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American Negro Autobiographies

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AMERICAN NEGRO AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

By

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A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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By George E. F. Hall

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Arts (in English.) August, 1966.

The purpose of this thesis was to evaluate a select group of American Negro autobiographies in order to determine their quality as a literary genre.

For that purpose the autobiographies from the fields of race leadership, writing, and entertainment were selected for evaluation.

In the field of race leadership the following autobiographies were analyzed: Father Henson, by Josiah Henson; The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, by Frederick Douglass; Up From Slavery, by Booker T. Washington; and Dusk of Dawn, by W. E. B. DuBois.

In the field of writing the autobiographies analyzed were: Along This Way, by James Weldon Johnson; A Long Way From Home, by Claude McKay; The Big Sea, by Langston Hughes; and Black Boy, by Richard Wright.

In the field of entertainment the autobiographies analyzed were: His Eye is on the Sparrow, by Ethel Waters; and My Lord, What a Morning, by Marian Anderson.

Other contemporary autobiographies were reviewed but not analyzed. They are: Notes of a Native Son and Nobody Knows My Name, by James Baldwin; Yes I Can, by

Sammy Davis, Jr.; Invisible Man, by Ralph Ellison; and Manchild in the Promised Land, by Claude Brown.

The author of this thesis assumed that the better educated Negro would write a biography superior in quality to one written by a less educated Negro. After research, he found that the original assumption was unwarranted.

Conclusions: The best autobiographies were those written by the persons who made an honest selection and analysis of the events that shaped their lives.

Further, all the autobiographers selected for this thesis contributed in some way to the welfare of their race and country.

Finally, the group of American Negro autobiographies selected was important in that it chronicled the history of the United States from 1850-1950 from the point of view of the American Negro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The major purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the quality of a group of American Negro autobiographies selected from the period 1850-1950.

As a literary genre, the autobiography is very difficult to evaluate. For one thing, it is perhaps the single literary form that can be and is attempted by such a heterogeneous group, having such a diversity of talent, and for such a variety of reasons. In other words, anyone can attempt an autobiography. As a result, it is difficult to establish a standard of measurement for evaluation and comparison.

One basis of measurement that has often been employed when dealing with autobiographies is that of the motivation of the writer. But to evaluate an autobiography on the basis of motives alone is weak, since most motives are mixed and unclear. One could also evaluate an autobiography on the basis of its historical content and worth, i.e., its attempt to portray the times in which the author lived. In this instance, the autobiography is judged mainly on the accuracy and completeness of historical fact.

Neither of these methods of evaluation seems adequate. The best standard of evaluation seems to be that of Roy

Pascal outlined in his book Design and Truth in Autobiography. First of all, let us make clear what is understood by autobiography. It must be recognized that all "life stories" are not true autobiographies. For instance, a diary which "moves through a series of moments in time" should not be confused with an autobiography which is "a review of a life from a particular moment in time."[1] Further, a memoir or reminiscence is not strictly speaking an autobiography, since in the former the attention is focussed on others and in the latter is focussed on self. Finally, true autobiography excludes those "life stories" which are merely philosophical reflections on self, or self-portraits, since in these there "is no interaction between self and the outer world."[2] In other words, the author's relationship to the events of his time are not analysed. Therefore, a true autobiography involves "the reconstruction of the movement of a life . . . a shaping of the past . . . in the actual circumstances in which it was lived."[3]

This "shaping of the past" will be judged, not by its historical information or psychological documentation, but as a literary work. In order to be a good autobiography

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[1] Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 3.

[2] Ibid., p. 8. [3] Ibid., p. 9.

it should give a unified picture of the complete man from his present standpoint. It should describe the process of interacting events in his life which have led him to his present level of achievement, philosophy, and whole personality. A truly great autobiography should have a "sense of wonder" about it for the author's having discovered something new and complete about his personality. In order to achieve this "sense of wonder" the author must most of all be truthful or honest in his research into himself.

It is on this "elusive quality of truth" that I will base the evaluation of the literary worth of an autobiography. It is not the minor aberrations in fact alone that concern us, but whether or not these minor untruths were introduced to distort the autobiographer's picture of himself or whether they are part and parcel of the autobiographer's personality.

Another element of this "truth" can be measured by the seriousness and sincerity with which he selects the particular events of his life, which he deems to be important to the formation of his present self.

The third element of this "elusive truth" is the honesty of analysis, and the depth of probing by which he evaluates the interaction of his selected events not only with each other, but with external events in the contemporary world.

From this outline of my basis of evaluation, it can be seen that only the rare autobiography would rate as superior. The autobiographies which this thesis proposes to evaluate generally present a further limitation from the point of view of truth as defined above. To a greater or lesser degree each of these autobiographers has tended to suffer from a somewhat limited ability at overall objective analysis because of a necessarily biased perception of events. Since this limitation, although variable in degree, is common to all members of this group, it will not be considered as too serious a fault in the rating of the literary value of these autobiographies.

CHAPTER II

RACE LEADERS

The earliest examples of American Negro autobiography were the slave narratives. One of the first of these was the autobiography of Josiah Henson, entitled Father Henson. This was a fast-moving, straightforward account of the life of an American slave who was born in 1789 in Maryland and subsequently escaped to Canada. Josiah Henson was called "Father" partly because of his age and partly because he was an ordained minister.

The story of this man's life is great, as a life story, because it has all the elements of a melodrama: it deals with an underdog slave who is subject to all the abuses of unjust masters, but who eventually overcomes all adversity and receives poetic justice in the end. Although I would classify the story as great, I would not classify it as a great or even a good autobiography according to the standards which have been set down previously.

This authentic slave narrative has clearly discernible motives, i.e., Henson's wish to make known to the people of the North the inhuman and detestable practices which occurred as a result of the institution of slavery, to inspire the other members of his race by his example, and

to give hope to those still in bondage that someday they too might be free. Since the motive is so obvious, the truth must necessarily suffer. The truth, from the point of view of selection and analysis of events, is so biased that the book becomes less of an autobiography and more of a success story of the public relations type.

Josiah Henson's life story is one of hundreds of slave narratives. Although these were autobiographical in nature, they were written as abolitionist propaganda. Their major purpose was to sell the beliefs of the abolitionists to the Northerners and the dream of freedom to the black South. For these reasons, an important element of truth is lacking in the slave narratives. As a result, any literary value such a work may have is incidental and secondary. Apart from their contribution to the cause of abolitionism, these slave narratives mark the beginnings of American Negro writings.

I. FREDERICK DOUGLASS

One of the authors of such a slave narrative who later rose to a position of prominence among the members of his race was Frederick Douglass.

Frederick Douglass, born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, is the Moses of the American Negroes who led his people out of bondage. Born in slavery in Talbot County, Maryland, in 1817, he escaped to freedom in 1838, and soon after became a lecturer for the Massachusetts

Anti-Slavery Society. He travelled and told the story of his life in bondage until the Civil War. After the war he worked to obtain suffrage and equal rights for his people, while at the same time holding various minor and major government offices until his death in 1895.

Frederick Douglass wrote three autobiographies. The first, entitled Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, was published in 1845; the second, My Bondage and My Freedom, was published in 1855; the third, The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, was published in 1881. This last work, written at the zenith of his career, is the most comprehensive of the three and therefore, will be more pertinent to my study.

In the conclusion to his Life and Times the author wrote: "My part has been to tell the story of the slave. The story of the master never wanted for narrators. They had all the talent and genius that wealth and influence could command to tell their story."[1]

In his telling of the story of the slave, Douglass has written his own story for the edification and example of the American Negro. At this stage of his life, the Civil War had been over for 16 years, slavery had been abolished and there was little need, as in his Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, to awaken the pre-war

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[1]Frederick Douglass, The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (New York: Pathway Press, 1941), p. 487.

abolition fever of the American people.

From his vantage point as Marshal of the District of Columbia in 1881, Douglass perceived his life as a progression from "First, the life of slavery; secondly, the life of a fugitive from slavery; thirdly, the life of comparative freedom; fourthly, the life of conflict and battle; and fifthly, the life of victory, if not complete, at least assured."[2]

The strongest and greatest influence on Douglass was exerted by the acknowledged leader of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, William Lloyd Garrison. Douglass first heard of Garrison during his first years of freedom while working in New Bedford at miscellaneous occupations. When the Abolitionists had their grand anti-slavery convention in Nantucket in 1841, Douglass received an invitation to attend; during the convention he was called upon to tell his story of slave life and thus began his career as lecturer. Although Douglass referred to himself as a self-made man, he did so with reservations, giving credit to all the friends of Abolition who supported the cause of anti-slavery throughout the pre-Civil War period.

After the Civil War, Douglass reflected that he did not have a cause. His life up until then had been synonymous with abolition, and once the battle was over, so was

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[2] Ibid., p. 487.

his occupation. Now Douglass was free to pursue his own career and work for his own fortune. This might have been the end of his speaking out for the American Negro had he wished to return to some less taxing occupation. The question of what to do was decided for him when he was invited to lecture at several Universities and accepted, using a lecture composed by him some time before called "Self-Made Men."

Though slavery had been abolished, Douglass realized that the wrongs of his people were not ended. He recognized that the power of the ballot box was necessary to secure the hard-won liberty of his people. "No man can be truly free whose liberty is dependent upon the thought, feeling, and actions of others; and who has himself no means in his own hands for guarding, protecting, defending, and maintaining that liberty."[3]

In his Life and Times, I believe that Douglass was honest about his politics. He led his people to vote for the Republicans, believing that party to be, like Abraham Lincoln, the champion of his race. He states in his Life and Times that he was not interested in a high political appointment, but Benjamin Quarles states in his biography of Douglass: "For his services in the campaign of 1868, Douglass had hoped to get the Rochester postmasterhip,

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[3] Ibid., p. 385.

but in 1871 he had given up hope of receiving a high appointive office during Grant's first administration."[4] Nevertheless, it became clear through the reading of his Life and Times, that Douglass' work for the emancipation and full citizenship of the American Negro was never prompted solely by the possibility of political or financial reward.

