney 'bout her plans. She was all ready ter move in. (Martha pauses just long enough to wipe a tear with the corner of her apron) If the ole devil didn' up an' tell her he'd changed his mind. Seems he'd done forgot all about it. He tole her ~~he~~ needed the money real bad ter pay some bills. Ah ain't never forgot how she look when she tole me 'bout it. Her heart was nigh breakin', Ah reckon. She tole me that them rooms was hers--an' she was goin' ter move in. Ah thought she was jes' talkin' wild--but she weren't.

Alice

(Breathlessly) What happened?

Martha

The next afternoon John Kinney found her up thar hangin' between the parlor an' the bedroom.

Alice

(With a little moan) Oh, my Gawd! She'd--

Martha

(Nodding confirmation) An' she ain't never moved away from up thar--jes' lak she said.

Sam

(Mopping his face with a hand that shakes preceptibly) Ah reckon they ain't no rooms fer us, Alice.

Alice

(In a voice bordering on the hysterical) Let's go, Sam. Quick, 'fore he comes back!

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Sam

(With elacirity) Sure. Ah doan never want ter see nothin' more uv him. Reckon he's still lookin' fer that wallet. (A loud crash is heard. Everyone starts violently--Pets, so violently that his Bible falls to the floor. A moment of petrified silence)

Martha

It's upstairs!

Sam

Somebuddy fell down! (He swallows convulsively)

Alice

(Bursting into tears) Oh, Sam, let's get outer here, quick 'fore somethin' happens!

Martha

Ah 'spec somethin' has happened. (To Sam) Reckon we'd better go up an' see ef Mr. Kinney's hurt.

Sam

(Drawing back) Who, me? Yuh ain't talkin' ter me, sister!

Alice

(Clinging tightly to his arm) Doan yuh do it, Sam. Doan leave me!

Sam

Sam Smith ain't never goin' near them rooms no more!

Martha

Well, Ah reckon Ah'd better go up an' see what's happened.

Sam

(Looking his horror at the mere suggestion) Yuh's crazy, woman. let me outer here!

Martha

Ah reckon Ah'll ask the people downstairs ter go with me.

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Pete

(Anxiously) Doan yuh go by yuhself, Martha!

Martha

(Reassuringly) Ah'll jes' step downstairs an' ask Mr. Brown ter go thar with me.

Sam

An' we'll jes' hop on downstairs with yuh. This ain't no place fer comfort! (Alice, who has Sam tightly by the arm, stoops to lift her umbrella which has fallen to the floor. At that moment, Martha, who has opened the door and gone out into the hall, hurries back into the room, shutting the door precipitately behind her. She rushes over to Pete, grasping him by the arm, and giving him a little shake) Pete! Pete! Yuh wanted a sign! Ah jes' seen John Kinney walkin' down the stairs with Her! She had him by the hand an' she was laughin'!

(The curtain starts to descend just as Alice's piercing scream rings through the room)

THE END

*

Scion by Eddie King

By - Eddie King

NUMBER 11.

S C I O N.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

Jessie Mae Sales
Carrie Sales, the mother of Jessie Mae
Alfred Sales, Jessie Mae's brother
Richard Folding
The Senior Folding, Richard's father
Mayberry, a sheriff
Masked White Figures
A Baby.

TIME: A June evening, the action beginning just before dark.

PLACE: A town in Southern United States.

SCENE: The living room of the Sales home. Against the right wall, between two neatly curtained windows, is a couch; a small library table stands near the center of the room, and there are several rockers and other chairs scattered about. In the rear-wall is another window, through which, during the very early action of the play, can be seen the front porch and a part of the front yard. In this same back-stage wall, a little to the left of this window, is the front door, which opens directly onto the front porch. Farther to the left, against this same wall, is a large bookcase filled with volumes. A door in the left wall leads to an adjacent chamber.

Scene discovers Mrs. Sales, a medium-sized, very light complexioned woman, with straight, dark hair, slightly silvered, and decidedly Caucasian features, seated to the right of the table, sewing a baby-coat; and Jessie Mae, a girl of about eighteen, with the same general features of her mother, except that she is not quite so fair of complexion, to the left of the table in a rocker, in her arms a bundle of what appears to be a very young baby.

MRS. SALES (without looking up) Is the baby sleep yet, Jessie Mae? Is the baby gone to sleep yet?

JESSIE MAE (slowly with down-cast eyes) Ma'am?

MRS. SALES: I said, is the baby sleep yet? Can't you hear me?

JESSIE MAE (in the same manner) I think he is.

MRS. SALES (starting as she looks up) Lord! it must be past seven. It's getting dark already outside. (She looks at a small clock on top of the bookcase.) Heavens' sakes! the train's due now; and it won't take Alf more'n a minute to get out here from the station. (Rises nervously.) Let's see, is he sleep. Give him here and I'll put him to bed, and you go out in the back so you won't be in here when Alfred comes. Best that I see Alfred first and talk to him before he sees you.

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JESSIE MAE (instead of yielding the baby pulls Mrs. Sales down to her.) 'Mamma, won't you tell Alfred that Mr. Richard loved me?

MRS. SALES: Oh, be still and give me the baby. And you go tidy up and stay out there 'till I call you. (Taking the baby.) Lord, you've worried me nearly sick now.

Mrs. Sales takes the baby into the next room. Jessie Mae sits staring at the rug before her.

Re-enter Mrs. Sales.

MRS. SALES: Come out of that, Jessie Mae. Go out and be getting ready for supper. And take off that dress and those house shoes. Just think Alfred is all finished now; I'll tell you, he is something to be proud of.

JESSIE MAE (turning her face away.) Alfred won't want to see me.

MRS. SALES (going to Jessie Mae.) Now, Jessie Mae. Poor little thing. Don't you think that. Alfred will be just as glad to see you as ever.

JESSIE MAE: No. Alfred will think I'm terrible. Alfred will think I'm terrible! I know he will! I know he will!

MRS. SALES: Oh, Jess, don't go on so. He will be sorry, of course; but he won't be unreasonable; he won't be unforgiving. I'll talk to him.

JESSIE MAE: Oh, I was so weak! (With a sigh.) I couldn't help it. It seemed that he loved me. I believe yet that Mr. Richard did care. I think, if he knew and if he could... Oh, mamma, I believe Richard Folding is good! Somehow I can't believe that he meant to ruin me. Somehow I think he does not know this now.

MRS. SALES: Oh, silly, be still! It seems to me that you'd be ashamed to mention his name. Loved you -- the beast! And to think of what he would do to Alfred if Alfred only looked at one of their kind. It's just awful. I hate to think about it! And you sit there and talk about his love.

JESSIE MAE: But you don't understand.

MRS. SALES: Shut up, I tell you! Mention that thing again and I'll slap the very stuffin's out of you. Go out of here and get your shameful self in some kind of shape to meet your brother.

JESSIE MAE: Oh, mamma.....

MRS. SALES: Shut up, you brazen little heifer!

JESSIE MAE: (bursting into tears.) Oh, mamma! Mamma! Mamma! -- is everybody against me!

MRS. SALES: Oh, Jess, don't carry on. You know I didn't mean to hurt you. But I'm nearly crazy. My nerves are all shattered. My head is nearly splitting now.

There is the sound of someone coming up on the porch.

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ALFRED (from without.) Thanks, Hudson, old man, for the lift. Yes, I'll see you tomorrow.

MRS. SALES: Lord! There's Alfred now! (Pushing Jessie Mae off toward the next room.) Run, Girl! (Closing the door behind her.) Don't wake the baby. (Going to the door, at the same time trying to adjust her person for the best possible presentation.) All right, Alfred! (She opens the door.)

Enter Alfred, evidently more like the deceased father than like Jessie Mae or his mother, for in color and hair he more nearly resembles the average Negro than they do. At once he is sharp and energetic. One would judge him to be about twenty-two.

MRS. SALES (throwing herself into Alfred's arms.) Alfred!

ALFRED: Mother! How are you?

MRS. SALES: Alfred. I'm so proud of you -- and so glad to see you.

She takes his hat and travelling bag and stands waiting to receive his coat, which he is taking off.

ALFRED (taking off the coat and handing it to Mrs. Sales.) Gee! but it's warm.

MRS. SALES: (taking the coat and motioning him toward the couch.) You sit there. I'll be right back and you've got to tell me all about your graduation. I'm so sorry I couldn't get there.

ALFRED: Where's Jessie Mae? I thought sure she'd be at the station to meet me.

MRS. SALES (admonishingly.) You know Jessie Mae has not been very well.

ALFRED: Yes. I knew; but she's not that bad, is she?

MRS. SALES: Oh, no. She was pretty sick, but she's all right now. She's all right. She'll be in in a minute. (She starts to go into the next room, but, seeing that Alfred is following her, she stops.) Alfred, I think Jessie Mae is dressing here; you better not come in yet. You go sit down. I'll be right back.

ALFRED (yawning.) All right. And I'm kinda hungry too, ma.

MRS. SALES: Yes, I know you are. And we're going to eat in just a minute.

Alfred throws himself down on the couch and Mrs. Sales goes out. He takes out a cigarette, but stops short in the act of lighting it as his glance is arrested by the baby coat, which Mrs. Sales in her nervous haste left lying on the table. He gets up, takes the piece, holds it up, examines it, lights his cigarette, thoughtfully, and returns to the couch. Re-enter Mrs. Sales.

