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By

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ABSTRACT

PIONEERING BLACK AUTHORED DRAMAS: 1924-27

By

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From 1924-27, Opportunity and Crisis magazines of the National Urban League and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, respectively, sponsored literary competitions to encourage black writers. The contests included a playwriting division and awarded prizes to thirty plays by fifteen black dramatists. These works comprise much of the pioneering efforts in dramatic literature by blacks. However, since these plays were not written for the Broadway stage, these dramas have not been included in the scope of many important studies of the black theatre.

This study provides a history of the literary contests and discusses the driving forces behind them. A detailed look at the drama category identifies the objectives of this division and documents the contests' rules, judges, and winning playwrights and their works. The discussion of the award winning plays are arranged by topic: (1) race dramas; (2) miscegnation dramas; (3) complexion plays; (4) domestic plays; and (5) religious life plays. For each of the nineteen extant dramas, there are a synopsis of the story and critical comments on the drama's plot, major characters, and other selected elements. Whenever possible,

plots and critiques are included from revised scripts, playreader reports, and production reviews of the eleven award winning plays without extant original scripts. The survey of the lives of the prize winning dramatists provides an indication of the impact that the drama contest may have had on their playwriting careers and the development of the black theatres. The appendix lists published and unpublished plays by the fifteen award winning dramatists. Script sources, productions, and selected theatre articles by these playwrights are also noted.

This dissertation reveals that the prize winning plays portrayed subjects familiar to their contemporary black audience. Racial injustice, miscegnation, and lynching were often used as topics of the plays; however, award winners also concerned domestic issues and religious life. The competitions also at least indirectly encouraged the prize winning authors to write more plays and become more involved, primarily, with black community and educational theatres.

To my mother, Corine Austin, who inspired my desire for knowledge and understanding.

To my nephew, Nehemiah Austin, who I pray will also desire to learn and use this knowledge to enrich the lives of others.

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May Miller, an Opportuntiy award winning playwright, allowed me a personal interview. Her reminiscences enhanced this study and provided information which I could not have otherwise obtained.

I cannot adequately express my gratitude to my friends and family. My parents--Corine and James Austin--and sisters--Yvette, Colette, Abigail, and Jill--were always understanding and supportive throughout the course of this study.

Most important, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, gave me the strength and perserverance to finish this

dissertation. Through this experience, He has revealed to me that "all things are possible."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

After World War I, thousands of blacks from the South migrated to Northern cities. Better education and employment opportunities were opening up to blacks; however, lynching continued, riots were initiated throughout the country, and racial discrimination was still common in American society.

In response to the negative aspects of black life, a Jamaican named Marcus Garvey gained a following of hundreds of thousands of blacks who supported his call for unity, pride, and a new black republic. Garvey and his followers believed that one day an "Africa for Africans at home and abroad"[1] would be organized which would unite that continent and be ruled by black men.

Many other blacks were not persuaded by Garvey's preachings. Instead, organizations such as the National Urban League and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sought ways to eliminate racial prejudice and injustice through education, non-violent protest, and judicial and legislative remedies. These groups also encouraged the development of black economic and cultural activities.

[1] The slogan of Garvey's Universal Improvement Association.

During the 1920s, black cultural activities became better known outside the black community as literature, art, music, and theatre written, composed, and/or performed by blacks attracted the patronage of white people. Langston Hughes wrote of the era now known as the Harlem Renaissance: "It was a period when every season there was at least one hit play on Broadway acted by a Negro cast. . . It was a period when white writers wrote about Negroes more successfully (commercially speaking) than Negroes did about themselves. . . It was the period when the Negro was in vogue" (228). The Urban League and NAACP realized that the opportunity had never been better to attempt to make gains in racial understanding and equality. According to Harlem Renaissance scholar Nathan Huggins:

> [Black intellectuals] saw art and letters as a bridge across the chasm between the races. Artists of both races, they thought, were more likely to be free of superstition, prejudice, and fear than ordinary men. . .Despite a history that had divided them, art and culture would re-form [sic] the brotherhood in a common humanity. (5)

The house organs of the Urban League and NAACP--Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life (Opportunity) and The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races (Crisis)--were subscribed to black and white readers and influenced the racial policy of the times. The journals encouraged the development of black writers through the publication of their works and by sponsoring literary contests. In his history of black cultural activities, James Weldon Johnson

identified the contests as a "decided impulse to the literay movement" of the era (277).

Both Opportunity and Crisis announced their literary contests in 1924. Each journal held three contests with the winners announced in 1925, 1926, and 1927. The contests encouraged entries in the following categories: short story, poetry, essay, personal experience sketch, illustration, and drama.

The drama category is the subject of this dissertation. Black theatre scholar Fannin Belcher stated:

> [P]laywriting received its greatest impetus from the annual play contests sponsored by the Crisis and Opportunity magazines. Private groups had offered prizes for plays several years earlier but they had neither the prestige of these magazines nor could they make competition as tempting by promising cash awards, publication and production of the plays. (395-96)

Although black writers, composers, and entertainers had captivated the American stage with such musicals as A Trip to Coontown, Bandana Land, and Shuffle Along, depictions of black life in drama had primarily remained the work of white writers. The literary contests brought thirty plays to the forefront to meet a desire for drama by black playwrights. The following is a listing of Opportunity and Crisis award winning plays. An asterisk denotes works with extant original scripts.

1925 Opportunity Competition

First Prize ($60)	Frances* by G.D. Lipscomb
Second Prize ($35)	Humble Instrument by Warren McDonald
	Color Struck by Zora Neale Hurston
Third Prize ($15)	The Bog Guide* by May Miller
Honorable Mention	Cooped Up by Eloise Bibb Thompson
	Fall of the Conjurer by Willis Richardson
	Spears by Zora Neale Hurston

1925 Crisis Competition

First Prize ($75)	The Broken Banjo* by Willis Richardson
Second Prize ($40)	The Church Fight* by Ruth Gaines Shelton
Third Prize ($10)	For Unborn Children* by Myrtle Smith Livingston

1926 Opportunity Competition

First Prize ($60)	Sugar Cain* by Frank Wilson
Second Prize ($35)	'Cruiter* by John Matheus
Third Prize ($15)	Blood by Warren McDonald
Honorable Mention	Color Struck* by Zora Neale Hurston
	The First One* by Zora Neale Hurston
	The Cuss'd Thing* by May Miller
	Blue Blood* by Georgia Douglas Johnson

1926 Crisis Competiton

First Prize ($100)	Bootblack Lover* by Willis Richardson
Second Prize ($50)	Foreign Mail by Eulalie Spence
Honorable Mention	Illicit Love by Randolph Edmonds
	Peter Stith by Randolph Edmonds