Douglass' Life and Times rates as one of the best Negro autobiographies in the period 1850-1950. He appeared to be both honest and probing in choosing the appropriate events for inclusion in his autobiography. He described his first trip to England as one which he made to escape the possibility of recapture as a fugitive after publication of his slave narrative. He praised the system of equal social privileges among the English. Further, he related various parts of his life to show an upward development in ability and confidence which culminated in his establishment of The North Star against the advice of his Boston Anti-Slavery friends. Out of respect for their views Douglass published the paper in Rochester, New York, rather than in Boston. He also included a clear discussion of his abandonment of the non-voting principle of the abolitionists, and their advocacy of secession from the slaveholding states. His analysis of the causes of

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[4]Benjamin Quarles, Frederick Douglass (Associated Publishers, Inc: Washington, 1948), pp. 253-254.

this turn-about are in the framework of good autobiography. In this, as in other instance, Douglass discovers a growth pattern in his life. A further element of good autobiography, i.e., the relationship of his life with the world, is discussed, for example, in the section showing his influence on Lincoln to use colored troops in the armed services during the Civil War, and the conduct of the Civil War as a war of abolition, rather than one of secession.

Bearing in mind Douglass' limited education and training, I must agree to some extent with Rebecca C. Barton, who says of the Life and Times: "We must wait several decades before we encounter once more in Negro-American autobiography this tone of high seriousness, and this mood of indignation tempered by perspective."[5]

II. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

A man quite different from Frederick Douglass became his successor to the role of leader of his race. That man was probably the greatest and most controversial figure among the Negro autobiographers - Booker T. Washington. His autobiography, Up From Slavery, is an outgrowth of a series of articles which he wrote for Outlook magazine from November 1900 through February 1903. His second

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[5]Rebecca C. Barton, Negro Americans in Autobiography (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1948), p. 174.

autobiography, entitled The Story of My Life, was published a short time later and differs only in his including in more detail some of his experiences in public speaking, the press coverage of his speeches, and his administration of Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. Both Up From Slavery and The Story of My Life will be treated as one autobiography.

Booker Talifero Washington was born in Franklin County, Virginia, in 1858 or 1859. His ancestry and date of birth are obscure, because he was born in slavery and no records except bills of sale were kept for members of the Negro race. After the slaves were emancipated in 1863, he moved with his family to Malden, West Virginia. The major part of his autobiography is merely another Horatio Alger story describing his hard work to achieve an education at Hampton, Virginia, his later teaching at Hampton, and finally, his establishment of Tuskegee Institute.

It goes without saying that Booker T. Washington was a great man and one of the greatest leaders of the American Negroes. He helped the Negro to help himself at a time when American citizens both North and South were tiring in the abuses of the Reconstruction policies after the Civil War. In 1877, after the last Federal troops were withdrawn from the South, the Negro's situation in the South was little better than that which he enjoyed

during his period of bondage. In his Up From Slavery, Washington relates his thoughts concerning the reconstruction period: "In many cases it seemed to me that the ignorance of my race was being used as a tool with which to help white men into office, and that there was an element in the North which wanted to punish the Southern white men by forcing the Negro into positions over the heads of the Southern whites. I felt that the Negro would be the one to suffer for this in the end. Besides, the general political agitation drew the attention of our people away from the more fundamental matters of perfecting themselves in the industries at their doors and in securing property."[6]

Washington's philosophy of education at Tuskegee was that of making each student a skilled worker in some trade which would be in demand in the economic market. He felt that if the Negro could do a skilled or semi-skilled job better than anyone else his color would not matter.

Booker also felt that the Negro educated in the Liberal Arts was, in fact, often a hindrance to his race because he would not be employed as a professional by either whites or blacks. Washington did not mean that the Negro should be trained exclusively for manual tasks.

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[6]Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1901), pp. 84-85.

He believed in the eventual progression of the Negroes from skilled industrial workers to owners of property and finally, to their complete acceptance as American citizens.

The story of Tuskegee and Booker T. Washington are one and the same. As a writer of autobiography, it was Washington's task to isolate and analyse periods of his life in order to arrive at a realization of his present position. From his standpoint in the present, in order to be truthful, the author must have discovered something new and complete about his personality.

In my opinion, based on my reading of the two biographies, Booker T. Washington was not an introspective man. He had neither the time nor the character to delve deeply into problems. If I were to tag the man, I would call him functional. He looked to the immediate problem and was so involved with the everyday duties of administration and fund-raising, that he did not perceive the overall pattern, nor the consequences that would ensue from some of his ideas and decisions.

For example, Washington was called by many during his lifetime the "Great Compromiser," and by many of his race, in these times, an "Uncle Tom."[7] The title of "Great Compromiser" refers to his Atlanta Exposition

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[7] Name given to a Negro who flatters people of the white race.

Address in September, 1895, in which he advised the white people of the South to hire the Negro and work together with him for economic security and advancement. In a very rhetorical passage he exhorted the white people of the South to "Cast down your bucket among these people who have without strikes and labor wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, and helped make possible this magnificent representation of the progress of the South."[8] Further, he states in the same speech, the famous lines which many Southerners and Northern whites took to heart: "In all things that are purely social we can be as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."[9] Certainly, his words had a great appeal at that exposition, and the speech was lauded from the lower echelons of the press to the highest and culminated in praise from the President of the United States, Grover Cleveland.

Washington's idea of social equality which would come with material prosperity, shows the man's naivete in urging the Negro to stay out of politics and concentrate on developing manual skills. What he did not perceive, in looking back at the events of his life, was that he was

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[8]Washington, op. cit., p. 221. [9]Ibid., p. 222.

admitting that the Negro was a second-class citizen who should count himself lucky to be earning a dollar, even though he was restricted by his color in places to spend it.

Finally, Booker T. Washington voiced the philosophy of the middle class white North when he advised, in his Atlanta Exposition speech, the hiring of Negroes in preference to foreigners. He was wittingly or unwittingly advocating a cheap labor force that would flood the market and bring down wages; also in referring to foreign labor, he was playing up to the industrialists of both the North and the South who definitely did not want to make any concessions to labor unions.

Booker T. Washington, in my estimation, was a great leader of the Negro race. However, I do not think that his is a great autobiography. It is the story of an ex-slave who tells the truth in his book in a way not offensive to the white people of his day.

This is the major weakness of Up From Slavery. Any event in his life story which might possibly injure either his own race or the whites is not mentioned at all, underemphasised or misinterpreted. A good example of this unwillingness to admit controversy or offense is Washington's statement that the opponents - particularly to his Atlanta Compromise - eventually came to agree with him. In actual fact, the opposition to Booker's philosophy for the Negro

was positive, well-expressed, and forcefully led by W. E. B. DuBois. This ostrich-like attitude of Washington's may have been an integral part of his personality, but in the literary evaluation of his autobiography this is a flaw which reduces Up From Slavery to merely another life story of a legendary leader.

Both Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington were race leaders born in slavery with much in common concerning their ideas for the education and uplift of the Negro race. Douglass believed that the best way to help the Negro was through training in the manual skills; Booker T. Washington went so far as to establish the greatest industrial school for Negroes in the South. Although both men believed that the training of men in industrial skills would result in their gaining wealth, ownership of property, and finally acceptance by the whites, of the two men, only Booker T. proposed to do this without the enfranchisement of the Negroes.

Washington's idea of educating the Negro in manual skills and de-emphasising the Liberal Arts education left him open to attack by a young and highly educated Negro intellectual: W. E. Burghardt DuBois. The controversy between Washington and DuBois will be dealt with hereafter in the analysis of the latter's autobiography.

III. W. E. B. DUBOIS

W. E. B. DuBois was born in 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. His grandfather gained freedom for his descendants by serving in the American Revolution. Colored people in Great Barrington numbered less than fifty and earned their living primarily by farming and hiring themselves out as servants. DuBois found no hostility to colored people here although the caste system was preserved.

Between the years 1885 and 1894 DuBois received his education at Fisk University, Harvard College, and the University of Berlin. DuBois' first choice for advanced education was Harvard University. However, he accepted a scholarship to Fisk University in Tennessee in 1885. DuBois recognized that had he attended Harvard rather than Fisk University he might have been content with white middle class values.

The main result of DuBois' schooling was to emphasize sciences and the scientific attitude. He was interested in evolution, geology, and the new psychology and thus began to conceive of the world as a continuing growth rather than a finished product. In Germany, he turned further away from religious dogma and began to grasp the idea of a world of human beings whose actions, like those

of the physical world, were subject to law.[10]

Thus, DuBois determined to put science into sociology through a study of the conditions and problems of his own group. He planned to study the facts concerning the American Negro and his plight, and by measurement, comparison, and research work up to a valid generalization.[11]

From the fall of 1894 to the spring of 1910, DuBois was a teacher. He remained at Wilberforce two years, at the University of Pennsylvania over a year, and thirteen years at Atlanta University in Georgia. It was at the University of Pennsylvania that DuBois was offered the opportunity to study the Negro problem scientifically. At that time, the city of Philadelphia had a theory that the great, rich, and famous municipality was in moral decline because of the crime and venality of its Negro citizens. Philadelphia wanted to prove this by figures and DuBois said that he was the man to do it. Of the city's motives behind the plan, DuBois neither knew nor cared. He saw only a chance to study a group of black folk and to show exactly what their place was in the community. DuBois found that his study revealed the Negro group as a symptom, not a cause of crime in Philadelphia. Of his

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[10] W. E. B. DuBois, Dusk of Dawn (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940), p. 50.