MRS. SALES: Your bath water's ready, and Jessie Mae'll be in in just a minute. And Alfred, I got something I know you'll like for supper -- but first I must talk to you some, Alfred.

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ALFRED: (nonchalantly) What you got for supper?

Mrs. SALES: Smoking a cigarette! Is that what they teach at the college?

ALFRED: Aw, ma!

MRS. SALES: I don't like them, Alfred.

ALFRED: Pourquoi?

MRS. SALES: What?

ALFRED (playfully) Je voudrai bien savoir le....

MRS. SALES: Nonsense!

ALFRED: Well, that's what they teach at college. I'm only asking you why you don't like them.

MRS. SALES: What?

ALFRED: (holding up the cigarette) These.

MRS. SALES: If Reverend Sales could walk in here now and see you with that thing in your mouth How was the exercise?

ALFRED: Fine.

MRS. SALES: Where's your diploma?

ALFRED: (pointing toward the room, to left, off-stage) In there in the bag.

MRS. SALES: Well, I'll look at it after while. (Then thoughtfully.) Alfred.

ALFRED: Ma'am?

MRS. SALES: (picking at the hem of her apron) Are your nerves good and settled?

ALFRED: Yes'm, why? (His attention suddenly being attracted by the baby coat again.) Say, ma: what's that?

MRS. SALES: What?

ALFRED: That on the table there.

MRS. SALES: Oh! You know, Alfred, things have been a little tight this year. If you hadn't got that job on the road last summer I don't know how you would have finished. Jessie Mae hasn't been able to help me much, and I've been doing some sewing too.

ALFRED (pointing to the baby coat.) That's sewing!

MRS. SALES: (slowly) Yes.

ALFRED (rising) Ma, I know you've been having a hard time and I'm glad that I'm through school now so I can help.

MRS. SALES (mechanically) Yes.

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ALFRED: Yes. And I'm not going on with medicine until Jessie Mae gets through. I'm going to get a job and teach and send her to college.

MRS. SALES: No Alfred, you've got to go on and finish for a doctor. Jessie Mae went to High school, and it don't matter so much about a girl anyway. We've got the two rent-houses, and you can work in the summer and spare time, and I can work, and just let Jessie Mae stay at home.

ALFRED: But we can't let Jessie Mae go on without having everything. Mother, it's not like it was when you came up: A girl now a days is got to have education just like a man. No, sir, there's any number of 'em that aren't as intelligent or as nice looking as she is; and I'm not going to have Jessie Mae taking a back-seat. She's got to have a college education, and I'm going to send her. How old's Jessie Mae now? Just eighteen. Finished hi' at seventeen. Look at that. And then just look at any other girls that're going away to school. And they got to do it. Why, a man now wants a woman who'se somewhere near his equal. These fellows that're most desirable want wives that're college graduates. Of course Jessie Mae's got it on a lot of 'em right now, but I want her to have everything. And she'll enjoy college life too, ma; I'm telling you, Jess'll be some sheikess on a campus. And then, after all, I may not study medicine. You know, I think I'd like business. I've been studying Economics a good deal, and I've 'bout come to the conclusion that a man can't choose a better ~~amx~~ profession than a business career. Just look, our folks don't have any business, and that's just why there's nothing for our young college graduates to do but teach school or get some menial work that any ignorant can do. But any way I'm going to send Jessie Mae to college.

MRS. SALES: (tragically) No.

ALFRED (pleadingly) Why?

MRS. SALES: Because.

ALFRED: Because what?

MRS. SALES: Because. Because I want you to be a doctor.

ALFRED: Then I don't want to be a docotr -- I'm^{not}going to be a doctor.

MRS. SALES: It was your father's wish.

ALFRED: Oh, the deuce! What did Jessie Mae do after leading her class at Main Hi'? Came out and went to work as flunky up at Mrs. Folding's. Suppose the Negroes around here had had any business besides barber-shops, pool-halls, and alley restaurants; why she could have got something better to do than going into the white folks' kitchen. I know she didn't work in the kitchen, but it's the same thing. And I tell you that Negroes are never going to get any respect until they can employ as well as be employed. Why it ~~mak~~ makes me sick; every Negro that amounts to anything, pretty near, is a doctor a preacher, or a school teacher; the rest are all laborers; everybody else has the business and the money; and we're going to be the tail end of creation until we get that.

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MRS. SALES: Oh, Alfred, you go on and be a doctor and that'll be business. (Then slowly and sorrowfully.) Jessie Mae is out of the question.

ALFRED: Out of the question! What do you mean? Where's Jessie Mae? What in the devil is taking her so long? Hey, Jessie Mae! Jessie Mae!

VOICE FROM THE OTHER ROOM (faintly.) What?

MRS. SALES (rising to stop Alfred, who is going to the door.) Oh, Alfred, you mustn't.

ALFRED: What! Why! She must be dressed now.

MRS. SALES (throwing herself upon him, and sobbing.) Oh, Alfred! Alfred! Alfred!

ALFRED: (with tenderness) What's the matter, Mother?

MRS. SALES: You don't know what.....

She is sobbing too much to speak further. Jessie Mae has opened the door and is standing with her hand on the knob, looking sorrowfully in their direction. But they do not see her.

ALFRED: What Mother? What? I don't know what? Tell me, what don't I know?

MRS. SALES: Something awful has happened to Jessie Mae.

ALFRED: What! Come! Tell me!

MRS. SALES: (seeing Jessie Mae.) There she is.

The baby cries.

ALFRED: What's that! A baby! Where? Whose?

MRS. SALES: (moving toward the door with her apron up to her face.) Here's your brother, Jessie Mae. I'm going out.

She goes out past Jessie Mae, closing the door behind her and thus forcing Jessie Mae into the room with her brother.

ALFRED: Jessie Mae!

JESSIE MAE: Alfred.

As if by impulse Alfred stretches his arms toward his sister and she, with eyes raised to his and a feeble smile on her face, begins to move slowly toward him. For a moment Alfred stands as one transfixed; but, as Jessie Mae advances, Alfred's arms slowly drop and, when she is quite near, he turns away and folds his arms. Jessie Mae raises her hands, her eyes close, and she sinks to a sitting posture on the floor -- sinks down as if her legs have suddenly refused to support her. Her body shakes with convulsive sobbing. Alfred walks away.

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He turns slowly, comes back to Jessie Mae, picks her up and helps her to the couch.

ALFRED (after a silence.) Jessie Mae, I can't understand.

JESSIE MAE: Don't you know?

ALFRED: Not quite.

JESSIE MAE: The baby's in there.

ALFRED: What baby?

JESSIE MAE (slowly with down cast eyes; pointing toward herself.) Mine.

ALFRED (who has risen) Who did it?

JESSIE MAE: Richard.

ALFRED: Richard? Who? What Richard?

JESSIE MAE: Mr. Richard - Richard Folding.

ALFRED: Oh, mister the devil! The damned white skunk! When! Where! How did this happen? Dammit! Speak! And I didn't know a thing about it.
(Calling) Mother! Mother! come here. How did this happen, Jessie Mae? Don't you dare lie to me!

Re-enter Mrs. Sales with the baby in her arms.

ALFRED: Mother, why did you keep this from me? When was it born?

MRS. SALES: (with a sigh, as she sits down.) The third of May.

ALFRED: And here it's June, and I didn't know a thing about it. Of all the disgraceful things I ever heard - a white bastard!

MRS. SALES: Alfred! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Saying such ugly things. Now, that's the very reason I wouldn't say anything about it to you in my letters. I knew it wouldn't do anything but get you all upset. The thing is done -- we're all sorry; but it does no good to carry on about it.

ALFRED: (walking away with his hands behind him.) H-m-m-m! (Stopping in front of Jessie Mae.) When did this happen?

MRS. SALES: Now you be decent, Alfred.

ALFRED: Will you let her answer my question? When did this happen, Jessie Mae?

JESSIE MAE: What?

ALFRED: You and Folding.

JESSIE MAE: Last summer.

ALFRED: When last summer.

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MRS. SALES: Oh, Alfred!

ALFRED: Mother, I wish you'd let me handle this. Tell me how this happened, Jessie Mae.

JESSIE MAE: It was the night they gave the party, before he went away. I had been helping Mrs. Folding. She asked me to stay until everybody was gone. He was always so nice to me that I liked him. He was always doing nice things. That night he said he would bring me home. When we got out in the car he said something about how warm it was and asked me if I would like to get a little breeze before I went home. I told him that I didn't mind. So he drove up the pike until we came to the Red-rock Road. Then he stopped the car and told me how the girls at the party bored him, and said that he was glad that he was going back to New York, where the people were broadminded and didn't have the prejudice that we have here. He said that races didn't make any difference to him. Then he told me that he had always admired me and that he wanted me to be his friend. I told him that I didn't think we should talk about that, and that I wanted to go home. But he just kept sitting there. And then he told me that he loved me. And we were in the car for a long time.

ALFRED: Well, go on.

JESSIE MAE: There's nothing more to tell -- we came home.

ALFRED: Did he kiss you?