1927 Opportunity Competition

First Prize ($60)	Plumes* by Georgia Douglas Johnson
Second Prize ($25)	The Hunch* by Eulalie Spence
Third Prize ($15)	The Starter by Eulalie Spence
	Four Eleven by William Jackson
Honorable Mention	Bleeding Hearts* by Randolph Edmonds

1927 Crisis Competition

First Prize ($200)	The Purple Flower* by Marita Bonner
	Exit, an Illusion* by Marita Bonner
Third Prize ($50)	Hot Stuff by Eulalie Spence
	Undertow* by Eulalie Spence

These playwrights and their works comprise much of the pioneering efforts in dramatic literature by blacks. However, since these plays were not written for the Broadway stage, these dramas have not been included in the scope of many important studies of the black theatre.[2] The few exceptions include Roseann Bell's dissertation on Opportunity and Crisis which discusses the literary contests and provides critiques of three prize winning plays, For Unborn Children, The Broken Banjo, and Frances (Crisis,

[2] For example, Doris Abramson's Negro Playwriting in in the American 1925-1959 (New York: Columbia UP, 1969) does not discuss the plays since the study is only concerned with drama by black playwrights produced on Broadway. Loften Mitchell's Black Drama (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1967) identifies a few of the prize winning plays but does not discuss their plots.

172-99). John Monroe's thesis on the black theatre of New York during the 1920s features a section entitled, "Prize Playwrights and Prize Plays," which primarily discusses the lives and careers of two of the fifteen award winning playwrights, Willis Richardson and Eulalie Spence (143-55). Fannie Hicklin's dissertation on black playwrights only includes one-page descriptions of nine of the prize winning plays--Sugar Cain, Broken Banjo, The Hunch, The Starter, Undertow, 'Cruiter, Blue Blood, Plumes, and Bleeding Hearts (144-83, passim; 271). Thus there is a need for a detailed evaluation of the drama category of the literary contests to ascertain what contributions these playwrights and their works have made to the black theatre.

Chapter I of this dissertation provides a history of the literary contests and discusses the driving forces behind them. Chapter II takes a more detailed look at the drama category by identifying the need for this division and documenting the contests' rules, judges, and winning playwrights and their works. Chapter III provides an analysis of the prize winning plays. For each of the nineteen extant dramas, there are a synopsis of the story and critical comments on the drama's plot, major characters, and other selected elements. Whenever possible, the chapter includes plots and critiques from revised scripts, playreader reports, and production reviews of the eleven award winning plays without extant original scripts. Chapter IV surveys the lives of the prize winning dramatists as an indication

of the impact that the drama contests may have had on their playwriting careers and the development of the black theatre. The appendix supplements Chapter IV by listing published and unpublished plays by the fifteen award winning dramatists. Script sources, productions, and selected theatre articles by these playwrights are also noted.

Three journals have been used extensively for this work: Crisis, Opportunity, and The Messenger: The World's Greatest Monthly.[3] Issues of Crisis and Opportunity provided information on the literary contests, scripts of some prize winning plays, black theatre reviews, essays on black literature and the theatre, and essays, poetry, and short stories by award winning dramatists. In The Messenger, Theophilus Lewis's regular dramatic column, "The Theater: The Souls of Black Folk" (Sept. 1923-July 1927), documented the black theatre of New York--its drama, performances, personalities, and expectations for its future development.[4]

Besides issues of Crisis and Opportunity, the following sources have been used to locate scripts of the prize winning plays: Carolina Magazine, University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill, NC); Dillard University Library (New Orleans, LA); Ebony and Topaz, ed. Charles S. Johnson;

[3] Edited by A. Philip Randolph, The Messenger was published in New York, 1917-1928.

[4] Theodore Kornweibel, Jr. provides an informative discussion of the drama critic in his article, "Theophilus Lewis and the Theater of the Harlem Renaissance," The Harlem Renaissance Remembered, ed. Arna Bontemps (New York: Dodd, 1972).

Randolph Edmonds, Six Plays for a Negro Theatre; Federal Theatre Project Collection, George Mason University (Fairfax, VA); Fifty More Contemporary One-Act Plays, ed. Frank Shay; Fire!! (New York); Fisk University Library (Nashville, TN); Hatch-Billops Collection, Inc. (New York); Armstead-Johnson Foundation for Theatre Research (Jamaica, NY); Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.); May Miller personal collection (Washington, D.C.); Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University (Washington, D.C.); Plays of Negro Life, eds. Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory; Pollack Theatre Collection, Howard University (Washington, D.C.); Samuel French, Inc. (New York); Allen Williams, Grambling University (Grambling, LA); Yale University Library (New Haven, CT); and Black Theatre, USA, ed. James Hatch.

For this study, the most useful information on the personalities, cultural activities, and history of the Harlem Renaissance was found in Arna Bontempts, The Harlem Renaissance Remembered; Langston Hughes, The Big Sea; Nathan Huggins, Harlem Renaissance; and David Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue.

For information on the lives, careers, and productions of award winning playwrights, I relied primarily on the following sources: Esther Spring Arata and Nicholas John Rotoli, Black American Playwrights, 1800 to the Present; Esther Spring Arata, More Black American Playwrights; Black American Fiction: A Bibliography, eds. Carol Fairbanks and Eugene Engeldinger; Black Theatre, USA, ed. James Hatch;

Black Playwrights, 1823-1977, eds. James Hatch and OMNAii Abdullah; Plays of Negro Life, eds. Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory; May Miller, personal interview; John Monroe, "A Record of the Black Theatre in New York City: 1920-29"; James A. Page, Selected Black American Authors: An Illustrated Bio-Bibliography; Theressa Gunnels, Carol Fairbanks Myers, and Esther Spring Arata, Black American Writers Past and Present; Who's Who in Colored America, ed. G. James Fleming and Christian E. Burkel; Who's Who in Colored America, 1933 to 1937; Allen Woll, Dictionary of Black Theatre; Genevieve Fabre, "Afro-American Drama, 1850-1975"; and Fannie Hicklin, "American Negro Playwrights 1920-1964."

Definitions

Black, Negro, Afro-American. An American of African descent.

Black dialect. A type of non-standard English used by Afro-Americans.

Black drama. A non-musical play concerning the lives of Afro-Americans.

Black musical. A musical revue or book musical composed by or about Afro-Americans.

Black theatre. Musicals and dramas by or about Afro-Americans.

Complexion drama. A drama in which the color of one's skin greatly affects the protagonist(s) sense of racial identity and/or relationships with others.

Folk play. A drama concerning the lives of common people primarily in rural areas of the United States.

Race drama. A drama concerning political, social, or economic relations between blacks and whites.