[11] Ibid., p. 58.

methods, DuBois wrote: "Convictions on all great matters of human interest one must have to a greater or less degree, and they will enter to some extent into the most cold-blooded scientific research as a disturbing factor. Nevertheless, here are some social problems before us demanding careful study, questions awaiting satisfactory answers. We must study, we must investigate, we must attempt to solve; and the utmost that the world can demand is, not lack of human interest and moral conviction, but rather the heart-quality of fairness, and an earnest desire for the truth despite its possible unpleasantness."[13]

After the completion of his Pennsylvania research, DuBois accepted a teaching position at Atlanta University which, because of its location, he saw as a unique laboratory for the social scientist. He had been asked by President Bumstead of Atlanta University to take charge of the work in sociology and of the new conferences which the University was inaugurating on the Negro Problem. For thirteen years DuBois and his group poured forth a series of studies dealing with Negro mortality, urbanization, the effort of Negroes for their own social betterment, Negroes in business, college-bred Negroes, the Negro common school, the Negro artisan, the Negro church, and Negro crime. In

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[13] Ibid., p. 59.

1906, the study included health and phsyiques of the American Negro, economic co-operation and the Negro American family.

DuBois' Atlanta University career in scientific research was abandoned after thirteen years. One reason was that the University was deprived of Federal and State educational funds owing to its policy of admitting people of any race. Also, as a result of Atlanta University's strong principles favoring social integration of the races, money from the northern philanthropists was withheld. Their main support was being tendered to Negro schools and colleges that provided industrial education. Perhaps the lack of funds was partially the reason for giving up the Atlanta Conference Studies, but a more cogent reason was the ideological controversy which arose between DuBois and Booker T. Washington.

DuBois believed in the higher education of a talented tenth who, through their knowledge of modern culture, could guide the American Negro into a higher civilization. DuBois knew that without this higher education, the Negro would have to accept white leadership, and such leadership could not always be trusted.

Washington, on the other hand, believed that the Negro should first be trained as an efficient worker and then educate his children and develop their possibilities. For that reason, he proposed to place the emphasis, for

the present, upon training in the skilled trades and encouragement in industry and common labor.[14]

Despite the slanted historical accounts of the Washington - DuBois controversy, the two theories were not absolutely contradictory. DuBois recognized the necessity of Negroes gaining a foothold in the trades, and Washington was not absolutely opposed to college training, but he did minimize its importance, and therefore discouraged philanthropic support of higher education. Beyond the difference of ideals lay another more bitter controversy. This controversy started with the rise at Tuskegee Institute, centering around Booker T. Washington, of what DuBois called the "Tuskegee Machine." Essentially, the "machine" was an outgrowth of Washington's undisputed leadership of the ten million Negroes in America, a leadership recognized by the whites and conceded by most of the Negroes. When young Negro intellectuals (mainly graduates from northern white colleges) began to protest that Washington decried political activities among Negroes, and yet dictated political objectives from Tuskegee, the beginning of the organized opposition to foes of Booker T. Washington resulted in the "Tuskegee Machine."

The "machine" arose naturally. Not only did Presidents of the United States consult Booker Washington, but

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[14] Ibid., p. 70.

governors, congressmen, philanthropists and scholars conferred with him. After a while, no appointments among Negroes to government or scholarly positions could be verified until they went through the clearing house of Tuskegee, Alabama. The "machine" was encouraged and given financial aid through certain white groups and individuals in the North. This northern group had clear objectives. They were capitalists and employers, friends and representatives of the Abolitionists who had taught in the South during Reconstruction. These people were the younger generation and believed that the Negro problem should not remain a matter of philanthropy, but must become a matter of business. Negroes were not to be encouraged as voters in the new democracy, nor were they to be left at the mercy of the reactionary South. They could become a strong labor force and, properly guided, they would restrain the unbridled demands of white labor born of the Northern labor unions and now spreading to the South. Thus, the philosophy of Booker T. Washington received the full support of Southern and Northern entrepreneurs.

In 1906, DuBois organized what was known as the Niagara Movement as a protest against the policies of Booker T. Washington and sympathizers. Twenty-nine colored men from fourteen states met during July, 1906. Its purpose DuBois stated as: "For organized determination and aggressive action on the part of men who believe in

Negro freedom and growth."[15] The Negro was determined to secure the full civil and political rights of citizenship by non-violent action. The Niagara Movement gave way to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909. It included members of all races as it does to this day.

In 1910, William E. B. DuBois created the Crisis magazine, the official propaganda arm of the NAACP, which he continued to edit until 1934. The magazine placed consistently and continuously before the country a clear-cut statement of the legitimate aims of the American Negro and the facts concerning his condition. The staff of the Crisis began to organize attacks against the "Grandfather Clauses," lynching, and residential segregation in 1917. The magazine, although the arm of the NAACP, was self-supporting. It had fantastic success until 1929; during the depression the association subsidized its finances.

DuBois was given free rein in his editorials and he did not always follow the principles laid down by the association. He argued with the principles of the association until his severance from it in 1934.

The Dusk of Dawn of W. E. B. DuBois is not a true autobiography. He states in the apology which prefaces

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[15] Ibid., p. 88.

his work that "I have written what is meant to be not so much my autobiography as the autobiography of a concept of race, elucidated, magnified and doubtless distorted in the thoughts and deeds which were mine."[16]

In his glance backward over his life, he first recognized that he was considered a second class citizen even in the Northern town of Great Barrington. He became even more aware of this fact after attending Fisk University and experiencing the segregation and injustice in the state of Georgia. At Harvard and the University of Berlin he came to the conclusion that the policy of European and American economic imperialism was based on the suppression of the colored nations of the world. He was taught that the superior race was the race that had a history and culture, and that the colored people of the world had none. Therefore, they were inferior.

DuBois thought that the American Negro problem should be studied scientifically, weighing all the facts pro and con in order to arrive at some truth, either advantageous to the race or otherwise, and whatever defects found could be pointed out and reformed. This was his thinking while doing the Atlanta University studies.

Later DuBois came to realize that the prejudice against the Negro was psychologically embedded in the minds

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[16] Ibid., p. viii.

of white America and that no matter how educated or refined a Negro became these achievements would not earn him acceptance.

DuBois recognized a pattern in which the events of his life were related to the major historical, social and educational movements in the United States and throughout the world. The Negro problem naturally affected him personally.

By employing the scientific rules of research in his Philadelphia and Atlanta Conference Studies, he contributed more to the study of the Negro race than any other person during his lifetime. But probably the most important personal belief that he was led to in his studies was that the Negro would not be accepted because of the psychological prejudice of the whites. He further saw that one of the major contributing factors that served to strengthen the concept of the Negro's inferiority was Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition speech of 1895. DuBois felt that Washington, probably unwittingly, set the fight for equality of the Negro back 50 years.

Through his studies of politics and economics, he concluded that the Negro was used by most of the white nations of the world; consequently, wars such as the Spanish-American, World War I, and World War II had their roots in the greediness of the white nations to strengthen their economy by exploiting the colored peoples of the world.

DuBois felt that democracy was for whites only, but in spite of this, he urged Negroes to fight for their country in World War I, regardless of the fact that they were being lynched and abused even in the training camps of the South.

However, after World War I, DuBois believed that the ideals for which he and the NAACP were striving were passé. He contended that the only hope for the Negroes was to organize their own consumer co-operatives, band together in their own labor organizations, and establish their own schools for the professions.

DuBois did not believe in Revolutionary Communism, but was greatly impressed by the socialistic theory of economic reform exemplified in Marxist theories.

Finally, Dusk of Dawn is not simply a life story. It describes the thinking of the whites as well as the blacks concerning the problem of the Negro. His sincerity can not be doubted as he explains logically his reasons for action. He is sometimes boastful, but that seems to be a trait of his character. He was not, however, an idle ranter, but backed up his boasts by scientific research. The incidents of his life were not chosen with a view to creating a favorable image for himself. He was a true intellectual who made the power of his pen a useful weapon for justice.

The November, 1965 issue of the Atlantic Monthly

contains an article by Ralph McGill entitled "W. E. B. DuBois." The article relates an interview which he had with DuBois in Ghana early in 1963. DuBois worked for various Communist front organizations after his final break with the NAACP. According to McGill, DuBois made use of these organizations in order to agitate for Negro civil rights.

In 1952, he abandoned the struggle for Negro rights to team up with Premier Kwame Nkrumah in promoting a Pan-African movement. At ninety-four DuBois became a citizen of Ghana where he had resided since 1960. Even though he had worked for Communist front organizations, he did not request membership until 1957, when he ceased to believe that any other system could produce the world he wanted.

DuBois died in Ghana, August 28, 1963, on the eve of the march on Washington, the largest demonstration for civil rights ever held. He was 95 years old.

CHAPTER III

WRITERS

Although the race leaders had a strong tendency to write and the writers had a strong tendency to exert some form of leadership, the line of distinction between the two categories is obvious. Among the writers, James Weldon Johnson was actively involved in promoting racial equality, and is, therefore, a good subject with which to open this section.

I. JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

James Weldon Johnson's Along This Way was the fascinating story of the Negro author, poet, diplomat, and race worker. Born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1871, he lived during the late career of Frederick Douglass, the era of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois, and the Negro Renaissance of the 1920's.

The author divided his autobiography into four major parts, each of these parts representing a separate phase of his life.

While on vacation from Atlanta University in the summer of 1893, Johnson taught school among the Negro farmers in Georgia's back country. "In all of my experience there has been no period so brief that has meant so much in my education for life as the three months I spent in the

backwoods of Georgia. I was thrown for the first time on my own resources and abilities. I had my first lesson in dealing with men and conditions in the outside world. I underwent my first tryout with social forces. Certainly, the field was limited, the men and conditions simple, and the results not particularly vital; nevertheless, taken together they constituted the complex world in microcosm. It was this period that marked the beginning of my psychological change from boyhood to manhood."[1]

In the backwoods of Georgia, the author found vicious discrimination in the mock justice of the courts in which he heard the Judge tell the jury: "Gentlemen of the jury, I don't have to tell you this nigger is guilty; you know it as well as I do. All you got to do is bring in a verdict of guilty."[2] The dangers of being on the road after dark, the fear of asking for a drink of water at the house of a white, not knowing if he were friendly or unfriendly - all these things, coupled with the ignorance forced on the people by their dire poverty, made Johnson realize for the first time the helplessness of the Negro in the Deep South. In Jacksonville, he had known a happy home, adequate, if not sumptuous, living conditions, and segregation

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[1] James W. Johnson, Along This Way (New York: The Viking Press, 1933), p. 119.