JESSIE MAE: Yes.

ALFRED: When?

JESSIE MAE: In the car and when we got here.

ALFRED (to Mrs. Sales) What time did Jessie Mae get in that night?

MRS. SALES: I wasn't here. I was over at Grandma's until past twelve, and when I got home Jessie Mae was in bed. You weren't here, but remember that Grandma was very sick then.

ALFRED: Well, of all things! This beats me! Has anything been done about it? Does Old Man Folding know? I reckon that wouldn't do much good though. Where's Richard.

MRS. SALES: I went over to see Mrs. Folding. She turned just as red as a beet when I told her, and as soon as I mentioned Richard's name in the affair she just stormed and ordered me out of the house; but I met the old man outside of the house and told him. He didn't say anything much when I told him; but a few days later he came down here and said he was sorry for the family and left some money.

ALFRED: Did you take it?

MRS. SALES: I didn't want to take it, Alfred; but we needed it.

ALFRED: How much was it?

MRS. SALES: How much was it, Jessie Mae?

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JESSIE MAE: I don't know.

MRS. SALES: I think it was twenty dollars. And then, some time after that, I got a letter from the Ku Klux Klan. And it said that they would give me until the fifteenth of June to get Jessie Mae out of town.

ALFRED: What?

MRS. SALES: So I took the letter down ^{to} the sheriff, Mr. Mayberry, and gave him the whole story; and he said that he'd see that no violence was done. And he told me to just let him handle the whole thing, and not to mention the Foldings any more, and that, as soon as Richard came home he would take up the matter with him and the old man, and that he was sure, that if it could be proved that the child was Richard's, that old man Folding would pay us for taking care of it.

ALFRED: Hell! If it can be proved! And I guess the varmints think that we are going to grin and bear this disgrace for a few dollars! And here's Jessie Mae ruined for life, and that beast.....

Here he is stopped by a sharp rap at the door.

ALFRED: I'll answer it.

He opens the door.

ALFRED: Howdydo.

VOICE FROM WITHOUT: Hello, Alfred! Why, how are you?

ALFRED: Oh, Mr. Mayberry! All right, won't you come in?

MAYBERRY: Is Carrie home, Alfred?

ALFRED: Yes, come in.

Enter Mayberry, without removing his hat.

MAYBERRY: (to Mrs. Sales, who has got up with the baby in her arms.) Hello, Carrie. (To Jessie Mae.) Hello, there, Jessie Mae, How do you feel?

MRS. SALES: Howdydo, Mr. Mayberry.

JESSIE MAE: Howdydo.

MAYBERRY (refusing the seat which Mrs. Sales has pushed, with her knees, toward him) No thanks, Carrie. I reckon it'll be all right to talk about that little matter here before the children?

MRS. SALES: Yessir, I think it'll be all right, Mr. Mayberry.

MAYBERRY. I know you'll be surprised to know that I took up that little matter today and I was able to get such good results that I just thought I'd go out of my way and come around here tonight and tell you all about it.

MRS. SALES: Is that so, Mr. Mayberry?

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MAYBERRY: Yes, you know Mr. Richard got in this morning.

Jessie Mae and Alfred start.

MAYBERRY: Yes, but he won't be here long. You know he's going back to New York. I hear he made awful nice progress in his art. I tell you we all mighty proud of him. Well, anyway, him and I and his father got together this noon and had a little lunch, and talked the matter over, and we had the thing settled in little or no time. He was a little bit nervous and excited at first, but after that was all over he was perfectly reasonable, and said he could see how the evidence might appear damaging against him. And then Mr. Folding was awful nice about it; and he said that, since he knew the family so well, and since the girl was partly under their care about the time when the misfortune occurred, why, he was just willing to take full responsibility and pay you all and keep the matter quiet and just let everybody be satisfied. He felt awful sorry for you, Carrie.

ALFRED: So he intends to settle it that way?

MAYBERRY: But wait a minute. I haven't told you the best part about it: Mr. Folding -- not Richard mind you -- But Mr. Folding, is going to give Jessie Mae, every month, through my office, all you got to do is come to the office every month and get it -- fifty-seven dollars. Ain't that fine!

ALFRED (coming forward and putting his knuckles down on the table with emphasis) No!

MRS. SALES (stamping her foot.) Will you be still, Alfred!

ALFRED: (with a thundering voice) No! No'. I don't think it's fine! It's the most damnable thing I ever heard of!

Jessie Mae turns on the couch and covers her face with her hands.

MAYBERRY: I think you are getting a little bit too excited there, Alfred.

ALFRED: It's time to be excited.

MRS. SALES: Alfred! Will you be still?

MAYBERRY: That's right, Carrie. Just cool down there, Alfred. It's a mighty nice thing we've done for you folks. There ain't another family of Negroes in town we'd a done it for. And if it wasn't that we just took interest in the family, you wouldn't get anything. And if you don't like what we was kind enough to do for you, you better not try to kick up any trouble about it.

MRS. SALES: That's all right, Mr. Mayberry; we appreciate what you've done.

Alfred shakes his head and walks away.

MAYBERRY: Yes, Carrie; I know you; and we did it all for your sake. So you can just come down to see me in the morning and don't let nobody know nothing about your business and everything will be all right.

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MRS. SALES: All right, Mr. Mayberry; I thank you.

MAYBERRY: (going towards the door.) Your health keeps pretty good, don't it, Carrie?

MRS. SALES: Yessir.

MAYBERRY: Well, good night.

MRS. SALES (following him to the door.) Goodnight, Mr. Mayberry. I thank you very much for your kindness.

MAYBERRY (going out) Not-a-tall, Carrie, not-a-tall.

Exit Mayberry.

MRS. SALES: (after closing the door, indignantly to Alfred) You've got a little sense!

ALFRED: Oh, don't say a word to me! I'm simply disgusted!

MRS. SALES: But don't you see we are perfectly helpless? What ax good will it do to try to fight them.

JESSIE MAE: Oh, I wish I could die! I wish I could die!

After the exertion of this speech she falls over on the couch and lies quite still.

ALFRED (turning suddenly upon Mrs. Sales, who has sat down in a chair and begun to rock nervously, the baby still in her arms.) So hark He's here in town?

MRS. SALES: So Mr. Mayberry says.

ALFRED: Jessie Mae!

MRS. SALES: Alfred, let the poor child alone.

ALFRED: Jessie Mae!

JESSIE MAE (without looking up) What?

ALFRED (going to her, bending down and talking in a very intense manner.) Have you told me the truth about Richard?

JESSIE MAE (In the same attitude.) What?

ALFRED (with the same intense tone.) He really did that?

JESSIE (in the same attitude.) What I told you?

ALFRED: Yes.

JESSIE MAE: Yes.

Alfred turns around, takes out a cigarette, but instead of lighting it and proceeding to smoke, he stands with his arms

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folded, a scowl on his face, and he looks straight in front of him.

ALFRED: (after a moment of the above business.) Where did you put my bag?

MRS. SALES: In the next room under the bed.

With a determined mien Alfred goes out to the next room. The baby begins to cry. Jessie Mae gets up and goes to Mrs. Sales.

JESSIE MAE: Give him here. He wants Me.

Mrs. Sales yields the baby and leans forward with her face in her hands. Jessie Mae takes the baby to the couch and proceeds to quiet him. Re-enter Alfred with his hat and coat on. Mrs. Sales does not look up.

JESSIE MAE: Where are you going, Alfred?

ALFRED: To hell if I don't get back.

JESSIE MAE (screaming.) Mamma, stop Alfred!

MRS. SALES (starting up. Alfred!

ALFRED (with deliberate fiendishness.) Just be calm, ladies. I am going over to visit the Foldings a little.

JESSIE MAE (noting that one of the pockets of Alfred's coat is heavy.) Alfred, what is that in your pocket?

ALFRED: Never mind my pocket. It's only an article that will argue my case with Mr. Folding when I meet him.

JESSIE MAE: Mamma! Alfred's got a gun! Stop him!

MRS. SALES: (Jumping up.) Alfred! Where you going? Stop! Come back here!

Alfred ignores his mother and is at the door with his hand on the knob, in the act of opening the door and going out, when a sharp rap is heard. He opens the door and then starts back with surprise. As Alfred's hand is still clutching the knob, and, as his surprise causes him to take a step back, with the same motion that expresses his surprise, he pulls the door far enough open for the full figure of a man to be seen on the threshold.

RICHARD: (standing in the door with his hat in his hand.) Good evening, Alfred.

Coming in and bowing to Mrs. Sales.

RICHARD: Good evening, Mrs. Sales.

ALFRED: (reaching into his coat pocket and making a step toward Richard, who is

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now well into the room.) What do you want here!

Jessie Mae screams and Mrs. Sales rushes to Alfred. She seizes his hand and prevents him from drawing it forth.

RICHARD: I have come to talk with you, Alfred; will you allow me?

MRS. SALES: (still holding the hand and pushing Alfred toward a chair.) Alfred, will you sit down!

ALFRED (snatching himself away from Mrs. Sales, and continuing to keep his hand in his pocket.) Make your talk damned short!

RICHARD (calmly facing Alfred.) I know how you feel toward me. I am not surprised. I expect it. But I have come to do what I can to satisfy you.