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CHAPTER I

THE OPPORTUNITY AND CRISIS LITERARY CONTESTS

In the early 1920s, stories on Negro life written primarily by whites had become quite popular; however, blacks failed to appreciate them. Black literary critic William Stanley Braithwaite commented:

> [A]lmost every one of these stories is written in a tone of condescension...Many of these writers live in the South or are from the South. Presumably they are well acquainted with the Negro, but it is a remarkable fact that they almost never tell us anything vital about him, about the real human being in the black man's skin...Always the Negro is interpreted in the terms of the white man. White man psychology is applied and it is no wonder that the result often shows the Negro in a ludicrous light. (206-207)

Blacks believed that their own writers could portray themselves more realistically. What was now needed were vehicles to promote these writers and their works. Opportunity and Crisis were to play significant roles in the development and promotion of black artists. Years after Charles S. Johnson resigned as Opportunity editor, he stated:

> [T]he importance of the Crisis Magazine and Opportunity Magazine was that of providing an outlet for young Negro writers and scholars whose work was not acceptable to other established media because it could not be believed to be of standard quality despite the superior quality of much of it. (Giplin, 222)

Furthermore, Crisis editor W.E.B. Du Bois believed that the

magazines' literary contests "grew into" the Harlem Renaissance (Dusk of Dawn, 270). While both Johnson and Du Bois wanted to encourage black writers, other objectives for the literary contests were incompatible. The Opportunity editor wanted to use black literature to affect white attitudes toward Afro-Americans. In contrast, the Crisis editor seemed less concerned about influencing whites and instead directed black literary efforts to an Afro-American readership. Throughout the history of the literary competitions, antagonisms between Johnson and Du Bois were reflected in the design and execution of their respective contests.

Since Opportunity was the first to publish an announcement on its literary contest, this journal's competition is discussed before its rival's contest. However, before documenting the history of the literary contests, more information is provided on the lives of the journals' editors, Charles S. Johnson and W.E.B. Du Bois.

Charles S. Johnson and Opportunity

The son of a Baptist minister, Charles S. Johnson was born in Bristol, Virginia in 1898. He earned an A.B. from Virginia Union University in 1916 and a Ph.B. from the University of Chicago in 1917.[5] He was only nineteen when appointed head of the Department of Research and Investigations

[5] A Ph.B. is a Bachelor of Philosophy degree.

for the Chicago branch of the Urban League in 1917. After serving a term in the military during World War I, he returned to the University of Chicago as a graduate student in 1919.

After the notorious Chicago race riot of 1919, the governor appointed Johnson associate executive secretary of an interracial commission to study the outbreak.[6] His research and assistance in the preparation of the report, The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot, earned him a national reputation.[7]

In 1921, Johnson became the Director of Research and Investigations for the national office of the Urban League in New York. In January 1923, he assumed the editorship of the newly created house organ of the League, Opportunity. The masthead of the magazine carried the League's slogan, "Not Alms but Opportunity."

Under Johnson's guidance, the magazine included more than the proceedings and announcements of its sponsoring organization. Opportunity became a vehicle for articles and essays concerning black society, economics, education,

[6] The infamous Chicago riot of 1919 began with a clash between blacks and whites at a public beach which resulted in the drowning of a black boy. A week of mob violence left thirty-eight people dead and five hundred and thirty-seven injured.

[7] The report was not published until 1922; however, Johnson's reputation preceded its publication and led to his appointment with the Urban League in 1921.

and culture. It also published poetry, short stories, and play and book reviews.

According to Langston Hughes, Johnson "did more to encourage and develop Negro writers during the 1920's than anyone else in America" (218).[8] Soon after he arrived in New York, Johnson became acquainted with many black cultural leaders including W.E.B. Du Bois, poet and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson, and Howard University Professor Montgomery Gregory. However, it was his relationship with Howard University Professor of Philosophy Alain Locke which became his most significant literary contact.

The first black Rhodes Scholar (1907-10), Locke also studied at the University of Berlin (1910-11) and received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1918. In 1916, he and Montgomery Gregory established a literary club, the Stylus Society, at Howard University. Locke was often a frequent guest at black poet Georgia Douglas Johnson's literary club in Washington, D.C. Called the "Saturday Nighters," young black writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and playwright Willis Richardson read and discussed their latest projects. Interested in the theatre, Locke was involved with the Howard Players and wrote articles on the black theatre for Opportunity, Crisis, and Theatre Arts.

[8] However, Johnson received little notice by literary scholars until the publication of Patrick Gilpin's essay, "Charles S. Johnson: Entrepreneur of the Harlem Renaissance," The Harlem Renaissance Remembered, ed. Arna Bontemps (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1972).

Locke also knew many white publishers, writers, and patrons of black art. He was often referred to as the "dean of the [Harlem Renaissance] movement." With his background, Locke and Johnson "made a perfect team," according to historian David Lewis, because "both wanted the same art for the same purposes--highly polished stuff, preferably about polished people, but certainly untainted by racial stereotypes or embarrassing vulgarity. Too much blackness, too much streetgeist and folklore--nitty-gritty music, prose and verse--were not welcome" (95).

Through Locke and other contacts, Johnson met young black writers whom he wanted to promote beyond the black community. To do this, Johnson realized these writers must gain recognition and acceptance by whites. According to historian Stephen H. Bronz:

> The very existence of the Harlem Renaissance depended upon white recognition and approval; since the Negro book-buying public was limited, the interest of white publishers, critics, and readers was necessary for financial maintenance. White approval also was necessary because a main purpose of the Harlem Renaissance was to prove to whites that Negroes could be cultural peers. (14)

Although Opportunity was influential, it sold fewer than eleven thousand copies a month.[9] Johnson realized he needed another strategy to promote these writers besides the publication of their works in his magazine.

[9] According to David Lewis, When Harlem Was in Vogue (New York: Knopf, 1981) 199, Opportunity's circulation peaked at 11,000 in 1928. Forty percent of its subscribers were white.

This strategy began March 21, 1924 at the Civic Club in New York where Opportunity sponsored a "coming out" dinner for the Writers's Guild--a group of young black writers whose membership included such poets and novelists as Countee Cullen, Jessie Fauset, and Langston Hughes. According to Johnson's biographer, Patrick Gilpin, the purpose of the dinner was "to bring the white publishers and black writers together" (224).[10] Besides Johnson and the young black writers, the impressive list of guests included established black leaders and writers such as James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, Alain Locke, and Montgomery Gregory. Also in attendance were prominent whites such as Horace Liveright (publisher), Albert Barnes (art connoisseur and anuthority on primitive African art), Frederick Allen (representing Harper Brothers), and Evans Clark (represent Nation).