[2] Ibid., p. 115.

though minor compared with Georgian communities.

Johnson's choice of occupation after college reflected his philosophy of service to his race, which later became embodied in his position as Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He had two alternatives when he left Atlanta University: a scholarship in medicine at Harvard or the principalship of Stanton School. His decision to accept the principalship was influenced by his education at Atlanta: "The central idea embraced a term that is now almost a butt for laughter - 'service'. We were never being educated as 'go-getters'. Most of us knew that we were being educated for life work as underpaid teachers."[3] He was a successful administrator while at Stanton Grammar School, however, he still found time to read law and was the first Negro since Reconstruction to be admitted to the Florida Bar Association and the State Supreme Court. His position as principal of Stanton and his idealism prompted him to establish, with two friends, the Daily American, the first Negro daily paper. It was short-lived.

In 1897, James's brother Rosamund returned from the New England Conservatory of Music where he studied for his degree. After establishing his studio in the family homestead, Rosamund gave music lessons, and the two brothers,

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[3] Ibid., p. 122.

both musically inclined, talked of collaborating on a comic opera. It was never produced, but many of the songs were used for contemporary broadway shows. This combination of the Johnson brothers was the beginning of a vaudeville career for Rosamund Johnson and Bob Cole, with lyrics by James Johnson.

The Johnson brothers took their works to New York in the summer during the school vacation. While there, besides selling a few tunes, they met Williams and Walker, comeddians; Will Marion Cook, the Negro composer; Harry T. Burleigh, the musician and singer; and a number of others doing pioneer work in Negro theatricals. In the author's connecting chain of events the summer in New York became very significant: "These glimpses of life that I caught during our last two or three weeks in New York were not . . . unfamiliar to Rosamund, but they showed me a new world - an alluring world, a tempting world, a world of greatly lessened restraints, a world of fascinating perils; but, above all, a world of tremendous artistic potentialities. Up to this time, outside of polemical essays on the race question, I had not written a single line that had any realization of the importance of the American Negro's cultural backgrounds and his creative folk art, and to speculate on the superstructure of conscious art that

might be reared upon them."[4]

Johnson's first step along these lines was an attempt to bring a higher degree of artistry to Negro songs, especially with regard to the text, with a song called "Louisiana Lize" written by the Johnson brothers and Bob Cole. Negro songs, then the rage, were known as "coon songs" and were concerned with the play of razors, chicken, pork chops, and watermelon, not to mention the "red-hot mammas" and not too faithful "papas." Johnson maintained that "Louisiana Lize" was a forerunner of the style that displaced the old "coon song." Returning to Jacksonville in the fall, he wrote the poem "Sence You Went Away," which appeared in Century magazine.

Between 1900 and 1905, Johnson lived entirely on what he made writing librettos for light opera, and lyrics for the vaudeville team composed of Cole and his brother Rosamund. In 1904, he campaigned for the Republicans while in New York helping to elect Theodore Roosevelt. While his brother and Cole were on the vaudeville circuit, he took some English courses at Columbia University. At this point, Johnson felt that he wanted to do something more than write material for broadway shows.

Following Roosevelt's election to a second term, Johnson was offered the Consulship of Puerto Cabello in

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[4] Ibid., p. 152.

Venezuela. Between the years 1905-1912 Johnson performed his duties faithfully and conscientiously both in Venezuela and later in Corinto, Nicaragua. He married a Brooklyn girl on one of his leaves during his tour of duty in Nicaragua. Johnson resigned from the Consulate service at the beginning of the Wilson administration in 1913.

He then returned to Jacksonville to take up the practice of law and continue his writing. The Negro in Jacksonville, as in other parts of Florida and the Southern states, was suffering from more and more discrimination as his civil and social rights were disappearing under a new Democratic Administration. After practicing law in Jacksonville for two years, he was advised by friends to leave because his successful law practice was proving offensive to the white citizens. In the summer of 1915, Johnson headed for New York and a new career as editorial writer for the Negro paper, The New York Age, in a column entitled "Views and Reviews." He enjoyed his work because it gave him an opportunity to continue his writing. While in New York, Johnson attended a conference of prominent whites and Negroes which led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. When asked to take the position of Field Secretary in the Association, he wrote: "When I received Mr. Spingarn's letter, it at once seemed to me that every bit of experience I had had, from the principalship of Stanton

School to editorship on the New York Age, was preparation for the work I was being asked to undertake."[5]

The central purpose for the NAACP was nothing more nor less than to claim for the Negro equality under the fundamental law of the United States; to insist upon the impartial application of that law; to proclaim that democracy stultified itself when it barred men from its benefits solely on the grounds of race and color.[6]

During his term of office, from 1916 to 1930, Johnson and his staff investigated several incidents involving the rights of Negroes: Negro disfranchisement in Southern states, discrimination against Negroes in the service during World War I, pleas for justice in cases of violation of Negro property rights, and loss of life by lynching. In these busy times of travelling and speaking all over the country in the interest of the Association, Johnson received the inspiration to put his ideas on the Negro Sermon into action: "I should take the primitive stuff of the old-time Negro Sermon and, through art-governed expression, make it into poetry. I felt that this primitive stuff could be used in a way similar to that in which a composer makes use of a folk theme. I believed that the characteristics of imagery, color, abandon, sonorous diction, syncopated rhythms, and native idioms, could be

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[5] Ibid., p. 309.

[6] Ibid., p. 310.

preserved and, at the same time, the composition as a whole be enlarged beyond the circumference of mere race, and given universality."[7]

As a result of this inspiration, a collection of poems was published under the title God's Trombones, which included his famous poems "Creation" and "Go Down Death." In 1922, Johnson published the Book of American Negro Poetry, a collection of Negro poets from Phyllis Wheatley in 1761 to his contemporary and friend, Paul Lawrence Dunbar.

In summary, I would compare Johnson with Frederick Douglass in the breadth of his career. Douglass, of course, was born in slavery and did not have the advantages of formal education, but in spirit the two men had a similar philosophy of life: to give the Negro his rights as a citizen of the United States, and to insist on the power of the ballot and public opinion in bringing this about. Neither man was a compromiser. They were proud of the race and labored to bring to light accomplishments and talents of its members, themselves the living examples.

The author of Along This Way looked backward and chose the major events and achievements that brought him to his present level of accomplishment and formed his personality. He analysed his personality and his relat-

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[7] Ibid., p. 335.

ionship to happenings in the outside world. He was sincere in documenting each stage of his life with major happenings in the social, civil, literary, and educational fields. This autobiography, in my estimation, meets the test of truth by fulfilling the requirements of the definition established in the introduction.

II. CLAUDE MCKAY

A contemporary of James Weldon Johnson and also a poet and novelist was the Jamaican-born Claude McKay. His autobiography, A Long Way From Home, is an exciting addition to the store of American Negro autobiographies. Born in Jamaica in 1890, McKay had established his reputation as a poet in his homeland and England before coming to the United States in 1911. He studied at Tuskegee Institute and at Kansas State College. After a few years he gave up his studies to travel around the country working at menial tasks, gaining experience which was later to prove valuable to him as a writer.

While working for the Pennsylvania Railroad as a waiter during the last years of World War I, he lived in Harlem. His work was introduced to American readers by Frank Harris, the British-American writer who published McKay's poems in Pearson's. Shortly after, two of his sonnets appeared in Seven Arts under the pseudonym of Eli Edwards. Claude was acquainted with the radical publication The Masses, which later became the Liberator.

Claude became friends with the Liberator's editorial staff who, in 1918, published Claude's famous poem, "If We Must Die."

McKay was not a card-carrying member of the Communist Party but a fellow traveller who sympathized with the Russian Revolution. Travelling to London in 1919, McKay worked for the left-wing paper Dread Naught. Dread Naught was raided by Scotland Yard and Mrs. Pankhurst, the editor, and her Assitant Editor, Comrade Vie, were arrested for conspiracy against the government. McKay fled to the United States, where in 1920 he became associate editor of the Liberator, working with Floyd Dell and Max Eastman. Many famous personages, such as Elinor Wylie, E. E. Cummings, and Carl Van Doren used to frequent the offices of the Liberator to discuss writing and the social situation.

Of the Negro intelligentsia, McKay described his meetings with DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, Hubert Harrison, and Jessie Fauset. He was favorably impressed with all except DuBois, whom he thought surly.

During the Fourth International, in 1922, McKay went to Russia via Germany. Not being an official delegate of the American Communist Party, McKay became a source of embarrassment to the United States' representatives. However, the Russians gave McKay the red-carpet treatment while in their country. McKay spoke at official functions of the highest echelon before leaving Russia in 1923.

Although McKay approved in principle of the Revolution, he refused to write poetry for Communist Party purposes. The Russians were disappointed when he refused to condemn American institutions as totalitarian.

Leaving Russia, McKay returned to Germany and then on to Paris. He later lived for a time in Marseilles where he became acquainted with French-colonial Negroes, who were either sailors or longshoremen.