ALFRED (with sarcasm.) Satisfy me. I suppose you have your checkbook.

RICHARD: Is that what you want? And I have come to see Jessie Mae.

ALFRED: For two cents I'd kill you!

RICHARD: If you will let me finish with what I am about to say I'll give you two cents.

ALFRED: I suppose one penny will purchase our honor and the other will buy your life.

RICHARD: Folks, do you think me a fool? Do you think I have come here to insult what I have already injured?

He turns and looks down at Jessie Mae, who is holding the baby and looking up in wonderment at him. Then he makes a step toward Jessie Mae and bends down in the act of looking at the baby.

May I see it?

He looks at the baby, then appears to be assured about something concerning which he has wanted to know.

A boy?

JESSIE MAE: Yes.

RICHARD: Alfred, Mrs. Sales, Jessie Mae, you can imagine my surprise when I heard about this today, and this afternoon I fought the hardest battle I think a man has ever fought.

There is the sound of many feet on the porch, and voices can be heard. The inmates of the house are all attracted by the noise. Suddenly the door is thrust open and figures in white crowd the threshold while one steps forward into the room. The figures are all masked and hooded. A blazing cross can be seen in the background.

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JESSIE MAE (terrified) Oh!

MRS. SALES: My God! The Klan!

THE FIGURE IN WHITE: (with deep, ceremonial voice.) Richard Folding, you have incurred the strongest displeasure of your friends and your father by coming here tonight; you have disregarded your father's most prudent advice, to keep away from this woman. Your father had gone to the length that many a self-respecting man would not have, and has shown himself most charitable toward this woman. You have been most ungrateful and imprudent. Just at the time when the town is to acclaim you one of its most promising young men, to celebrate your signal achievements in art, and to bid you God's speed in your youthful, but remarkable career, you dissipate the fondest hopes of your friends and break the heart of your father. In the name of all that is Christian and decent, I command you to leave this house at once!

RICHARD: Upon what authority do you follow me here? What right have you to interfere in this matter?

THE FIGURE IN WHITE: The right that your father and this worthy order have vested in me, upon your unwise refusal to accept his most liberal adjustment of this affair; upon your flagrant insult to piety, and by the right of the duty sacredly intrusted to this noble body by the citizens of this town, state and country.

RICHARD: By right of the authority vested in me, to act as my own free-moral agent, as a full grown citizen of this Republic of America, I order you, or any other agency my father may detail to meddle in my affairs, to leave me to handle matters that effect my honor and the free exercise of my duty as I see and feel it. What right have you to come here? You violate the sacred precincts of a home -- a house already bowed by the visitation of disgrace and sorrow. I came here for once resolved to be a man. I mean to protect the honor of this girl and this baby. I will not leave them to their shame. Go and tell my father that he need not trouble himself further about me. I am leaving tomorrow for New York and this girl and my child are to join me there. Mrs. Sales, how soon can you arrange to leave with Jessie Mae and the baby?

MRS. SALES: Mr. Folding!

RICHARD: Jessie Mae, will you join me in New York and accept the name of Folding?

JESSIE MAE (with a little scream). Richard!

ALFRED: You mean that?

THE WHITE, HOODED FIGURES IN THE DOOR: Let's have him! The nigger lover! Lynch him!

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THE FIGURE IN WHITE (snatching off his hood and mask.) Richard!

RICHARD: (Starting.) Father!

THE SENIOR FOLDING: (No longer using the deep, ceremonial voice.) Richard! I command you to leave here at once! Will you persist in bringing eternal shame on my house!

RICHARD: Your house and name are shamed and eternally damned if I forsake these! (Then pleadingly.) Father, don't you see the gross injustice of your attitude? For years we have perpetrated this crime upon these helpless people. Look at these faces; they should be black; but see, they are almost the color of ours. Look at this girl, she is almost the color of myself. Our blood courses through these veins. How did it get there? That should be shame enough to send you and those men back to your homes to do penance. But if that does not shame you, look at this baby; the blood of Folding is coursing through his veins. It is your blood and you are ashamed of it; you would leave it to sorrow and disgrace. But it is the blood of Richard Folding, it is my blood and it shall have the honor of my name, and the protection of my life. (taking the baby.) This baby shall have a name! The blood of Richard Folding is not unworthy of that name.

THE SENIOR FOLDING: Then you defy me!

RICHARD: If I must.

THE SENIOR FOLDING: (menacingly.) Then, by God, there will be no more Foldings!

He waves the white, masked figures forward. They rush in. Alfred throws himself into the body and fights desperately.

JESSIE MAE: (screaming.) My child! Give me my child!

She takes the child and hugs it to her breast. Richard struggles with the white, masked figures. Alfred is dealt a crushing blow with the butt of a revolver and sinks to the floor. Mrs. Sales becomes hysterical over him. Richard is seized by several men. They all crowd upon him and bear him struggling out into the night. Mrs. Sales is trying desperately to revive Alfred, who lies motionless. Jessie Mae hugs her baby and looks with horror out into the night, where, through the open door, which has been left open, the blazing cross can be seen waving triumphantly above the heads of the retreating figures.

CURTAIN.

The Cuss'd Thing by May MillerTHE CUSS'D THING

Just a Word

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The idea of "The Cuss'd Thing" was suggested by the pathetic case of a boy whom I taught in the high school. In the requirements of the course of study the youth fell far short, having failed twice in his sophomore year. He stayed in school because here he got his only chance to play the mandolin and in this art the student was extraordinarily gifted. Only when the question of music arose did the boy show any enthusiasm. When spoken to about the likelihood of his studying music, he only shook his head explaining that his mother did not believe in it; she thought it wicked to play in the only places where the remuneration would be worth-while.

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C H A R A C T E R S

Sampson Lee, a stevedore.

Marthy Lee, his wife.

Jim Watkins, a neighbor.

Ma Banks, a midwife.

SCENE: The kitchen of a two room apartment in Harlem,
 New York City.

TIME: The present. A May evening about six o'clock.

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Furniture, Entrances and Exits.

1. Sink
2. Window
3. Gas range
4. Cabinet
5. Door to bedroom
6. Stationary tubs
7. Door to hall
8. Table
9. Chair
10. Chair
11. Chair

PROPERTIES

A cornet
A mandolin
Basket of groceries
Pan, kettle and dishes

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Scene

The scene is laid in the kitchen of a two-room apartment in Harlem.

The strumming of a mandolin and blatant notes of a cornet are mingled in a harmonious chorus of "Old Fashioned Love". This chorus is almost ended before the curtain rises.

In the rear wall to the left is a door leading into a bedroom, and to the right stands a dilapidated cabinet behind the cracked panes of which heavy white dishes are arranged on shelves. In the middle of the right wall a window faces a bare, ugly brick wall, and to the right and left of it are a sink and a gas range. A door leading into the hall is down-stage in the left side wall and on the same side back stage are two stationary tubs. In the center of the room stands a medium sized table with a red and white checkered oil-cloth cover. Around the table are three chairs, two of which are occupied.

Jim Watkins, a well built mulatto of about thirty-five, with his body erect and his head thrown back is playing a cornet. He is dressed in a carefully pressed threadbare dark suit. In his tie a gaudy scarf pin glitters and both ring fingers are circled by gold rings.

Sampson Lee, a slender dark brown fellow of about thirty, with his feet propped on the table and his large black eyes fixed on the brick wall visible through the window, lets his fingers wander slowly over the strings of a mandolin. His attire is in striking contrast to that of his companion. His colored shirt is open at the throat and his dark trousers bag sadly.

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The selection ends. Jim puts his cornet down with an air of finality and turns toward Sampson, whose fingers are now lying idly on the strings; but whose facial expression has not changed.

Jim

Well, Sampson, you sho' does play that music like you been knowin' it all yo' life.

Sampson

I has.

Jim

What 'cha mean?

Sampson

Nuthin'--only dere's dat an' uh lot mo' pieaces 'way down in me dat I nebber plays. If someone 'ud jes' hum uh little ways I kin ketch 'um 'cause I already knows 'um.

Jim

How lon' you been playin' like that?

Sampson

Mos' mah life. When I war uh barefoot pickaninny down in Winsboro I ustah spen' hours in de swamps alookin' fuh uh good reed tuh playon. Den when I got biggah I hung 'round de post of-fice at de cross-roads all de day lon' awaitin' fuh de mastah tuh sell dat las cigar so as I 'ud git de box.

Jim

An' what 'id you do with that?

Sampson

O! I ustuh mek the queeres' lookin' banjos but dey play'd.

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Jim

But where'd you learn all them tunes?

Sampson

Ol' tunes is everywhere.

Jim

I can't understan' yit how you heard that show music jus' once an' now you knows it well 'nough to play tonight. Ol' man Cook was sho' lucky to git you, him being deserted in the middle of th' season by that no-count nigger Dodd.

Sampson

I war lucky to know yuh!

Jim

(rising proudly)

Yes that's right 'cause when Ol' man Cook says to th' ore1stra yesterday that he needs a banjo-mandolin, I says real loud, "I knows a man who can do it." An' he says, "Well brin' him to-morrer."

Sampson

(showing some eagerness for the first time)

An' he did lak mah playin' didn' he?

Jim

You know he must 'a liked it, didn't he promise you thirty-five dollars a week.