A program followed the dinner with Alain Locke as master of ceremonies. He remarked, "They [black writers] sense within their group--meaning the Negro group--a spiritual wealth which if they can properly expound will be ample for a new judgement and re-appraisal [sic] of the race" ("Debut," 143). The program featured poetry readings and remarks by various speakers on black art, poetry, drama, and fiction.

The "coming out" dinner successfully introduced the

[10] Gilpin also noted that the dinner was the brain-child of Johnson and Urban League official William H. Baldwin.

young black writers to white publishers and patrons. To maintain and develop this relationship, Charles S. Johnson initiated another venture five months after the dinner. In August 1924, Opportunity announced that it would sponsor a literary competition for black writers.

W.E.B. Du Bois and Crisis

An acclaimed historian, sociologist, educator and leader, W.E.B. Du Bois is, undoubtedly, one of the greatest advocates of black rights of the twentieth century. Born in 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, Du Bois received an A.B. from Fisk University in 1888 and A.B. (cum laude) and M.A. from Harvard University in 1890 and 1891, respectively. He pursued graduate studies at the University of Berlin, 1892-94. Du Bois received his Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard in 1896. He taught economics and history at Wilberforce University (1894-96), University of Pennsylvania (1896-1897) and Atlanta University (1897-1910).

In 1903, the first of over thirty editions of Du Bois's The Souls of Black Folk was published. According to historian Lerone Bennett, this collection of essays on black life in America "had an impact on its age not unlike the publication fifty-one years earlier of Uncle Tom's Cabin" (331). Although Du Bois understood the plight of the common black person, David Lewis characterized him as an "elitist."

> A Brahmin who lacked the common touch, Du Bois had formulated while at Harvard a concept of race leadership that was unabashedly elitist and in striking contrast to the prevailing populist

> ideas of his future nemesis, Alabama educator Booker T. Washington. 'I believe in the higher education of a Talented Tenth who through their knowledge could guide the American Negro into a higher civilization,' Du Bois explained--a numerically insignificant class imposing itself by education and 'character' on the masses. (7)

In 1910, Du Bois helped to organize the NAACP. In that same year, he became the only black officer of the organization as Director of Publicity and Research. Du Bois was extremely proud of his accomplishments of the next twenty years. He commented:

> I think I may say without boasting that in the period from 1910 to 1930 I was a main factor in revolutionizing the attitude of the American Negro toward caste. My stinging hammer blows made Negroes aware of themselves, confident of their possibilities and determined self-assertion. So much so that today common slogans among the Negro people are taken bodily from the words of my mouth (Bennett, 331).

In November 1910, the first issue of Crisis was published. Originally, the magazine was to serve as the house organ of the NAACP; however, it soon was recognized as an effective platform for the views of its editor, W.E.B. Du Bois, until his resignation in 1934. Bennett commented that the NAACP board eventually perceived the magazine to be "something of a rival" of its parent organization (340-41). Nevertheless, Crisis reached a circulation of 104,000 by 1919. Available in the U.S. and abroad (including several African nations), Lewis commented, "In an era of rampant illiteracy, when hard labor left Afro-Americans little time or inclination for reading Harvard-accented editorials, the magazine found its way into kerosene-lit sharecroppers' cabins and cramped

factory workers' tenements. In middle-class families it lay next to the Bible" (7).

Besides the views of Du Bois and NAACP news, Crisis included articles on many aspects of the social, political, and cultural life of blacks in the U.S. and around the world. Largely due to the efforts of literary editor Jessie Fauset, Crisis also featured plays, short stories, poetry, essays on literature, and theatre and book reviews by black writers.[11]

Like Charles S. Johnson, Du Bois wanted to promote the works of black writers and introduce them to white audiences. However, unlike Johnson, Du Bois had firsthand experience with creative writing as a poet and novelist.[12] An ardent supporter of the arts, Du Bois attended the March 21, 1924 Opportunity dinner for the Writers' Guild. Thus, when Crisis initiated its literary contest, it came as no surprise. Announced in October 1924, the Crisis contest differed in many significant ways from the competition initiated by Opportunity two months earlier.

[11] Fauset served as Crisis literary editor from November 1916 to May 1926. Fauset, Charles S. Johnson, and Alain Locke were recognized by Langston Hughes as the "three people who midwifed the so-called New Negro [Harlem Renaissance] literature into being." In The Big Sea, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1940) 218.

[12] Du Bois wrote poems, for example, "The Song of the Smoke" and "A Litany at Atlanta," in 1899 and 1906, respectively. These poems are reprinted in Black Voices, ed. Abraham Chapman (New York: NAL, 1968), 359-63. He also wrote a novel, The Quest of the Silver Fleece (Chicago: McClurg, 1911).

The 1925 Competition

Poet Arna Bontemps recalled that Charles S. Johnson "spoke of his aim to conduct a literary contest through Opportunity" at a party during the summer of 1924 ("The Awakening," 20).[13] In the August issue of Opportunity, news of the contest was made public with the following announcement:

> To stimulate creative expression among Negroes and to direct attention to the rich and unexploited sources of materials for literature in Negro life, Opportunity will offer prizes for short stories, poetry, plays, essays, and personal experience in the amount of FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS ("Opportunity Literary Contest," 228).

The cash prizes were donated by Mrs. Henry Leach, an Urban League board member and "a long, thorough sympathizer with the struggles of Negroes for social as well as artistic status" (Johnson, "The Donor," 3). Her husband was the editor of the influential Forum magazine.

Accompanying the contest announcement was an editorial by Johnson, "On Writing About Negroes" (227-28). Here, the editor provided his views on black literature and its writers. He affirmed the rôle of literature as the "liason between races." He also states that blacks were dissatisfied with literature on black life "written by persons other than Negroes, who have never yet been wholly admitted to the privacy of Negro thots [sic]." While he did not

[13] Four of the writers attending the party would receive awards from the Opportunity contests. These writers were Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Eric Walrond.

contend that blacks should be restricted to writing about their own race, Johnson believed that in order to treat black themes "competently," black writers, "knowing them best, should be the ones to do it."

At the Crisis, W.E.B. Du Bois was surprised by Opportunity's contest announcement. Du Bois wrote Joe Spingarn about the matter, since it was this influential white NAACP board member who offered to donate the prize money for Crisis in his wife's name (Amy). According to Lewis, "although the Crisis prizes had been widely discussed in Harlem circles [Du Bois stated to Spingarn that] 'neither I nor you had any idea that they [the Urban League] were offering prizes until after your offer was made.'" Lewis further contended that this "was an early example of Charles S. Johnson's gloved ruthlessness. For the pragmatic sociologist...the appropriation of a rival's idea was hardly even a misdemeanor if it promoted racial progrss through the arts (97-98).