While in Paris, he met many of the expatriate writers who frequented the salon of Gertrude Stein. McKay also went to Spain and Morocco, where he felt at home. In 1926, after he had published his novel, Home to Harlem, he received a letter from James Weldon Johnson asking him to come home and take part in the Negro Renaissance movement. McKay did not accept Johnson's invitation because his book, Home to Harlem, had received scorching reviews from the Negro intelligentsia: "But the resentment of the Negro intelligentsia against Home to Harlem was so general, bitter and violent that I was hesitant about returning to the great Black Belt. I had learned very little about the ways of the Harlem elite during the years I lived there."[8]

Later, Claude McKay met many of the Negro Renaissance members in Paris: "The cream of Harlem was in Paris. There was the full cast of Blackbirds with Adelaide Hall

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[8]Claude McKay, A Long Way From Home (New York: Lee Furman, Inc., 1937), p. 307.

starring in the place of Florence Mills, just as fascinating a group off the stage as they were extraordinary on the stage. The Porgy actors had come over from London. There was an army of school teachers and nurses. There were Negro Communists going to and returning from Russia. There were Negro students from London and Scotland and Berlin and the French Universities. There were presidents and professors of the best Negro colleges. And there were painters and writers and poets, of whom the most outstanding was Countee Cullen."[9]

In A Long Way From Home, McKay chronicled the political and literary movements as they related to his life during the years 1912-1937. In his autobiography he described his dabbling in revolutionary communism while in Russia, the employment of Bengalese Troops in the occupation of the Ruhr after World War I, the Back-to-Africa movement in Harlem, and the racial prejudice at home and abroad. McKay showed great insight into the problems and feelings of the Negro as a member of a minority group: "It is hell to belong to a suppressed minority and outcast group. For to most members of the powerful majority, you are not a person; you are a problem. And every crusading crank imagines he knows how to solve your problem. I think I am a rebel mainly from psychological reasons,

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[9] Ibid., pp. 311-312.

which have always been more important to me than economic. As a member of a weak minority, you are not supposed to criticize your friends of the strong majority. You will be damned as mean and ungrateful. Therefore, you and your group must be content with lower critical standards."[10]

McKay's look into the Negro Renaissance movement found it lacking: "My idea of a renaissance was one of talented persons of an ethnic or national group working individually or collectively in a common purpose and creating things that would be typical of their group."[11] He felt that many talented Negroes regarded their renaissance only as a vehicle to accelerate the pace and progress of smart Negro society.

Speaking futher about the members of the Negro Renaissance, McKay said of Negro writers: "Each one wanted to be the first Negro, the one Negro, and the only Negro for the whites instead of for their group. Because an unusual number of them were receiving grants to do creative work, they actually and naively believed that Negro artists as a group would always be treated differently from white artists and be protected by powerful white patrons."[12]

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[10] Ibid., p. 345.

[11] Ibid., p. 321.

[12] Ibid., p. 322.

McKay, when he spoke of the various motives of the white expatriate writers in the 1920's, sympathized with them but recognized his own reason for living abroad as one of color: "Color-consciousness was the fundamental of my restlessness. And it was something with which my fellow-expatriates could sympathize but which they could not altogether understand. For they were not black like me . . . For all their knowledge and sophistication, they couldn't understand the instinctive and animal and purely physical pride of a black person resolute in being himself and yet living a simple civilized life themselves."[13] McKay loved the physical greatness of America, but the social condition naturally galled him.

McKay's A Long Way From Home has the elements of good biography. He was sincere and serious in his selection of events in shaping the past. He analyzed the problem of being a Negro from his point of view as poet, novelist, social critic, and human being. His arguments are sound, but perhaps he has taken upon himself the role of judge by judging the motives of other men, both white and black. However, his knowledge of life transcends racial prejudice, as he, like a later writer, Langston Hughes, lives his life as a man, an individual

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[13] Ibid., p. 245.

who tries first of all to depict the problems of the world, not just those of the Negro race.

III. LANGSTON HUGHES

Langston Hughes's autobiography, The Big Sea, reveals a person of well-rounded personality. It is obvious from the prose style that the author is a poet. By use of the flash-back technique, he reconstructs the major events of his life that helped form his philosophy and the pattern of values which he embraces.

Born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902, Langston Hughes lived with his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas, until his twelfth year; with his mother in Cleveland through high school, and with his father during school vacations in Mexico. His parents had separated when he was a small boy. In his father's ancestry there was a Scottish distiller named Clay, a descendant of the famous stateman, Henry Clay. His mother's ancestry included a Captain Ralph Quarles, related to the Jacobean poet, Francis Quarles, a freeman named Sheridan Leary who was a follower of John Brown, and a brother of John Mercer Langston who had been a congressman from Virginia, Minister to Haiti, and Dean of the first Law School at Howard University.

In Book I of The Big Sea, Hughes was twenty-one and had just completed an unsuccessful year at Columbia University. As the ship on which he was mess boy left New York, he threw his books overboard. Quite melodramatic,

he himself admitted, but also significant of his break with the world of books and other peoples' ideas; he was twenty-one and felt that he was an individual who would from then on do exactly as he pleased. He was bound for the West Coast of Africa. His dreams of Africa and its beautiful people led him to believe that he would be received by the natives as a brother, but because Hughes was a mulatto, African blacks of the Gold Coast did not believe that he was a Negro.

Hughes, from this point in his book, looked at events and accomplishments that had led him to his present occupation as seaman at the age of twenty-one. He was never ashamed of being a Negro, nor did he hate whites as a group. When Hughes started at the Harrison Street School in Topeka, Kansas, his mother had to fight the school board for his admittance. He was the only colored child in the school and was subject to some teasing by the white children. But this did not leave an indelible mark of hatred for whites in his memory: "But there was one little white boy who would always take up for me. Sometimes others of my classmates would, as well. So I learned early not to hate all white people, and ever since, it has seemed to me that most people are generally good, in every race, and in every country where I have been."[14]

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[14] Langston Hughes, The Big Sea (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 14.

His poetic career began when he was elected Class Poet of his grammar school class at Lawrence, Kansas. The title of poet was given him because most white people thought that colored children had a natural rhythmic bent. The only poems that Hughes remembered hearing as a child were those of Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Hughes's mother loved reading and took him to the library while they lived in Topeka. His interest in poetry and literature had its roots in the early recitation of poems by his mother.

The fact that his mother and father separated before he was born had helped to determine his attitude toward his own race and that of others. Langston's father's hatred of the color bar, and its restrictions prompted him to migrate to Mexico where it was virtually non-existent. In 1919, while going to high school in Cleveland, Hughes spent a summer vacation in Mexico with his father. The elder Hughes was a very snobbish man and frequently made derogatory remarks about the poor Mexicans and the Indians; their low station he attributed to laziness. Langston spent an unhappy summer adding figures for his father, a very practical man. At the end of the summer, Langston detested him to the extent of becoming physically ill. After graduation he visited his father again to talk over his future. Mr. Hughes urged Langston to study mining engineering in Europe, but he finally agreed to

Langston's choice of Columbia University. Langston was elated, for he had longed to see Harlem, Negro capital of the world.

At Columbia, Hughes found subtle prejudices. For instance, he was given a room in a dormitory for whites because he had registered from Mexico and was, therefore, presumed to be Mexican, not Negro. Prejudice extended to the school's publication, the Spectator. He did get assigned to write up fraternity news, but this of course, was impossible, for no Negroes were admitted to the fraternities. To Hughes, Columbia "was all a little like my senior year in high school - except more so - when one noticed that the kids began to get a bit grown and girl-conscious and standoffish and anti-Negro in the American way, that increases when kids take on the accepted social habits."[15]

The only instructor that Hughes got to know and like was Mr. Wasson, who read Mencken aloud. He did not like Columbia and spent his time reading, attending lectures at the Rand School under Ludwig Lewisohn and Heywood Broun. He went to Shuffle Along, the Negro musical which he credits with ushering in the Negro Renaissance. After finals Hughes moved out of Hartley Hall and down into Harlem. He tried to get a job in New York City, but people were

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[15] Ibid., p. 84.

surprised when he answered advertisements, since they had not advertised for colored. He finally found work on a truck farm in Staten Island; later he worked for a flower shop in New York City which catered to the rich. He was then twenty years old.

Later, Langston took a job aboard what is called a "mother ship." A mother ship looks after a fleet which is placed in drydock. He spent the winter in Jones Point, New York, tending World War I ships that had been decommissioned. While on board ship, he read Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh, Conrad's Heart of Darkness, and d'Annunzio's The Flame of Life. That winter, Langston wrote a poem called "The Weary Blues." This later became the title of a book of his poems published by Alfred A. Knopf. He had sent a few poems to the Crisis, of which a few were accepted. Alain Locke, Professor of Philosophy at Howard University, wrote him to ask if he might visit him at Jones Point. Hughes refused because he felt that it would be out of place to have a distinguished professor clambering about on the rolling ships. In the spring he left the mother ship and took the SS. Malone bound for Africa.

Book II of The Big Sea described Hughes's voyage to Africa, his shipping to Holland, and his stay in Paris. After arriving in Paris with seven dollars in his pocket, he lived in the Montmartre section. While there, he met

Rayford Logan, Professor of History at Howard University, who had stayed in Paris after the First World War. Logan subscribed to the Crisis magazine and had read some of Hughes's poetry. Through Logan's influence, Hughes received work as a second cook in a night club. The owner of the club was French and the manager, orchestra and chanteuse were all colored. From listening to the after-hour jam sessions, Hughes received inspiration for many of his poems.

After working in Paris for the winter, Hughes traveled to Italy for the summer season. While there, he received a cable from Alain Locke inviting him to Venice. He showed Langston the beauty and culture of Venice which he knew so well. After the week in Venice, Hughes started back to Paris planning to visit Claude McKay on the French Riviera. His passport and money were stolen on the train and he was forced off at Genoa, where he remained until he secured working passage on a ship bound for America. He arrived home with a quarter in his pocket after leaving Paris ten months before with seven dollars.

After arriving in New York, Hughes went to Washington where his mother lived with her aristocratic friends. They had begun to recognize Langston now that his poems had appeared in the Survey Graphic, a magazine which included articles, stories, and poems by the young Negro writers such as Countee Cullen, Hughes, and Zora Neale

Hurston.