Sampson

(Laying his instrument on the table and moving toward the window)

Thirty-five dollar uh week!

Jim

What 'id th' 'ol woman say?

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Sampson
(Looking out the window)

Marthy? I aint tol' huh yit.

Jim

Why? Want 'a s'prise her?

Sampson

Not 'xactly. Yuh know Marthy aint been well fuh uh lon' time, she goin' tuh hab uh baby. I's kinda skeer'd tuh tell huh.

Jim

Scared? Why?

Sampson
(Turning slowly toward the window)

She don't lak mah playin' an' say Gawd don't lak it.

Jim
(He approaches Sampson)

Well, maybe she'll change her min'. Thirty-five dollars 'ud come in powerful good an' her havin' a baby.

Sampson

I donno but I 'ud lak de maney fuh huh and de baby. Den tuh I'd git mah chance. All de time I's been awantin' tuh play an' play--.

(Sampson's speech is interrupted by the opening of the outer door. Marthy, a small brown woman of twenty-five, dressed in a dark suit and carrying a basket, staggers in and drops in the nearest chair, breathing heavily. She lets the basket fall to the floor. Sampson turns quickly when he sees her condition, rushes over to the sink, takes a cup off the nail, fills it, and goes to the woman's side. He forces her to drink.)

Jim
(Approaching the two)

Anything I can do?

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Sampson

No, she git all right. It war dem steps an' de heat. Dey been tuh much fuh huh lately. (As Marthy sits up) Feel bettah now-- don't yuh, Marchy?

Marthy

Uh huh.

Jim
(Over-cordially)

Evenin', Mis' Lee.

Marthy
(Quickly looking at him and turning her head away)
Evenin'!

Jim
(Reaching awkwardly for his cornet on the table)
Well, I guess I'll be movin' alon'. I'll be seein' you in half-hour, Sampson.

Sampson

All right.
(Jim Watkins goes out and closes the door behind him).

Marthy
(Looking around)

Dat yalluh Watkins gone?

Sampson
(Taking a chair)

Yes. Why?

Marthy
(She rises and hangs her coat and hat on a nail on the door)
I hates no-count nigger musicians an' dat low-down Watkins mus' hab dehilment up his sleebe ahangin' roun' heah.
(She lifts the basket and deposits it with vim upon the table)

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Sampson

But, Marthy, he ain't done nuthin' an' anyhow he gone.

Marthy

Yes, but did' I heah him asayin' he war comin' back? What's he comin' back fuh? (Sampson is silent and Marthy works putting the dinner on the stove. Coming back to the table she notices the mandolin) An' yuh been playin' dis agin, ain't yuh?

Sampson
(guiltily)

Yes, tuh tell yuh de truf.

Marthy

I know--yuh leabe work early an' come home to hang 'roun' wid dat yalluh Watkins.

Sampson
(Speaking with determination)

No. I ain't been tuh work to-day an' I ain't agoin' back no mo'--nebber.

Marthy
(Stopping in the act of putting potatoes in the pan--
she is dazed)

Yuh ain't what?

Sampson

No. I ain't agoin' back 'cause I got uh new job.

Marthy

Huh!

Sampson
(Speaking desperately as if seeking to gain Marthy's approbation)

Yes, uh new job. Yuh know Watkins play dat cornet in uh orc'stra an' he say to me yestiddy as how dey needs uh mand'lin an' how he tol' ob me. I wen' wid him tuh de theayter tuh practice de music dis mornin'.

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Marthy

Yuh practice music in uh theayter!

Sampson
(proudly)

Yes, an' dey lak mah playin' an wants me tuh stay. I starts
tonight--thirty-five dollar uh week.

(Marthy drops in a chair exhausted. Sampson rises hurriedly)

Sampson

Dere yuh go agin. Yuh mus' be needin' some medicine.

Marthy

'Tain't nuthin. I git all right in uh minute. Ma Banks say
I gotta feel bad fuh uh lon' time yit.

Sampson

Kin I ~~do~~ dat yuh war doin'?

Marthy

No. Yuh set down. I hates men-folks amessin' wid mah cookin'.
(Sampson sits down and Marthy rises and works on looking at him
thoughtfully)

Marthy

So yuh tol' 'um yuh'd go aplayin' in uh trashy no-count show
in uh wicked theayter, huh?

Sampson

Now dere ain't no use yo' gettin' all het up. I tell yuh dis
ain't no trashy show. Dis is "Runnin' Wil'." Yuh 'members how we
seen all dem pretty pitchures ob it in de Sunday paper an' we couldn't
hardly believe dem war cullud? Watkins say it war back by one ob de
bigges' white men in de show business. Dere 'ud be all kind ob
folks come tuh heah mah music.

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Marthy
(In an awe-stricken voice)

Gawd 'ud come tuh heah yuh tuh!

Sampson

Ain't Gawd always heah me? When yuh an' me war a settin' in de do' ob de cabin 'way down dere in Car'lina dem nights when it war tuh hot tuh sleep inside, did'n Gawd heah me when I play den?

Marthy

Yes. YUH war playin' His music den an' yuh warn't in no theayter either.

Sampson

I thought all music was Hisn', only 'stid ob de stars, de moon an' de trees alis'enin dere 'll be people--people what'll understan'!

Marthy

I ain't talkin' 'bout de people. Maybe dey will lak it but Gawd won't. Yuh're atrunin' yo' back on Him fuh thirty-five dollar uh week.

Sampson

Marthy, I ain't aturnin' mah back on Gawd. Sometime I think He done de turnin'.

Marthy

Sh! Yuh's wicked.

Sampson
(bitterly)

'Twar wicked when mah mammy call me Sam'son, she awantin' me tuh grow big an' strong so as I 'ud work an' buy de farm. I seen huh die tryin' tuh do de things I warn't strong 'nough tuh do--me uh puny, sickly boy name Sam'son.

Marthy

Sh! He know bes'.

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Sampson

Yuh warn't thinkin' dat when I war ploughin' an' workin' in dat dry, brown Car'lina lan' dat nebber grow nuthin' much but straggly corn an' sparse cotton, an' me haf sick all de time.

Marthy

But didn' Gawd lead yuh out ob dat?

Sampson

An' what's dere fuh me tuh do heah? I work an' tug all day lon' on de wharf an' at night dere's uh achin' back an' three dollar tuh show fuh mah time. Mah body ain't big 'nough fuh dis kind ob work an' I ain't got sense tuh do what dem eddy-cated ones kin do.

Marthy

Dere mus' be some kind of decent work fuh yuh somewheres if yuh'd only fin' it.

Sampson

I's tried all dat bof yuh an' me kin fin' an' ain't nebber mek good in none ob 'um. An' I's through wid jobs dat beats me fo' I starts. I's playin' from now on.

Marthy

All right, Sam'son Lee, but 'member I tol' yuh no good kin ebber come ob it 'cause it's cuss'd.

Sampson

No 'tain't. Gawd wouldn't go accussin' de onliest thing He let uh man do well. An' yuh know if I b'lieve dat, I'd nebber tech de man'lin agin.

Marthy

(stopping short)

Somewheres dey talks 'bout punishment fallin' on de chillun--

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jes' s'pose----

Sampson

Now, Marthy, don't go a lookin' fuh trouble.

Marthy

I ain't, but all de time I keeps athinkin' ob dat terrible dream I hab de other night.

Sampson

What dream?

Marthy

I went tuh tell yuh aftuh breakfus' but. I mus' hab forgot. I dream I war all dress' up in white agoin' tuh de church tuh git married; but, funny lak dreams is, I thought I war carryin' our baby an' he war dress' in white tuh.

Sampson

Nuthin' bad 'bout dat, an' anyhow it ain't nuthin' but uh dream.

Marthy

I know but de ol' folks ustuh say as how when yuh dream of marriages dey war certain death an' dat white war uh sho' sign ob sorrow. Yuh don't s'pose--

Sampson

I don't s'pose nuthin'. Our baby's comin' heah biggah and stronger'n his pappy ebber war. He's agoin' tuh do all dat decent work yuh talk 'bout 'cause he's goin' tuh be strong 'nough tuh work. An' maybe he'll be one ob dem eddycated ones wid yuh an' me alivin' heah in New York where he kin go tuh any school 'etid ob tuh uh shanty three mile down uh dusty road.

Marthy

(more cheerfully)

An' we kin call him Sam'son. (Then dejectedly) If yuh only warn't goin' tuh play. I's skeer'd. (Her voice has risen to a

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high pitch. She is hysterical. She groans and sits down in a chair exhausted)

Sampson

Now yuh see yuh's all het up. Yuh ain't got nuthin' tuh be skeer'd 'bout. Go in an' lay down uh mite an' I kin finish fixin' dis dinner. (He helps her to rise and gently pushes her into the next room) (He goes to the stove and peeps into the pans, then stands there apparently dreaming. A knock is heard at the outer door)

Sampson

Dat yuh, Jim? Com'on in.

Jim

(His instrument under his arsm)

Ain't you ready yit?

Sampson

Not yit. Set down an' wait uh spell. Marthy kin put dem things on de table while I fixes up uh little. I wan'na let huh res' uh little longer. Ain't we got plenty ob time?