The Crisis announced its contest in its October 1924 issue. Referred to as "The Amy Spingarn Prizes in Literature and Art," it offered $100 more in prizes that Opportunity's competition. Still upset over its rival's contest, Du Bois reprinted its 1920 editorial in its November 1924 issue (Du Bois, "To Encourage," 11). The editorial boasted of how Crisis had sought to promote black literature "since its founding" (thirteen years before the first issue of Opportunity). Du Bois then provided an impressive list of

writers published by Crisis since 1920. The list included such authors as Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Claude Mckay, and Walter White. He concluded with the following paragraph which must have been read with an underlying sense of bitterness to those who knew of Du Bois's true feelings about the Opportunity contest:

> Today and suddenly $1,100 are offered in prizes to Negro writers and artists. Without either knowing the other's plans or intentions, both The Crisis and the magazine published by the Urban League, Opportunity, have offered a series of prizes. Mrs. Spingarn's offer was made to us in July, but Opportunity first gave publicity to its prize offer. In order, therefore, to give young authors every chance we have put the date of our competition well on in the spring so that there will be no unnecessary rivalry and all can have the full benefit of this great generosity and foresight on the part of friends. (11)

According to the Du Bois editorial, it appeared as if the total cash prizes and deadline dates were the only differences between the competitions. Of course, there were similarities between the contests. The competition had four common categories: short story, poetry, play-writing, and essay.[14] The contests were restricted to black writers. Contestants were to use pseudonyms, allowed to compete in more than one division, and could submit more than one entry per category. The contests awarded cash prizes for first, second, and third place winners. Both contests allotted the greatest cash awards to the short

[14] The Opportunity contest also featured a personal experience sketch category. The Crisis competition also offered prizes for illustrations.

story category.[15] Both publications stated they would publish the prize winning entries.[16] Material published before the contests were ineligible. Length of text limitations were given for most categories. Both contests utilized distinguished black and white editors, writers, and publishers, for example, judges included Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, William Stanley Braithwaite, novelist Zona Gale, editor John Macy, drama critic Alexander Woollcott, and playwright Eugene O'Neill.

Nevertheless, the contests differed in several important ways. Unlike Opportunity, Crisis ran articles on the writing of short stories and plays before its contest deadlines. Opportunity stated that the short stories, plays, and essays "must deal with some phase of Negro life." The personal sketch must also be related to black life since the work had to be based on a true experience of the writer who by contest rule must be black. Crisis only restricted the subject of the plays to "deal with some phase of Negro history or experience." Eighteen of the twenty-four judges used by Opportunity were white, as compared to the nine white and seven black judges employed

[15] Total cash awards for short story category--$150 (Opportunity) and $170 (Crisis). In the Opportunity contest, playwriting was allotted the second highest cash awards ($110). The playwriting and illustration categories offered the second highest cash awards ($125 each) in the Crisis competition.

[16] Actually, the magazines would publish many, but not all of the winning entries.

by Crisis.

Why would there be such a difference between the contests in subject restrictions and racial composition of the panel of judges? By looking at the stated purposes of the competitions, it can be seen that Johnson had grander objectives in mind that Du Bois. The purpose of the Crisis contest was simply to "encourage their [black writers] aptitude for art expression" ("Amy Spingarn," 24). However, Johnson provided the following statement of purpose for the Opportunity competition:

> It hopes to stimulate and encourage creative literary effort among Negroes; to locate and orient Negro writers of ability; to stimulate and encourage interest in the serious development of a body of literature about Negro life, drawing deeply upon these tremendously rich sources; to encourage the reading of literature both by Negro authors and about Negro life, not merely because they are Negro authors but because what they write is literature and because the literature is interesting; to foster a market for Negro writers and for literature by and about Negroes; to bring these writers into contact with the general world of letters to which they have been for the most part timid and inarticulate strangers; to stimulate and foster a type of writing by Negroes which shakes itself free of deliberate propoganda and protest. ("An Opportunity for Negro writers," 258)

The Opportunity editor wanted to take advantage of the current vogue for works on black life. Therefore, Johnson structured the contest to generate these writings. To ensure that these works received the attention of influential whites, he loaded the jury with many more prominent whites than blacks. Johnson may have believed that the competition would appear to be more legitimate with such a

ratio of whites to blacks on the panel of judges.

Opportunity announced the winners of its contest in the May 1925 issue. Johnson stated that "the average quality of the manuscripts was high in all divisions of the contest" ("The Contest," 130). Fifteen of the seven hundred and forty-seven entries were awarded cash prizes. The winning authors included some names already known in New York and Washington, D.C. black (and some white) literary circles, such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Countee Cullen.[17] However, the contest did elicit award winning works from previously unknown writers, such as G. D. Lipscomb, G. A. Steward, and Fidelia Ripley.

Opportunity held a dinner for the contestants at the Fifth Avenue Restaurant in New York. During a personal interview with award winning playwright May Miller, she stated that all contestants were invited without knowing if they had won or not until the prizes were announced at the dinner. Besides the contestants, the 316 attendants included Johnson, the judges, and other distinguished guests. Impressed by the dinner, the New York Herald-Tribune included an editorial on the event in its May 7, 1925 edition. Entitled, "A Negro Renaissance," the editorial provided the following comments:

> [The Opportunity dinner] was only a somewhat more conclusive indication of a phenomenon of which

[17] Beginning in 1926, Countee Cullen would serve as the assistant editor for Opportunity.

> there have been many symptoms--of the fact that the American Negro is finding his artistic voice and that we are on the edge, if not already in the midst, of what might not improperly be called a Negro Renaissance...These young people--and youth was another striking thing about this gathering--were not trying to imitate the white man nor repeating the professional white story-teller's dreary stencils of the 'darkey'. . . . (16)

Regardless of the editorial's few patronizing remarks, Johnson must have been elated by this publicity because the editorial also included a statement appearing to affirm that others had recognized the potential for racial understanding through the arts:

> A novel sight, that dinner--white critics, whom "everybody"knows, Negro writers, whom "nobody" knew--meeting on common ground. The movement behind it doubtless means something to the race problem in general; certainly it means something to American literature. (16)

Johnson reprinted the Herald-Tribune editorial in Opportunity's June 1925 issue. Crisis held a similar dinner for its contestants at the Renaissance Casino in New York on August 14, 1925. Besides the announcement of award winners, the program also featured a presentation of the first place award winning play, The Broken Banjo by Willis Richardson.[18] Strangely, in its September issue, Opportunity listed its rival's contest winners one month before Crisis

[18] In June 1925, Du Bois reported that black director Charles Burroughs would stage a masque entitled "Black Man: A Fantasy." See Du Bois, "Krigwa," "Opinion," Crisis 30 (June 1925) 59. However, in September 1925, an Opportunity article on the Crisis awards dinner did not mention this performance. See "The Amy Spingarn Prizes," Opportunity 3 (Sept. 1925) 287.