"The New Negro," Washington's leading colored literary club, decided to honor the new Negro writers by inviting them to their annual dinner, a very formal event in the city. Hughes refused their invitation, since it excluded his mother. In the background of Washington ghetto life, Hughes recognized the superficial tone of Negro society. No Negro could get a Coca Cola, attend theaters, or eat a meal other than in the colored section of the city. Yet there were color lines within the race itself. Those Negroes who were the uneducated, full-blooded blacks, were looked down upon by the educated Negroes with white blood. This bothered Hughes, who disliked all pretension. He said of the government workers, professors and teacher, doctors, lawyers, and resident politicians: "They were, on the whole, as unbearable and snobbish a group of people as I have ever come in contact with anywhere. They lived in comfortable homes, had fine cars, played bridge, drank Scotch, gave exclusive 'formal parties' and dressed well, but seemed to me altogether lacking in real culture, kindness, or good common-sense."[16] Some of the Negro socialites went so far as to boast of being directly descended from the leading Southern white families on the

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[16] Ibid., pp. 206-207.

colored side - that is, the illegitimate side. Hughes told of one prominent Negro family whose members traced their ancestry back to George Washington and his various slave mistresses. Hughes felt much more comfortable on Seventh Street, where there was small interest in pedigree, where gay, uninhibited souls laughed within sight of the Capitol. While in Washington, Hughes entered a poetry contest conducted by Opportunity magazine, the official publication of the National Urban League. The poem, "The Weary Blues," was submitted by Hughes and took the prize of forty dollars. Hughes travelled to New York where he received the prize at a banquet given for himself and other young Negro writers. After the banquet, Hughes met Carl Van Vechten who submitted a selection of Hughes's poems to Alfred Knopf. Knopf later published them in a book entitled The Weary Blues. His poems were also published in various periodicals such as the New Republic, the Bookman, and the Crisis. Later Hughes won the Amy Spingarn prize offered by Crisis.

It was during Christmas, 1925, that Hughes received a full scholarship to Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. There he remained until he received his degree.

In the final book of The Big Sea, Hughes told of Manhattan's Renaissance, beginning in 1920 with Shuffle Along, Running Wild, and the Charleston, and reaching its peak before the crash of 1929. Hundreds of Negro musical

revues, written, staged, and acted by Negroes, were the rage of white and black. These were exciting times. Hughes attended parties given for the new Negro artists and litterati. Names such as Jules Bledsoe(Emperor Jones), Paul Robeson, Ethel Waters, "Bojangles" Robinson, Louis Armstrong, Claude McKay, James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston were becoming famous. Whites came to Harlem in throngs. Clubs became Jim Crow in reverse. The "Cotton Club" would not admit any Negro unless he was a famous personage. It catered to white people who had come to see Negro artists such as Duke Ellington perform.

In the midst of this social life, Langston Hughes published his second book of poems, Fine Clothes to the Jew, for which he was attacked by the Negro press. Benjamin Brawley, Negro social historian, and most repectable Negro critic wrote: "It would have been just as well, perhaps better, if the book had never been published. No other ever issued reflects more fully the abandon and vulgarity of its age."[17] Hughes thought that this book was better than his first, which was more subjective. In Fine Clothes to the Jew, he made use of Negro folk song forms and included poems about work and the problem of finding work. Because he used the dialect, the intellectual Negro accused him of distorting the image of the New

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[17] Ibid., p. 266.

Negro. He sympathized with their view, but he also knew that the lower class, the greater number, were not refined. So to be true to himself as a writer he presented them as they were in fact.

From 1925 to 1929, Langston Hughes attended Lincoln University. While there, he wrote most of his novel - Not Without Laughter - being set free from financial worry by his anonymous white Park Avenue patron. He polished the novel and published a play, Mulatto, which dealt with the problems which the light-colored Negro encountered in society. It was unsuccessful.

More successful was a research paper he wrote in his Senior year at Lincoln, which was a study of the institution's policy of an all-white faculty and an all-white board of trustees in an all-Negro University. He showed the contradiction between the University's policy of educating Negro leaders but at the same time refusing them jobs as instructors or professors or positions on the board of trustees. A student poll taken by Hughes showed 80% to be in favor of white professors. Students thought that Negro professors would show partiality to Negro students; consequently, they would receive an inferior education.

At Commencement, a famous former graduate of Lincoln University objected to the boldness with which the facts of Hughes's survey were presented. He said to Hughes:

"Young man, suppose I told the truth to white folks. I never could have built the great institution I've built for my race."[18] He told Hughes that that was not the way to get things out of white folks. He implied that the way to get things was by flattery, cajolery, good-natured beggin, lying, and general "Uncle Tomming," not by truth.

Langston Hughes, poet, author, and world traveller, showed how his experiences, both pleasant and unpleasant, influenced him to choose writing as his vocation: "Literature is a big sea full of many fish. I let down my nets and pulled. I'm still pulling."[19]

In The Big Sea, Langston Hughes demonstrated his ability to probe into the events of his first twenty-seven years and measure the influences that caused him to arrive at his present level. Some of these influencing factors were: his travels, the people he met in foreign countries, the Negro Renaissance, his patron who paid his way through college - all are the fish of the sea from which he acquired knowledge and values, hence coming to a better knowledge and understanding of himself.

In telling his story he was truthful. He could not escape being a Negro and did not want to. Europe, especially France, was enjoyable because of the absence of a color bar. Races there were free to mingle without fear

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[18] Ibid., p. 209.

[19] Ibid., p. 209.

of reproof. But he was a realist, and acknowledged, with regret, that in the America of his day it only happened that the famous intellectual, entertainer, or writer could mingle with the whites. He did not become disillusioned with or bitter against all whites because he believed in his own worth.

Hughes reviewed his life and wrote a better than average autobiography.

IV. ZORA NEALE HURSTON

Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography, Dust Tracks on the Road, is an entertaining tale of a Negro girl born in the all-Negro town of Eatonville, Florida, in 1903. Her rise from relative poverty to become a successful writer could be compared with that of Cinderella, fairy godmother included. The good relationship with the white people in the adjacent town of Maitland influenced the favorable attitude toward white people that she held for the rest of her life.

Zora was mid-wifed by a passing white man who heard her mother's screams. This same white man was a staunch individual who taught Zora to be self-reliant. He advised her never to run from a fair fight, but to use discretion in situations where the odds were against her. The white man was a hard-riding, hard-drinking, hard-fighting, and hard-cursing individual. He helped foster within Zora the traits of strength, courage, and individuality.

Her childhood was happy within the family. Her father was the nominal head of the family, but the mother provided the staying power. That fact became evident after the death of her mother when Zora was ten years old and her father married within a month. He sent the children to a boarding school in Jacksonville, where Zora no longer had the freedom with whites experienced during her early years.

Miss Hurston believed that she had a vision in which her future life was revealed to her in a dream she experienced when very young. "There was no continuity as in an average dream. Just disconnected scene after scene with blank spaces in between. I knew that they were all true, a preview of things to come, and my soul writhed in agony and shrunk away, but I knew that there was no shrinking. These things had to be."[20] She felt that eventually she would also have much happiness. Whether or not the visions were the effect of her imagination or were from heaven, from the time of that experience her life followed the course of her visions.

After the death of her mother and two years at Jacksonville, she and her brothers and sisters were forced to find jobs and support themselves. Zora held several jobs

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[20]Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1942), p. 65.

as a domestic but was often dismissed for reading on the job. Her passion for reading began in Eatonville where she was given gifts of books by two visiting white teachers. She had read the children's books at the elementary school, so the gifts of the Iliad, and the Aeneid, and a book of Norse mythology were a welcome challenge to the young girl. When she worked for members of her own race or for poor whites, she missed being able to discuss the literature that she had read.

The event that gave Zora an indirect opportunity to further her education came when she was sixteen. Her eldest brother had become a registered pharmacist and was working in Jacksonville. He invited Zora to live at his home. In return for her performing domestic chores, he promised to help her continue her education. Later he reneged on his promise. While staying at her brother's home, Zora worked as a ladies' maid to the leading lady in a travelling Gilbert and Sullivan troupe, then playing in Jacksonville. She later toured with the troupe for eighteen months, until the leading lady married and left the show. The troupe was playing in Baltimore at the time, so Zora decided to remain in that city.

She had learned much from members of the Gilbert and Sullivan troupe. Many of the players had had professional training in Grand Opera and were willing to pass on their knowledge of classical music to Zora. A young tenor, a

former Harvard student, lent Zora many of his books. After leaving the troupe, she went to night school in Baltimore, and finally registered as a full-time student at Morgan College in that city. She was later able to enter Howard University in Washington, D. C., where she stayed two years, participating in many activities, including the college literary society. Dr. Alain Locke was the presiding genius of this society. Zora sent a short story, "Drenched in Light," to Opportunity. She won a prize for her story and travelled to New York where she received it. After meeting Zora, Fannie Hurst offered her a job as her secretary and Annie Nathan Meyer procured for her a scholarship to Barnard College.

While at Barnard she majored in anthropology. A term paper that she wrote while at Barnard was brought to the attention of Dr. Franz Boas, and through him Zora received a fellowship upon her graduation. The fellowship entailed touring the South and collecting Negro folklore.

Her first six months of research were unfruitful because of her inability to communicate with the Negro lower classes. Later Mrs. R. Osgood Mason, whom she refers to as Godmother, set aside two hundred dollars a month for two years in order that she could continue her work. Mrs. Mason was a patron of many other Negro painters and writers, including Langston Hughes, during the period following the Negro Renaissance.

Zora travelled among the Negro sawmill workers in Florida's Polk County, collecting their songs and anecdotes about their prowess with razor and knife; she delved into voodooism in New Orleans and collected folk music in the Bahamas. She was very impressed with the music of the Bahamas. "The music of the Bahaman Negroes was more original, dynamic and African, than American Negro songs."[21] She later went to voodoo ceremonies in Haiti and saw a zombie. From her research in the field in 1929, she wrote a novel called Jonah's Gourd Vine. By 1932 she had collected a mass of work songs, blues and spirituals and by 1941 she had been a Guggenheim Fellow twice and had had five books accepted by the publishers. During the writing of her autobiography, she was working for Paramount Studios in California as a writer and actress.