Jim

Want'a practice a bit while we wait?

Sampson
(eagerly)

Uh-huh. (He goes to the bedroom door and very carefully closes it. He joins Jim)

Jim

Which one shall it be this time?

Sampson

Yuh knows dat piece we plays for de cabaret crowd.

Jim

Th' chorus for th' Charleston?

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Sampson

Yes, dat's it. I nebber seen anything like it. When dem gals begins tuh pat dere han's an' sway an' ben' I'd jes' keep on playin' fuhebber.

Jim

You ain't like me. 'Cause when them bare brown legs swing back an' forward an' in an' out, I just wants to lay that cornet across my knees an' look.

(Sampson picks up his mandolin and begins the patter chorus of "Old Fashioned Love," swaying and patting his foot in Charleston time. Watkins' cornet joins in. In the midst of the music Sampson pauses as if listening to something but resumes his playing. He is in the midst of the second chorus)

Marthy

(In a terrified whisper from the next room)

Sam'son! Sam'son!

(Sampson arises in haste, letting his mandolin fall in his hurry and rushes into the next room. He returns hurriedly from the bedroom and grasps the arm of Watkins)

Sampson

Jim, go quick 'cross the hall an' tell Ma Banks tuh come ober. Marthy's sick. (Watkins turns and goes out. Sampson puts water on the stove to heat and goes back into the bed-room. Watkins enters with Ma Banks. She is a stout dark woman of fifty, dressed in a gingham house-dress with a full white apron over it, a dust cap on her head. Sampson comes out the bed-room)

Sampson

(Approaching Ma Banks)

It's Marthy!

Ma Banks

There, there honey don't I know?

Sampson

But something's happened.

Ma Banks

'Course it has, but don't git so riz up. Marthy ain't the

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first an' las' woman tuh have trouble carryin' a baby. (She goes toward the bedroom door, and Sampson starts to follow. She opens the door and turns and pushes him back gently)

Ma Banks

Go lon' son, an' leave this tuh Ma Banks. She knows.

(The door closes behind her)

Jim

(Awkwardly)

I guess I'd better wait a while for you, eh?

(Sampson nods distractedly)

Jim

Do you thing--

Sampson

I ain't athinkin' nuthin' now.

Jim

Oh, come on, man. Don' cha know everything's goin' to be all right?

Sampson

(sullenly)

How I know dat?

Jim

Ain't Ma Banks the best for blacks 'round. Gee! I wish I had dollars in my pocket now for every one of th' little black babies she's delivered in this block.

Sampson

But maybe dere warn't no cuss'd thing agin dem.

Jim

What 'cha mean now?

Sampson

Nuthin'.

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(Sampson walks nervously to and fro kicking his foot against his mandolin which he stoops automatically to pick up. Watkins takes his cornet from the table and plays the first strains of the Charleston chorus again. Sampson thoroughly aroused strides toward him and jerks the instrument from his hand.)

Jim

All right. All right.

Sampson

If Marthy heah dat I knows she's sicker.

Jim

Why?

Sampson

'Cause dat kind of music worry huh.

Jim

Seems all of it worries her.

Sampson

No. I 'members dat night huh ol' woman died an' Marthy sat up fuh two whole night 'cause she couldn't git tuh sleep. An' dat las' night I come wid mah banjo an' I play an' play dis thing ober and ober agin. When I look up at Marthy she war in de corner asleep-in'.

(Unconsciously he has picked up the mandolin and as he talks his fingers strike the chords of "Nobody Knows Be Trouble I See", and he begins to play more ardently half crooning the words. The door opens and Ma Banks stands in the door way, carefully closing the door behind her. She starts toward the stove for the hot water)

Sampson

Marthy! (Ma Banks shakes her head)

Sampson

She ain't-----

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Ma Banks

No. Marthy'll be all right wid a little rest an' good care.
Only there won't be no child now.

Sampson
(Stupified)

De chile gone!

Ma Banks

Yes an' I'm scared she mus' never carry no more.

Sampson
(Nodding with understanding)

Den Marthy war right aftuh all. I understands now. I guess I
ought tuh be glad He didn' let de po' little helpless thing come
heah tuh suffer fuh mah sin. O Gawd!

Jim

Com' on Sampson, we've wasted 'nought time. Ain't you goin'
now with Marthy all right?

Sampson
(Shortly)

No.

Jim

Mus' I tell him you'll be there tomorrer?

Sampson

No. Tell him tuh git another man.

(Watkins looks at Sampson in amazement and starts to remonstrate but
Sampson has turned his back and is looking out the window. Watkins
shrugs his shoulders and goes out. Ma Banks takes the water and goes
back into the next room closing the door after her. Sampson remains
staring at the brick wall)

Curtain

The Deep Regret by Claude ReymondTHE DEEP REGRET.

Sarah Anderson is ironing in the room which the family uses as dining-room and kitchen. She is a slim brown woman of thirty-six, wearing a calico dress and gingham apron. She is standing in front of the stove and in front of her is a table on which the ironing board is resting. At her right is a door which leads out through the back yard, and at her left is another door which leads to the parlor and sitting room. There are one or two chairs filled with ironed clothes about the room, and in the rear wall to the right of the stove is a window. There are no pictures on the walls. The chair just below the door which leads outside is unoccupied. Sarah stands above the stove humming as she irons. Presently Mamie, her daughter, a girl of twenty, enters from the right. She has a package in her hand and she keeps it out of her mother's sight by putting it quietly on the chair as she enters and sitting in front of it.

Sarah. (Pausing in her work.)

You stayed a right long time, didn' you?

Mamie.

Yes'm, Ah met Amos Jackson out there and he had to hold me up for a long talk.

Sarah. (Looking at her sharply.)

How come you so friendly with him since we borrowed that money?

Mamie.

Ah aint friendly with him. He stopped me to tell me his boss was in town and wants to come around to day to collect what we borrowed.

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Sarah.

His boss, did you say?

Mamie.

Yes'm, the man that's the head o' that loan company. You know the boss was out o' town when we borrowed the money, and he just found it out this mornin'. Amos let us have the money on his own hook.

Sarah. (Standing with her arms akimbo and her eyes on Mamie.)

How long you been knowin' Amos Jackson? Ah don't like you bein' so friendly with him so soon.

Mamie.

Ah met him at a dance a couple o' months ago.

Sarah.

And right on top o' that he let us borrow fifty dollars on the parlor furniture. Ah hope there aint nothin' between you two.

Mamie.

He let us borrow the money because he's in the loan business. And then he's sure o' gettin' his money back cause Ah told him Pa was gone to Palm Beach to wait and he brings two or three hund'ed dollars back with him when he comes home.

Sarah.

Ah told you not to tell all our business to outsiders. He don't have to know how much money your Pa brings back.

Mamie.

Ah was sure he'd let us have the fifty dollars after Ah told him how much Pa brings back from Palm Beach.

Sarah. (Beginning to iron again.)

Well, he'll get his money soon as Josh comes and not before.

Mamie.

Ah told him that but he says the boss is comin' anyhow.

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Sarah.

He c'n come if he wants to; but he wont get a cent till Josh gets here.

Mamie.

Ah told him Pa might be here any minute.

Sarah.

Yas, this is the day for him to come. Ah been waitin' for this day for three long months.

Mamie.

If he gets here to-day we c'n get a lot o' new clothes and strut Sunday.

Sarah.

Yas, we'll have eve'ybody in church rubber neckin' at us.

Mamie.

We sure will.

Sarah.

Ah don't know how much Josh'll bring back, but we got to pay back that fifty dollars before we buy anything.

Mamie.

Oh, Ah know that. We c'n pay that back to-day then go downtown to-morrow.

Sarah.

One thing's mighty funny.

Mamie.

What's that?

Sarah.

Josh aint been doin' much writin' this time.

Mamie.

Ah reckon he's been too busy makin' money to write.

Sarah.

Ah hope so. Then we wont miss the fifty dollars we got to pay back.

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Mamie.

That fifty dollards sure did come in good Christmas. Eve'ybody was wondering how we could afford to make such good presents.

Sarah.

Ah reckon Josh was wonderin' where we got the money from to buy the bathrobe and slippers we sent him for his Christmas present.

Mamie.

Maybe he'll be askin' us about it when he comes.

Sarah.

He wont care, chile. Eve'y time Josh comes home from Palm Beach he's just as happy as a lark, cause he knows he's got his pocket full o' money, a full stomach and good clothes on his back.

What's that you got there? (She goes over to hang a finished piece on a chair and sees the package behind Mamie.)

Mamie.

Some shoes.

Sarah.

New shoes?

Mamie.

Yes'm.

Sarah.

Where'd you get money to buy new shoes, gal?

Mamie. (Embarrassed.)

Ah - Ah bought 'em on time.

Sarah.

Stoppy your lyin', now; you know nobody aint goin' to let you have no shoes on time.

(Mamie is silent.)

Now tell me the truth; where'd you get them shoes?

Mamie.

Martha got paid off this mornin' and Ah borrowed the money from

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huh. That's why Ah said Ah bought 'em on time, cause Ah got to pay huh back.

Sarah.

Martha next door?

Mamie.

Yes'm.

Sarah. (Starting out.)

Well Ah'll go and see what Martha's got to say about it.