(Amy, Opportunity) 287.[19] Crisis provided a list of the award winners and selected comments from its judges in its October 1925 issue. Winners were to receive free membership in the Crisis Guild of Writers and Artists (KRIGWA) and Du Bois claimed that each contestant would receive a letter from KRIGWA to provide advice on his or her work ("Krigwa," 278). As in the Opportunity contest, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and G. A. Stewart, had also won awards in the Crisis competition.[20] However, the Crisis contest seemed to award more prizes than Opportunity to previously unknown writers, such as Marie French, Anita Scott, and Ruth Gaines Shelton. There could be one explanation for this occurrence. Some of the better known younger writers did not believe Du Bois to be receptive to their works. Poet Arna Bontemps wrote that "Du Bois had serious reservations about the tone and character of the new writing and art. He leaned toward the tidy, the well-mannered, the Victorian--literary works in which the Negro put his best foot forward, so to speak" (100 Years, 229).[21] Perhaps some of the writers did not send their works to Crisis because they realized that Du Bois would be among the panel

[19] Opportunity would never, again, announce the Crisis winners. Crisis never cited Opportunity's winners.

[20] In 1928, Countee Cullen would marry Du Bois's daughter, Yolande, in an extravagant wedding. The marriage ended in divorce a year later.

[21] Arna Bontemps would, in fact, be awarded first place for poetry by Crisis in 1926.

who initially read entries to disqualify any which did not merit a judge's review. Whatever the reason, Crisis received six hundred and twenty nine entries (one hundred and eighteen less than Opportunity), although its April 15 deadline gave contestants three and a half months after Opportunity's deadline to prepare and submit works.

The 1926 Competition

At the 1925 Opportunity dinner, it was announced that there would be a contest for 1926. For this contest, the cash awards were donated by Casper Holstein. The donor was a Harlem numbers banker who shared Johnson's beliefs on the potential role of black arts in American society. According to Langston Hughes:

> [The West Indian native] did good things with his money, such as educating boys and girls at colleges in the South, building decent apartment houses in Harlem, and backing literary contests to encourage colored writers. Mr. Holstein, no doubt, would have been snubbed in polite Washington society, Negro or white, but there he was doing decent and helpful things that it hadn't occured to lots of others to do. (214)

Due to Holstein's generosity, the prizes now totaled $1,000. A musical composition category was added to the competition. Furthermore, the white to black ratio of judges was lower than it had been in the previous year, 1.5:1 (sixteen whites/ten blacks). The 1926 Opportunity contest received one thousand two hundred and seventy-six entries as compared to seven hundred and thirty-two works submitted in the 1925 competition.

Again, Opportunity announced the awards at a dinner

with an impressive guest list. One of the guests--Leon Whipple, a Columbia University Professor and journalist for The Survey--called the event "a glory for the thousand or more Negroes there, the prize winners and their loving admirers. It was warm with good hope for the serious friends of Negro art" (517). However, Whipple expressed concern at the "profiteers and parasites" who were also present at the dinner.

> This sorry crew are not important in themselves. Next year they will be flittering round the candle of some new fad. But they may misguide the Negro for a time unless he can steel himself in anger or wrap himself in his own guffaws against their flattery, false witness, and bribes. It would be the final tragedy if after exploiting the Negro's body for two centuries we ended by exploiting his heart and soul. (517)

At the Crisis, Amy Spingarn again donated money for the awards totaling $600. This year, cash prizes were only awarded for first and second places to allow larger cash awards for these winners. Nine blacks and six whites would serve as judges. In a January 1926 editorial, Du Bois provided advice for the contestants. He stated that, "We want especially to stress the fact that while we believe in Negro art we do not believe in any art simply for art's sake" ("Krigwa 1926," 115). Clearly, the contestants who read this statement would believe that his or her entry would have a better chance of winning, if it had

propagandistic leanings.[22]

The dinner for the contestants included presentations of the awards and plays Foreign Mail and Mandy, poetry and short story readings, a performance by the Negro String Quartet, and dancing. It was announced that Spingarn would increase her donation to $1,000 for the 1927 competition (mating the awards offered by Opportunity). Also, since there were several repeat winners, it was ruled that those who had won two first or second place prizes would be ineligible for next year's contest.[23]

The 1927 Competition

Casper Holstein, again, donated $1,000 for the Opportunty literary contests. The ratio of white to black judges was about the same as the 1926 competition (sixteen whites/nine blacks). The January 1927 issue of Opportunity included an editorial by Johnson citing some of the recent achievements of short story and poetry contest winners. Their works were now being published in magazines and anthologies ("Stories and Poetry," 5). However, the playwriting division disappointed the Opportunity editor. Johnson stated that the play section "seems yet farthest behind the possibilities

[22] In an October 1926 article, five months after the May 1 contest deadline, Du Bois stated, "I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda" ("Criteria of Negro Art," Crisis 32 (Oct 1926) 296.

[23] Because of this rule, poet Countee Cullen and dramatist Willis Richardson could not enter the 1927 Crisis competition.

of its field of all the literary division" ("On the Need," 5). The awards were announced at a dinner described in an article by short story award winner Eugene Gordon in Opportunity's July 1927 issue ("The Opportunity Dinner," 208-209).

Four months after the magazine announced its 1927 award winners, Johnson suspended the contest. He wrote:

> Examination of the mass of manuscripts shows that there has been improvement over the mass of other years, and that in general they are not very much worse than those of other general contests. We have concluded, however, that with the point of the contests known, more time for the deliberate working of manuscripts will yield vastly more valuable results. Most important, this extension of time should allow for our aspiring writers a margin for experimentation with more than one manuscript, in the search for the most effective channels of expression" ("The Opportunity Contest," 254).

As he had written in the January 1927 issue, he commended the poetry and short story sections, since some of these works were being published in "standard" literary journals (magazines with a predominately white readership). Also, he stated that he was displeased with the results of the drama and essay divisions.

While Opportunity eventually sponsored other literary contests, none matched the scale or prestige of the one conducted from 1924-1927. Johnson left Opportunity in 1928 to become the chair of the Department of Social Sciences at

Fisk University.[24]

At the Crisis, Du Bois changed the format of the literary contest without notifying the contestants. The editor personally read all of the 375 entries. Clearly, this year's number of entries represented a significant drop from the 627 entries of 1925.