Miss Hurston's autobiography was overly self-centered in that she seemed to be oblivious of the events taking place around her. For instance, Miss Hurston does not mention the depression or its effects, if any, on herself or members of her race. She graduated in 1928 from Barnard and travelled in the South among the Negro timber workers. Granted she was interested only as a researcher, but as a well-informed college graduate she did not men-

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[21] Ibid., p. 200.

tion the poverty of either the Negroes or the whites. She herself was supported by the same white patron as Langston Hughes. Hughes was very much aware of the bread lines and the unemployment, especially where these things touched members of his own race.

Further, Miss Hurston seemed to distort the truth somewhat, for example, when she discussed the play, Mule Bone. In his autobiography, The Big Sea, Langston Hughes mentioned that he and Miss Hurston collaborated on the play but that she gave permission to have it produced before it was polished. Miss Hurston insisted that it was her play. Finally, she withdrew permission necessary for its production when she took a personal dislike to one of the members of the cast. In her autobiography, Miss Hurston mentioned nothing about Hughes's connection with the writing of the play and dismissed as her own with no reference to literary quarrels between herself and her co-author. This is of importance since it reflects another aspect of her personality which serves to distort her image, presenting herself to the reader as something she really was not.

However, Miss Hurston had a fabulous "Cinderella life" and has contributed much to society as a writer and a collector of Negro folk culture. She was an individual and did not adhere to the concept of Negro racial superiority. She was primarily concerned with the individuals

in all races. Dust Tracks on a Road is a good story but an inferior autobiography.

V. RICHARD WRIGHT

Richard Wright's autobiography, Black Boy, was first published in its entirety in 1945. Born on a Mississippi plantation in 1908, Wright dated his recollections of childhood and youth from his fourth year, when he lived in a household comprised of his father, a younger brother, his mother and grandmother.

Wright was a man of extreme intelligence and spirit who refused to simply exist by conforming to the stereotyped picture of a fawning, laughing, carefree Negro who was supposed to accept his place in Southern society. Like Langston Hughes, he did not believe in flattering the white man, but attempted to do so in order to earn passage to a Northern city.

His whole childhood was pictured as a fight for survival. He fled from poverty and hunger and from his soul-saving grandmother who, along with the other relatives, thought that he would probably end his life in jail.

Wright formed his philosophy of life at the early age of twelve, when his mother, who had been the sole support of Richard and his brother, became ill with a sickness that was to make her virtually helpless for the rest of her life. "At the age of twelve, before I had had one full year of formal education, I had a conception of life

that no experience could ever erase, a predilection for what was real, that no argument could ever gainsay, a sense of the world that was mine and mine alone; a notion as to what life meant that no education could ever alter, a conviction that the meaning of living came only when one was struggling to wring a meaning out of meaningless suffering."[22]

This attitude toward life was to endure, and he sought the areas of living that would keep it alive. It made him skeptical of everything while seeking everything. He became tolerant of all, yet critical. Wright recognized this in his actions as a writer: "It made me want to drive coldly to the heart of every question and lay it open to the core of suffering I knew I would find there. It made me love burrowing into psychology, into realistic and naturalistic fiction and art; into those whirlpools of politics that had the power to claim the whole of man's soul. It directed my loyalties to the side of men in rebellion. . . "[23]

When Richard was in the eighth grade in Jackson, he wrote his first story which he called "The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre." The story was published in the Southern Register, a Jackson Negro newspaper. Instead of being

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[22]Richard Wright, Black Boy (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945), p. 112.

[23]Ibid., p. 113.

praised for his story at home, his grandmother reprimanded him for it, because to her, all fiction was evil.

Later, when Richard graduated from high school at the age of seventeen, he showed his rebellious spirit by writing his own valedictory speech. The principal of the school usually wrote the speech for the valedictorian in order to impress the white guests and the white superintendent.

After graduation, Wright took a job as counter-man in a Jackson drugstore. The white proprietor mistrusted Negroes who did not talk about sex and play the part of "Uncle Tom." Wright was fired from his job because he had never learned to think as a Southern Negro. "I had begun coping with the white world too late. I could not make subservience an automatic part of my behavior."[24]

Richard could never be sure how he was expected to act around the many white people with whom he came in daily contact. For that reason he lived in constant fear, never knowing whether or not he would gain the approval or disapproval of the whites.

Wright, in his autobiography, gave the lie to the white Southerner's much-used expression: "We take care of our niggers down here." Those whites who took care of their colored people usually did so by gently urging

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[24] Ibid., p. 215.

them with lead pipes, lynching or castration to stop trying to rise above their social position.

Wright's story was a poignant tale of a struggling childhood but not of the Horatio Alger variety. Looking back, he discovered the events of his childhood that formed him in his early years: a struggle for meaning in life coming out of a broken home, a paralyzed mother, the cruelty of whites and his own family. His reading of Sherwood Anderson, H. L. Mencken, Turgenev, Flaubert, and other realists and naturalists gave to his writing a naturalistic bent.

Wright, in shaping his past, recognized the influences that led him eventually to embrace writing. In his analysis of his early life, he showed the interconnection of events that led him to form his philosophy of life. Although there was not much relating of his life to happenings in the contemporary world, this was understandable since his main concern was with the problem of survival. Wright took a careful look at his life and wrote a good autobiography.

CHAPTER IV

ENTERTAINERS

In the field of entertainment, the Negro has made a unique contribution to the body of American culture. It was in this field, in the first half of the twentieth century, that the American Negro achieved his greatest successes. The availability of autobiographical works from this group, however, was limited. In order to get a representation of sorts, one work was selected from the field of popular entertainment and one from the more serious side.

I. ETHEL WATERS

Ethel Waters, the great blues singer and, later, actress, was born in Philadelphia in 1900 of a 13 year-old mother. She grew up in the vice-infested areas of Philadelphia, looked after by her grandmother, who was "home" one day a week. Her childhood consisted of a series of moves from one aunt to another, from mother to grandmother and back again - always in the slums of Philadelphia. Prostitution, thievery, tipsters were well-know facts to her, but discrimination was unheard of in her world. "I didn't know much about color then. There was no racial prejudice at all in that big melting pot running over with vice and crime, violence, poverty, and corruption. I

never was made to feel like an outcast . . . All of us, whites, blacks, and yellows were outcasts there together and having a good time among ourselves."[1]

After attending most of the public schools in her areas, Ethel was enrolled in a parochial school and at the age of nine became a Catholic. This seemed to have provided an anchor for her. "I felt that God would always be with me, helping me as I battled my way through that wasteland of violent emotions and exploding egos in which I was growing up."[2] Throughout her life, Miss Waters frequently exhibited a strong religious feeling.

At thirteen Ethel Waters was married and began to work as soon as she finished the sixth grade. The marriage lasted less than one year, after which she worked as a scullion with no ambitions towards show business. At seventeen, she won a contest singing in a Philadelpia saloon and joined a Negro vaudeville unit with which she gained her first acclaim for her rendition of the blues.

Even after her first minor stage successes, Miss Waters maintained that her one ambition was to become the personal maid of a lady who travelled around the world.

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[1]Ethel Waters, His Eye is on the Sparrow (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1951), p. 93.

[2]Ibid., p. 194.

On the subject of racial problems, Miss Waters was very unlike Marian Anderson. While Miss Anderson was reserved, Ethel Waters was outspoken. Although both women were proud of being Negroes, Miss Waters was much more articulate on the subject: "I have the soundest of reasons for being proud of my people. We Negroes have always had such a tough time that our very survival in this white world with the dice always loaded against us is the greatest possible testimonial to our strength, our courage, and our immunity to adversity . . . Ours is the truest dignity of man, the dignity of the undefeated."[3]

Throughout the first half of her career - the Southern tours, Philadelphia and Harlem - Ethel Waters sang for Negro audiences. Long after she had been urged to join the "white time," Ethel finally went on in Chicago. Thus began a series of white vaudeville tours, and eventually, appearances on New York's "white" stage. Always, Ethel Waters preferred to play before a Negro rather than a white audience and she compared them thus: "If whites bored me, it was because they bored themselves. . . . In spite of the countless advantages they enjoyed as the master race they looked fed up with everything and as though they hated life itself. When you worked in front

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[3] Ibid., p. 93.

of them you had to do the whole job. But in the Negro night clubs, the customers worked with you. They had come to the spot to cut loose, and even if you were lousy they had a good time. High spirits weren't forced on them. They came in with bounce and eclat, checking their troubles at the door."[4]

But her successes before white audiences continued. She began appearing in Broadway musicals and revues and travelled the tour with them. Ethel Waters added another conquest when she starred as Hagar in Mamba's Daughters. She was the first Negro actress to star in a Broadway dramatic play. Of this role, Miss Waters said: "This is the pinnacle, and there will never be anything better or higher or bigger for me. . . . I had shown them all what it is to be a colored woman, dumb, ignorant, all boxed up and feeling everything with such intenseness that she is half crazy."[5] The play had a long successful run and Miss Waters was acclaimed as a great dramatic actress. This was followed by a part in Cabin in the Sky and two movies. It was eleven long years before Miss Waters reappeared on Broadway, this time in The Member of the Wedding. It was about this time that she wrote her autobiography.

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[4] Ibid., p. 194. [5] Ibid., p. 248.

His Eye is on the Sparrow was a good autobiography. It delineated a clear picture of a whole person - a big, brassy, talented, enjoyable entertainer; a religious, confused, fighting, generous and sometime bitter social being; and an unhappy, frequent, childless wife. The analysis of events was not deep, but Ethel Waters seldom took time to analyze events - she simply reacted to them. The recollection of events was perhaps too clear and exact, but then the tendency to dramatize seemed to be an integral part of Miss Waters' personality, and therefore, could not be construed as a lack of truth. The interpretation of events seemed, at times, biased in favor of the author, but once again, this could not be considered an untruth, since it seemed clear that the author sincerely beleived her own view of things. The prose is not polished, sharp, or well-constructed, but recounts, in Miss Waters' language, the events of her life. Regardless of the lack of factual truth in some of the elements of this autobiography, it emerged as a relatively good work because of the evolution of a complete, clear and true description of the autobiographer as she saw herself in her early fifties.