Mamie. (Hastily.)

There aint no use to go over there cause Martha's downtown. Ah left huh down there.

Sarah. (Angrily)

You're lyin' again! Martha's right in the house! Didn' Ah see huh in the back yard hangin' clothes on the line no longer than a minute ago?

(Mamie hangs her head)

Now, where in the devil did you get them shoes?

(There is a loud knock at the back door.)

Sarah. (As she goes out pass Mamie.)

That's all right, you young hussy! Ah'll talk to you some more after Ah see who this is!

(She goes out leaving Mamie puzzled as to what she must do. She sits making lines on the floor with the toe of her shoe. Presently Sarah returns followed by Jackson and Green. Green is a fat, well-dressed man of fifty-five. Jackson is a young dandy of thirty.)

Sarah (To Jackson as they enter.)

Ah told you last week that Ah wouldn't have no money till ma husband got home.

Green. (Speaking for Jackson.)

But when is he comin' home? The money is due now.

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Sarah. (To Jackson.)

Is he the boss o' that company?

Jackson.

Yas, he's ma boss.

Green.

Ah'm the boss all right, and if Ah had 'a' been here when this loan was made things would 'a' been different. Ah understand by my papers that my man let you all have fifty dollars on your parlor furniture.

Sarah.

That's what he did.

Green (Looking over his papers.)

Ah see that the money is due to day at twelve o'clock - fifty dollars and interest.

Sarah.

Not fifty dollars and interest, mister; just fifty dollars, that's all.

Green.

What about the interest?

Sarah.

We paid the interest in advance the day we got the money.

(To Jackson.)

Didn't we give you the money for the interest the day we got the fifty dollars from you?

Jackson.

Yas, you all paid the interest.

Green. (To Jackson)

How's that? These papers don't show it.

Jackson.

Ah must 'a' forgot to put it down. Ah took the money to your office.

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Green. (Angrily.)

That aint no business - no business at all. Ah told you time and again to put everything down in black and white. Ah don't care how little it is put it down.

Jackson.

All right, seh.

Green.

Don't you think this is the end of it now; Ah'm goin' to look up that interest time Ah get back.

(To Sarah.)

Ah've been tryin' to learn Jackson how to loan money on things, but he don't seem to catch on so fast. Now, Ah want to see the furniture he let you have the fifty dollars on.

Sarah.

Come right in here.

(She leads him through the door into the parlor. Mamie and Jackson begin to speak in lowered tones.)

Mamie.

Ma found out about the shoes.

Jackson.

Found out Ah give 'em to you?

Mamie.

No, but she found out something's wrong. She got me all tied up and she's goin' to raise the devil soon as you all go out.

Jackson.

Why didn' you tell huh you borrowed the money from me?

Mamie.

Ah did tell huh Ah borrowed it, but Ah was scared to say you lent it to me.

Jackson.

What did you tell huh?

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Mamie.

Ah told huh Ah borrowed it from Martha. Ah don't know why Ah said that cause Martha don't like me for nothin'; but she was the first one Ah could think of.

Jackson.

Does Martha know?

Mamie.

No, Ah aint had no chance to tell huh. Time Ah told ma Ah had borrowed it from Martha she caught me in a lie and started over to Martha's when you all knocked.

Jackson.

Ah'll put Martha wise when Ah go out.

Mamie.

Ah'll be glad if you will. It'll save me a lot o' trouble. All Ah want huh to do is to say she let me have the money.

Jackson.

You know Ah'll save you from trouble any time Ah kin cause Ah like you a whole lot.

Mamie.

Ah don't have to tell you how much Ah like you cause Ah done proved it.

Jackson.

Let's don't talk about that now.

Mamie.

That old boss o' yours is kinder mean, aint he?

Jackson.

Yas, he's just as tight as they come.

Mamie.

Do you think he'd try to take our things if we couldn' get the money on time?

Jackson.

He's mean enough.

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Mamie.

But if anything would happen you know you said you'd never let him take 'em even if you had to pay the money out o' your own pocket.

Jackson.

Aint nothin' goin' to happen. Don't your old man always bring two or three hundred dollars back from Palm Beach?

Mamie.

Ah know that; but suppose he got robbed or got in a accident an' got killed.

Jackson.

Don't be so blue, eve'ything 'll come out all right.

Mamie.

Ah know you couldn' turn me down after what's gone on between us.

Jackson.

Don't worry, look on the sunny side.

(Green and Sarah enter again)

Green. (To Jackson.)

This is the bummiest job you've ever done. Instead of improvin' you get worse and worse every day. No judgement at all, not a bit!

Jackson.

What's the matter?

Green (Excitedly.)

Everything's the matter! You let these people have fifty dollars on stuff in there that aint worth twenty! Ah went over it piece by piece and Ah couldn't get twenty dollars for the whole bunch of it nowhere!

Jackson.

It looked all right to me.

Green.

Anything looks all right to a fool like you! A baby couldn't be fooled with that stuff in there!

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Jackson.

Ah didn't buy it from 'em. Ah just let 'em have fifty dollars on it. They'll pay the money.

Green.

Maybe they will and maybe they wont. Whether they'll pay or not, it aint business to let out money on stuff that aint worth it.

Sarah.

You needn' be scared o' not gettin' your money, mister.

Green.

Lady, Ah'm business man and Ah don't take nobody's word for nothin'. Jackson never will be a business man. He's too soft-hearted. A man's got to have a heart like marble to be a good business man.

Sarah.

All this talk aint doin' nothin but wasting time. Ah told you you'd get the money soon as ma husband got home.

Green.

That's all right too, but the money is due now - it was due at twelve o'clock and now it's twenty minutes after.

Sarah.

Ah know you wouldn' be mean enough to take our things before you'd wait a few minutes longer.

Green.

Yas, Ah would; Ah'd take 'em right now if they was worth the money, but they aint.

Sarah.

They're worth that much to me and more.

Green.

Ah tell you what Ah'm goin' to do.

Sarah.

Ah know you aint goin' to take these things, and that settles it.

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Green.

Ah'm goin' up the street to collect another debt, and if your husband don't come by the time Ah get back we'll be in to take your things along with us. Ah've got the wagon out there now.

Sarah.

You can come back if you want to, but you sure aint goin' to take a thing out o' here unless you walk over me.

Green.

All right, you'll see.

(To Jackson)

Come on.

(They go out.)

Sarah. (Giving Mamie a bucket.)

Here, go to the pump and get a bucket o' water. Your pa might want a cool drink when he comes.

(Mamie takes the bucket and goes out. Sarah sets her irons off the stove to cool, then unwraps the shoes and looks at them and the ticket. Shaking her head she wraps the shoes again and goes to the window to watch Mamie. Presently Mamie returns with the water.)

Sarah.

Put it on the table.

(Mamie puts the bucket of water on the table and Sarah puts her ironing-board away.)

Mamie.

It's funny pa takes so long to come.

Sarah.

It's mighty funny. Whole lots o' things is mighty funny. It's mighty funny where you got them shoes from.

Mamie.

Ah told you Ah borrowed the money and bought 'em.

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Sarah.

You still stickin' to that lame tale about borrowin' the money from Martha?

Mamie.

Ah'm tellin' the truth. You can go and ask huh if you don't believe me.

Sarah.

Ah'll ask huh time enough.

Mamie.

You think Ah'm tellin' a line, but Ah aint.

Sarah. (Turning to her almost fiercely.)

What you doin' payin' ten dollars for shoes? You aint never paid that for shoes before!

Mamie. (After a monts pause.)

Ah wanted a good pair.

Sarah.

Shoes for three and a half used to be good enough. Ah don't see what you want to get so stylish for all of a sudden.

Mamie.

Ah don't want to be wearin' cheap things all ma life.

Sarah.

It's better to wear cheap things if you come by 'em honest.

Mamie.

Ah didn't steal them shoes.

Sarah.

You must 'a' stole 'em if you shamed to tell where you got 'em from. You know Martha never did like you good enough to lend you ten dollars.

Mamie. (With more confidence than before)

You can go over and ask Martha any time you want to.

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Sarah.

That's all right, Ah'm goin' to tell your pa soon as he gets here; maybe you'll tell him where you got 'em from.

Mamie.

Ah'll tell him the same thing Ah told you.

(Sarah goes to the window and looks out again. Mamie sits.)

Sarah.

There's Martha in the yard again.

(She calls.)

Martha! Martha!

Martha's Voice.

Ma'am?

Sarah.

Come here to the window a minute. Ah want to ask you somethin'.

Mamie.

Ah know you'll believe what Ah said after she tells you cause you know she aint no friend o' mine; Never was and never will be.

Sarah. (Speaking out of the window.)

Martha, did you lend Mamie ten dollars to buy a pair o' shoes with?

Martha's Voice.

Ten dollars?

Sarah.

Yes, she said you lent huh ten dollars to buy a pair shoes with.

Martha's Voice.

'Deed, Mis' Sarah, Ah aint had ten dollars in two weeks.

Mamie. (Excitedly.)

She's lyin', she knows she's lyin'! She's just sayin' that to spite me cause she dont like me!

Martha's Voice.

No'm Ah aint lyin', Mis' Sarah. Amos Jackson's been here tryin' to get me to lie about it; but Ah aint tellin' no lies for nobody.