For the 1927 contest, divisions were eliminated as writers competed against each other regardless of the form used. Du Bois graded each entry using the following scale:

> A--Excellent
> B+--Good and worth publication
> B--Good
> C--Fair
> D--Poor, but with some points to commend
> E--Impossible (Du Bois, "Krigwa," 312)

Only those manuscripts with the grade "A" could be considered for prizes.

There was no formal dinner to announce the award winners. Instead, contest results were cited in the editorial section of Crisis. Du Bois selected the winners in consultation with (unnamed) "experts." There were only three cash award winners: First place ($200) went to Marita Bonner for her collection of two plays, short story, and essay; Brenda Ray Moryck received the second place award of $100 for three short stories; and Eulalie Spence won the third place award of $50 for two plays.

Without warning, the literary contests were eliminated.

[24] Johnson became Fisk's first black president in 1947.

In its place, monthly honoraria of fifty dollars was awarded to the best literary works published in Crisis. According to Lewis, Amy Spingarn (the donor of the cash awards) "must have been surprised to see white writers Zona Gale and Clement Wood among the first recipients of prizes intended for ambitious Afro-American writers" (200).

Nevertheless, despite the brief history of the Opportunity and Crisis literary contests from 1924-1927, it can be said that the competitions were a major factor in the development of black literature of the period. Many of the major writers of the Harlem Renaissance were introduced to the general public through these contests. Furthermore, the publishing contacts made via the competitions greatly enhanced their fledgling careers.

Charles S. Johnson took advantage of the current vogue for black literature. The Opportunity editor promoted black writers and made sure that influential whites became acquainted with their writings via the contest juries and awards dinner. W.E.B. Du Bois appeard less concerned about pleasing white audiences. Unlike Opportunity's contest, the Crisis 1925 and 1926 literary competitions were nearly an equal number of black and white judges. For the 1927 competition, Du Bois acted as the primary judge. He also eliminated the awards dinner which was an important way for black writers to make contacts with established writers, editors, and publishers.

Proud of the accomplishments of the award winning

short story and poetry writers outside of the contest, Johnson was dismayed by the quality and lack of similar success by the playwrights. In contrast, Du Bois seemed to appreciate the Crisis prize winning plays much more than Johnson did those of the Opportunity contests. In 1927, Du Bois chose playwrights as the first and third place winners of the Crisis competition. The Opportunity and Crisis playwriting divisions will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER II

BLACK THEATRE PRIOR TO 1924 AND THE *OPPORTUNITY* AND *CRISIS* PLAY CONTESTS

The development of English speaking drama in America was inhibited by the puritanical mores of the colonists and their decendants. Throughout the nineteenths and early-twentieth centuries, American playwrights used native themes and characters to appeal to popular tastes. However, most critics agreed that these works lacked the polish, sophistication, and merit associated with European drama. According to theatre historian Bernard Hewitt, it was not until the 1920s that "the American theatre had attained maturity. For vitality and originality it had no superior and perhaps no peer" (381).

While white playwrights were earning international acclaim, few black dramatists were known beyond the Afro-American community in the early-1920s. Furthermore, the literary merit and craftsmanship of black authored dramas were usually inferior to those by white writers. While American drama in general had matured, drama by black playwrights was still in its infancy.

Both Johnson and Du Bois attempted to encourage black dramatists through their respective literary contests; however, only the *Crisis* editor recognized the early stage

of development which characterized the talents of these fledgling black writers. Consequently, Johnson and Du Bois held differing expectations for their play competitions which led to contrasting opinions as to their success. Before discussing the journals' play contests, the history of the black theatre will first be given in order to place the drama competitions in their proper context.

Black Theatre Prior to 1924

Black characters first appeared in American plays in the late-eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century, black characters were featured prominently in several immensely popular plays, most notably, Uncle Tom's Cabin.[25] However, these roles were customarily played by white actors well into the twentieth century.

Few black dramatic companies of the nineteenth century have been identified. One New York group of the early 1820s, the African Company, is notable for producing the first drama by a black in the U.S., William Henry Brown's King Shotaway. Also, the Company is believed to have provided the great black tragedian, Ira Aldridge, with his first dramatic role.[26]

[25] For a discussion of black characters in drama prior to 1909, see Fannin S. Belcher, Jr., "The Place of the Negro in the Evolution of the American Theatre, 1767-1940," Diss. Yale U. (1945) 1-56.

[26] For a discussion of the African Company, see Jonathon Dewberry, "The African Grove Theatre and Company," Black Theatre Literature Forum 16 (Winter 1982) 128-31.

Few plays written by blacks in the nineteenth century are known to be extant. One of these plays, William Wells Brown's The Escape; or a Leap for Freedom (c. 1858), was given readings by its author but not performed. From 1865 to 1920, black churches and other community organizations raised money by "crudely present[ing] religious plays, amateur minstrel shows, dramatic readings, mock trials, womanless weddings, and other types of recreational dramatics" (Edmonds, 17). During this period, would-be stage actors, such as Henrietta Vinton Davis, Charles Burroughs, and Richard Berry Harrison, toured the country giving dramatic readings and recitations.[27]

Nevertheless, the impact of black artists on the stage was negligible until the latter half of the nineteenth century. According to black historian James Weldon Johnson, "The real beginnings of the Negro in the American theatre were made on the minstrel stage" (87). The origins of the American minstrel show is usually credited to a performance by a group of blackface entertainers known as the Virginia Minstrels (featuring Dan Emmett) at the Bowery Amphitheatre

[27] Charles Burroughs would, later, act as a judge for the play division of the Crisis literary contest. Richard Harrison was "discovered" and acclaimed by the American theatre of the 1930s in Marc Connelly's The Green Pastures. For discussions on the lives and careers of Henrietta Davis and Harrison, see Errol Hill, "Henrietta Vinton Davis: Shakespearean Actress," Women in the American Theatre, Eds. Helen Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins (New York: Crown, 1981) 92-97, and Andrea Nouryeh, "When the Lord was A Black man: A Fresh Look at the Life of Richard Berry Harrison," Black American Literature Forum (Winter 1982), 142-46.

in New York in 1843. Minstrelsy soon became one of the most popular American entertainment forms of the era. Troupes performed in large cities and small towns throughout the nation. In his book entitled Blacking Up, scholar Robert Toll contended that these white entertainers in blackface "selectively adapted elements of Afro-American folk culture into caricatures and stereotypes of Negroes...Minstrelsy was the first example of the way American popular culture would exploit and manipulate Afro-Americans and their culture to please and benefit white Americans" (51).