II. MARIAN ANDERSON

Although not, strictly speaking, a part of the Negro Renaissance, Marian Anderson must certainly be included as a worthy representative of professional entertainers of

the Negro race. Her autobiography, My Lord, What a Morning, was published in 1956, when she was 49 years old.

As a literary contribution, this autobiography was only sporadically significant. Miss Anderson's story ranged from dimly remembered, haphazardly arranged childhood events, a calendar of concert dates, a catalogue of songs, and notes on singing, to a few well-expressed, deeper thoughts on career, talent, hopes and her race.

Miss Anderson's account of her early life described an ordinary childhood. Left fatherless at six, living in poor, but happy, circumstances, she admitted to only vague recollections of particular events from this period, and pictured a happy, young girl who loved to sing. She sang at every opportunity - Churches, Y.M.C.A.'s, Choral Societies, amateur concerts, etc. This constant singing continued into her high school years, always delivered with great vigor, but as yet, without training. Significantly, at this point, both Marian and her family seemed to underplay her prodigious talent.

Refusal of admittance to a music school in Philadelphia, because of color, was Miss Anderson's first real encounter with prejudice. Her reaction here was simply one of shock. Later incidents of prejudice showed Miss Anderson reacting most often with resignation, very seldom with bitterness and never with aggression.

Following high school graduation, Miss Anderson's musical career expanded to a series of small tours with a professional accompanist and mounting fees. It was then suggested that she perform at New York's Town Hall. She prepared assiduously and was bitterly disappointed when she failed to be a success. "I now had what amounted to a complex about music. Hopes had been raised too high, and when they crashed too low, I could not be objective. Perhaps I had not admitted it to myself, but Town Hall in New York had represented the mainstream of American musical life, and I had plunged into it hoping to become one of the fortunate swimmers."[6]

The biggest, single influence on Miss Anderson's life was her mother, whom she frequently refers to: "She never tried to tell me what to do with my life; if she had any wish for my future other than my happiness, I never heard of it . . . if she saw that I had to have counsel, she would find someone who could help."[7]

Miss Anderson's career received a boost in 1925, when she won a contest sponsored by the Lewisohn Stadium Concerts. The prize was an appearance with the New York Philharmonic, which was well received by the critics.

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[6]Marian Anderson, My Lord, What a Morning (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), p. 75.

[7]Ibid., p. 96.

She then spent a year in London studying voice. This year was followed closely by a six-month study in Germany, this time on a fellowship from the Rosenwald Fund. From this study period evolved her first of many series of Scandinavian concert tours. Then followed a growing success in the European capitals, a well-received Town Hall concert, and an increasingly important series of performances under the direction of Sol Hurok. This included a highly successful tour of Russia, of which she said: "Were they especially attentive to me for propaganda reasons? In any case, it would make no difference to me. I sang in Russia for the same reason I have always sung anywhere else - to make music. After all, it proved that one of my people could be raised up freely in the United States to do the work the Lord had given him the gift to do."[8]

Under Mr. Hurok's management, Miss Anderson's bookings in the United States began to improve in quantity as well as quality. One of these appearance was scheduled to take place in Constitution Hall, Washington, D. C. The Daughters of the American Revolution, owners of the hall, refused to allow a Negro to perform there. Typically, Marian had little opinion to offer on the discrimination being shown against her race in this instance. "I felt

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[8] Ibid., p. 183.

about the affair as about an election campaign; whatever the the outcome there is bound to be unpleasantness and embarrassment. . . . But I have been in this world long enough to know that there are all kinds of people, all suited by their own natures for different tasks. It would be fooling myself to think that I was meant to be a fearless fighter."[9] The solution totthe problem came about when Miss Anderson's concert was scheduled to take place from the Lincoln Memorial. "I could see that my significance as an individual was small in this affair. I had become, whether I liked it or not, a symbol, representing my people."[10]

Although Miss Anderson seemed rather inarticulate about this critical event of her life, it was simply that the focal point of her interest was music, and other happenings remained consistently in the background.

Barring the Lincoln Memorial concert, Miss Anderson was shielded from any controversy which might have arisen concerning her race. "It is better not to think about it if I can avoid it. . . . If my mind dwells even partly on the disconcerting thought that I am staying where I am not really welcome, I cannot go out and sing as though my heart were full of love and happiness."[11]

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[9] Ibid., pp. 187-188. [10] Ibid., p. 189.

[11] Ibid., p. 239.

Miss Anderson's career reached another high point when she signed a contract as a regular member of the Metropolitan Opera Company, the first of her race to achieve this success.

Throughout her entire life, then, it became clear that Marian Anderson, although a highly talented, successful and conscientious musician, remained a social introvert, never actively involving herself in racial or any other problems outside the realm of music. But she did express the hope that improvements in relations between races could come about in the United States: "The United States could set a shining example and reap rewards beyond expectations. All the changes may not come in my time, they may even be left for another world. But I have seen enough changes to believe that they will occur in this one."[12]

Finally, My Lord, What a Morning, although an interesting life story, was not a good autobiography. Miss Anderson's memory of her early life was too foggy to make its recall meaningful. She simply reported happenings and did not connect them one to another. From her autobiography, we have a description of a happy and successful professional career of a talented, but diffident, woman who revealed all of her career but very little of herself.

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[12] Ibid., p. 309.

CHAPTER V

CONTEMPORARY AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Since the 1950's, Negro autobiographies have been on the increase in the United States. For the most part, these contemporary autobiographers are motivated by a desire to set themselves up as examples for other members of their race. This is an opportune time for the release of a Negro autobiography because freedom marches, civil rights legislation, and school integration are highly publicized.

The contemporary autobiographies were omitted from the main body of this thesis, not because they were deemed of little importance, but because the emphasis was placed on the lesser known autobiographical works.

One of the better known of these contemporary autobiographers is James Baldwin, a successful novelist, playwright, and essayist. Two of his works, Notes of a Native Son, and its sequel, Nobody Knows My Name, have autobiographical elements. Each book contains a collection of essays in which Baldwin takes a critical look at subjects ranging from his childhood in Harlem to the problems of natural and perverted love.

James Baldwin believes that the lack of acceptance of the Negro, in both the North and the South, lies in the

white man's refusal to re-organize his system of moral values. Like Claude McKay, he believes the unspoken, but implied, problem involved in the segregation issue is the white man's mythical conception of the Negro as sexually superior.

Another major Negro novelist is Ralph Ellison. His novel, Invisible Man, contains many autobiographical elements. Written in a picaresque style, it describes the hero's adventures as he seeks recognition in society, neither as a tool for the cause of civil rights, nor as a political stooge for the whites, but simply as a man.

Sammy Davis, Jr., a popular Negro in the field of entertainment, has recently written an autobiography. Davis wrote Yes I Can in collaboration with writers Jane and Burt Boyer. Martin Duberman had this to say in his review of the work in The New York Times Book Review Section of September 19, 1965: "Autobiographies usually aim at one of two goals: presenting the individual experience, or using it to illustrate some larger historical theme. Sammy Davis Jr.'s autobiography focuses on neither. He has been unwilling or unable to make his story a depth analysis of self, and his history has been too special to serve as a prototypic tale of the Negro in America. And so we have a presentation which fluctuates between personal narrative and sociological suggestion, a fluctuation often absorbing, often unsatisfying."

An autobiography of the past year, Manchild in the Promised Land, written by Claude Brown, would seem to warrant attention in that it is an appeal to the young Negro; it is an attempt to convince him that no matter how unequal the opportunities, or the possibility of ever being able to escape the ghetto which surrounds him, he can survive the degradation of Harlem life and become a respected citizen of the community. It is an autobiography without bitterness, and if it proves nothing else, it is living evidence that the American dream is still alive in the most unlikely of places.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The major purpose of this thesis was to evaluate the quality of a group of American Negro autobiographies from the period 1850-1950. To that end, I selected eleven autobiographies which included race leaders, writers, and entertainers.

I assumed at the beginning of the research that the better educated Negro would write the better autobiography, and that there would be a noticeable improvement in the quality of the autobiographies from 1850 onward.

After analyzing the works, I realized that the quality of an autobiography did not depend on the education of the author. Rather, the quality of an autobiography was dependent upon whether or not the writer made an honest selection of events in his life and a truthful analysis.

Further, through the research into the lives of eleven prominent Negroes, I discovered that all made definite contributions to the welfare of their race. Frederick Douglass' contribution was to free his people from slavery and to secure for them the right to vote. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, and later, Langston Hughes worked through the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to correct the abuses which were

suffered by the Negro in violation of his rights under the Constitution.

Ethel Water and Marian Anderson were representative of a large group of Negroes who achieved great success in the field of entertainment. Ethel Waters was the first person to popularize the blues and also the first Negro actress to star in a dramatic play on Broadway. Although Marian Anderson was not the first Negro to appear on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera, she was the first to sign a contract with them as a regular member of the company.

Finally, the autobiographies, apart from their literary quality, were important in that they chronicled American history from the Negro's point of view from 1850-1950.

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BIOGRAPHY OF THE WRITER

George Earlen Franklin Hall was born in West Peru, Maine on August 25, 1933. He received his early education in public schools in West Peru and was graduated from Dixfield High School in 1951.

In the fall of 1952 he entered St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English in May 1956. Following graduation he served two years in the Army.

In September 1958, upon receiving a discharge from the service, he entered St. John's Seminary, in Brighton, Massachusetts, where he remained one year. In the fall of 1959 he accepted a teaching position in Errol, New Hampshire. This was followed by two years of teaching in Nashua, New Hampshire, and two more in Millinocket, Maine.

In 1962 he was married to Carol-Ann Houghton and in 1965 they adopted a daughter. In the fall of 1965, he was enrolled for graduate study at the University of Maine. He is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Maine in August, 1966.