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Sarah.

That's all right, Martha; that's all Ah want to know.

(Turning to Mamie.)

Uh, hu, Amos Jackson's got somethin' to do with it, is he?

(Mamie hangs her head.)

So Amos Jackson bought them shoes for you, did he?

(Mamie is silent.)

Answer me, gall!

Mamie.

Yes, 'm, he bought 'em.

Sarah.

What the devil is he doin' buyin' shoes for you?

Mamie.

He bought 'em cause he wanted to.

Sarah.

None o' your smartness! Ah want to know what's between you two!

Mamie.

Nothin'

Sarah.

Don't talk like a fool! Ain't Ah got sense enough to know he
aint givin' you shoes for nothin'!

(Mamie is silent.)

Sarah.

Now Ah reckon Ah know what you been doin' stealin' our o' here
night after night!

Mamie.

Ah aint been doin' nothin'.

Sarah.

We'll see. Ah'll make Josh break eve'y bone in his body, and
yours too if you say much!

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Mamie.

Ah don't see what you want to bawl at me for. Ah aint done nothin'.

Sarah.

You can call it nothin' if you want to!

(At this moment Josh enters with a travelling bag which he puts down by the door.)

Sarah. (As soon as she sees him.)

Josh!

(She runs to him and throwing her arms around his neck, kisses him. He kisses her, but does not seem to be "as happy as a lark". After kissing Mamie he takes off his hat and we can get a better view of him. He is a slightly bald man of forty, wearing sideburns but no mustache. He is a little above medium height and very strongly built.)

Josh (As he hangs his hat on the back of a chair.)

What you all been doin', quarrelin'?

Sarah.

We had a few words. Ah'll tell you about it after a while. You must be tired, aint you?

Josh.

No, Ah aint tired.

Sarah.

You don't look so pert. What's the matter?

Josh.

Eve'thing's the matter.

Sarah.

Eve'ythin'!

Josh. (Rubbing his hands slowly.)

Yes, Ah'm all out o' luck. Ah aint done a thing this season. Aint hardly made ma expenses. Ah just did have enough to get back home.

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The toughest season Ah ever seen.

Sarah.

Josh Anderson, is you kiddin' me?

Josh.

Do Ah look like Ah'm kiddin'?

Sarah.

You mean to stand there and tell me you aint brought no money
back from Palm Beach?

Josh.

Not a thing. Not less you call fifteen or twenty cents money.

Sarah.

Now we sure is in a hole.

Josh.

Ah don't see how we're in such a hole.

Sarah.

That's cause you don't know what we done while you was gone.

Josh. (Looking at her sharply.)

No. Ah don't know what you done. What?

Sarah.

Didn't you notice the new bathrobe and slippers we sent you
for Christmas?

Josh.

Yes, Ah was wonderin' where you all got the money from.

Sarah.

We made a borrow.

Josh.

A borrow from who?

Sarah.

We borrowed fifty dollars from Green's on the things in the
front room.

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Josh.

Fifty dollars!

Sarah.

Yes.

Josh.

And when you think you goin' to pay him?

Sarah.

We got to pay him to day. The man's out there waitin' for his money now. Didn't you see two men in a wagon?

Josh.

No, Ah didn't see nobody.

Sarah.

Maybe they went. Ah hope they did.

(She hurries out.)

Josh. (To Mamie.)

You and your ma certain'y is played the fool now.

Mamie.

Eve'ything was so lonesome around here, and we wanted some money to spend.

Josh.

What did you do with the rest of the money?

Mamie.

We bought some Christmas presents for the neighbors. We was so sure you'd bring some money back from Palm Beach like you always did.

Sarah. (Returning)

They is gone. Ah hope they gone for good.

Josh.

Aint nobody goin' nowhere for good when you owe 'em fifty dollars.

Sarah.

What we goin' to do about it?

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Josh.

There aint nothin' to do. Ah aint got no money to pay 'em if they come back to day or tomorrow.

Sarah.

But the man says he'll take our things if he don't get his money today.

Josh.

He'll have to take 'em then.

Sarah.

You goin' to let him take our things like that?

Josh. (Hopelessly and angrily.)

Ah can't help it. Ah aint got nothin' to pay him with. When Ah got back here Ah knowed Ah was in hard luck, but Ah thought Ah'd go back to ma old job and soon catch up. Ah didn't know Ah'd come back here and find you all head over heels in debt. Now, you'll have to take your medicine.

Sarah. (With tears in her eyes.)

Ah didn't know Ah was makin' trouble for you when Ah borrowed the money or else Ah wouldn't 'a' done it; but that aint the worse yet.

Josh.

Aint the worse? What else you done?

Sarah.

Ah aint done nothin' else. But ask Mamie what she done.

Josh. (Turnint to Mamie.)

What you been doin', Mamie?

Mamie.

Ah aint been doin' nothin', pa.

Josh (To Sarah)

What's she been doin'?

Sarah.

Ask huh how we got that loan so easy! Ash huh who's been buyin'

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new shoes for huh and payin' ten dollars for 'em!

Josh.

Buyin' shoes for huh! Some man?

Sarah. (More angry on account of her own disappointment.)

Ask huh, Ah tell you! Ask huh!

(At this point Green enters followed by Jackson.)

Josh.

Who is this?

Sarah.

That's the man we owe the fifty dollars.

Green. (To Sarah).

Is this your husband?

Sarah.

Yes, seh.

Green (To Josh.)

Ah had to go away a few minutes but now Ah'm back to collect.

(Mamie and Jackson are standing aside talking in whispers. Jackson is seen shaking his head.)

Josh.

Well, Ah'll tell you, mister; Ah didn't know a thing about this loan till Ah got home a minute ago.

Green.

Well, everything was done in a legal way, and Ah've got papers to show it.

Josh.

Ah aint sayin' nothin' against that; Ah'm just sayin' that Ah'd pay you if Ah had the money, but Ah didn't bring a thing back from Palm Beach.

Green.

Ah'll have to take your things, then. Ah can't wait another day.

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Of course if you'll promise to pay in a week or so with interest and sign papers to that effect Ah'll consider it.

Josh.

Ah can't promise that cause Ah don't know where the money's comin' from to pay you.

Green.

All right, Jackson, get to work. (Jackson hesitates.)

Green. (Impatiently.)

Come on, Ah'll give you a lift. (They start towards the front room.)

Mamie. (To Jackson.)

You goin' to take our things out, Amos?

Jackson.

Ah can't help it. Ah got to hold ma job.

(He and Green go into the front room.)

Sarah (To Josh.)

Is you goin' to stand here like a coward and let 'em clean our front room out?

Josh.

What else you want me to do? They got the law with 'em, aint they? If Ah make 'em git out, they'll get the cops and take the things anyhow! If Ah beat 'em up they'll have me put in jail!

Sarah. (With Sarcasm.)

You didn' used to be so scared of goin' to jail, Josh Anderson!

Josh.

Ah could take one of 'em by the neck with each hand and choke 'em till they couldn't walk, but that wouldn't do no good; so you just as well make up your mind to take your medicine!

(Sarah sits by the table and begins to cry.)

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Green. (Coming back followed by Jackson
each carrying two chairs.)

Ah heard what you said, mister; but if you start it Ah'll have
the police on you in two minutes.

Josh.

You can take the things out, but don't be too rough about it
if you don't want me to lose ma temper. Ah aint feelin' good nohow.

(Green and Jackson start out.)

Mamie. (Catching Jackson's arm.)

You goin' to break your word to me, Amos Jackson?

Jackson.

Ah got to keep ma job.

Mamie.

Didn't you promise me you wouldn't never take these things out?

Jackson.

Ah know well you don't think Ah'm goin' to throw up ma job.

Josh. (To Mamie.)

Is this the man you been runnin' with? Is this the one that's
been buyin' new shoes for you and payin' ten dollars for 'em?

Mamie.

Yes, seh.

Sarah.

Ah told you so! Ah told you so!

Josh. (Catching Jackson by the shoulder.)

Ah ought to break your black neck, but Ah wont do it cause it's
just as much her fault as it is yours.

Get out! (He gives Jackson a shake and a
push.)

Sarah. (Snatching up an iron as Green
starts out with a chair.)

If my husband is too big a coward to stop you, Ah'll stop you!

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(She makes a dash for Green with the iron raised. Dropping the chair Green catches her hand and pushes her backwards. She stumbles and nearly falls, but Josh catches her, and angered by Green's action takes the iron from Sarah's hand and starts for him.)

Josh. (As Green hurries out.)

Put your hands on ma wife and think you'll get away with it!

(As Green darts out of the door Josh catches him in the back of the collar and raising the iron strikes. We hear the fall of a heavy body. Josh steps back and the three stand gazing into the hall.)

Josh.

You wont put your hands on nobody else's wife!

Sarah.

Josh! Josh! What did you do!

Josh.

Ah fixed him! Ah told him not to get rough!

Sarah.

They'll send you to the pen!

Josh.

Ah know they will! Aint it you all's fault? Didn't Ah tell you you made a mess of it? All this comes from wantin' to show off in front of the neighbors!

(He puts the iron on the floor. Sarah sits in the chair weeping while Mamie still stands staring into the hall.)

CURTAIN.

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