Minstrelsy remained the domain of white entertainers until black companies began to tour the country in the 1850s. None of these fledgling organizations achieved much notice until one black company, the Georgia Minstrels, gained recognition after their successful tour of the Northeast, 1865-1866 (Toll, 199). The dances, music, and comedy of these black artisis influenced the development of the American musical theatre.[28]

Minstrelsy was one of the major employers of black entertainers until the development of black musical comedies and revues. James Weldon Johnson credited the 1898 New York production of a A Trip to Coontown as the first black show to "completely break" from the minstrel format (102).

[28] For a discussion of black minstrel artist contributions to minstrelsy and the development of the American musical theatre, see Chapters 7 and 8 in Robert Toll's Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America (New York: Oxford UP, 1974).

It was also the first show to be written and produced by blacks on the New York stage. Other black shows were to follow, but most popular were those featuring Bert Williams and his partner, George Walker. Williams and Walker Broadway shows included such musical comedies as Sons of Ham (1900), In Dahomey (1903), Abyssina (1906), and Bandana Land (1908).

However, this era of black musicals on Broadway ended as increasing production costs and the popularity of comparatively inexpensive movies resulted in the closing or conversion to movie houses of hundreds of legitimate theatres throughout the country. According to scholar Arthur Paris:

> [P]roducers looked increasingly for shows that would be "sure-fire" hits and would settle into long Broadway runs in first class houses to repay their investment. As a consequence, producers exercised more caution and were less willing to take a chance with anything which might be peculiar, novel or different enough to make patrons hesitate. Blacks were clearly at a disadvantage in such a situation and the sudden deaths of key figures among Black theatre folk dealt a fatal blow to the development of this trend toward full Black participation in the American theatrical mainstream. (62)

Consequently, few black entertainers appeared on Broadway from 1910-1920. Instead, black shows toured black theatre circuits or were staged in Harlem. Variety acts and musical shows were the most popular attractions for black audiences as they were for whites. Several black theatre circuits were established, most importantly, the Theatre Owners

and Booking Agency (TOBA).[29] TOBA booked shows for its theatres located in large northern cities and throughout the South.

In Harlem, the Lincoln and Lafayette Theatres catered to the entertainment tastes of the common people. Opened in 1909, the Lincoln Theatre could seat over one thousand patrons and featured variety acts, musical shows, and movies. Until 1916, the Lincoln was also the home of the Anita Bush Players (Kellner, 63). "High society folks" seldom patronized this theatre which was "always crowded to capacity from the moment it open[ed] its doors on Monday afternoon to the last curtain calls on Sunday evening" (Walrond, 52). Indeed, most middle class blacks probably share critic Theophilus Lewis's impression of this theatre:

> The Lincoln Theatre is a cheap movie-vaudeville house. Its audiences consist of the kind of people who kick the varnish off the furniture, plaster chewing gum on the seats and throw peanut shells in the aisles. The imperfectly disinfected odors of the lavatories somehow contrive to seep out into the auditorium to mingle with the scent of cologne and sachet powder and the body smells of people who sweat freely and frequently and bathe now and then. The air in the place always suggests there is a hamper of diapers somewhere about waiting for the laundry wagon. At night a strong fleet of cruisers, ludicrously gorgeous in war paint of vermillion and purple, patrols the place looking out for love-famished stevedores, and of Thursday

[29] TOBA is also referred to by performers as "Tough on Black Acts," because of the circuit's poor pay and working conditions. For a discussion of the circuit, see Henry Sampson, Blacks in Black face: A Source Book on Early Black Musical Shows (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1980, 14-19.

> afternoons sweet-back men without connections are wont to resort there for the servant girl shooting. (380)

The Lafayette Theatre enjoyed a better reputation than the Lincoln. The two thousand seat theatre opened in 1912. Unlike the Lincoln, whites initially dominated the audience of the Lafayette; however, by 1916, the patrons were predominately black (Kellner, 214). Formerly with the Lincoln, the Anita Bush Players were not known as the Lafayette Players Stock Company.[30] Most of the plays presented by the Company "were either melodramas or farces which had run their course on the Broadway stage" (Belcher, 350). Occasionally, the Company presented black drama, mostly one-acts, by black authors; however, these plays were "ususally relegated to midnight performances, often benefits" (Monroe, 129). By 1920, musical shows increasingly were placed on the Lafayette's bill. Although plays were sporadically offered, the Lafayette became a vaudeville house under the management of Frank Shiffman in 1923.

Like the Lafayette Players, few dramas by black writers were produced by black stock companies and amateur groups which were founded throughout the country in the early-twentieth century. One notable exception was the production of Angelina Grimke's Rachel by the Drama Committee of the NAACP of Washington, D.C. on March 3 and 4, 1916. The play

[30] For a history of the Lafayette Players Stock Company, see Sister M. Francesca Thomson, "The Lafayette Players: 1915-1932," Diss. U. of MI, 1972.

was later performed at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York and in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Gregory, "Chronology," 413-414). It also was one of the earliest published dramas by a black writer.[31]

In the 1920s, black entertainers were again welcome on Broadway due to the success of Shuffle Along. With its book by Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles and songs by Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, the musical comedy ran for 504 performances beginning on May 23, 1921. The show influenced contemporary music and choreography in white shows (Kimball, 148). Its chorus featured such future black stars as Florence Mills, Josephine Baker, and Ethel Waters. Shuffle Along made producers eager to mount black musicals, such as Runnin' Wild, Chocolate Dandies, and Hot Chocolates. Writer Langston Hughes also credited the musical with giving "the proper push--a pre-Charleston kick-- to that Negro vogue of the 1920s, that spread to books, African sculpture, music, and dancing" (224).

Black drama also returned to Broadway four years before Shuffle Along; however, it could not claim to have affected the American theatre nearly as much as the musical. In 1917, Robert Edmond Jones directed and Emily Hapgood produced Ridgley Torrence's one-act black dramas--The Riders

[31] Cornhill Company of Boston published Rachel in 1920.

of Dreams, Granny Maumee, and Simon the Cyrenian.[32] Although the production lasted only 18 performances, James Weldon Johnson called it "the most important event in the entire history of the Negro in the American theatre" (175). The significance of this production was primarily due to the novelty of having blacks instead of whites in blackface portraying black characters:

> [T]he Negro actor, up to this time, was a synonym for the Negro entertainer, and his sphere of influence in minstrel and burlesque shows, musical comedies, revues, and on the vaudeville stage. Oblivious to the fact that these antics usually presented Negro life not as it was, theatre audiences, chiefly white, could not conceive of the Negro entertainer in any but the traditional role of clown, and no commercial producer dared to experiment. (Belcher, 163-64)

Throughout the 1920s, black drama was produced on Broadway. In 1923, the Chicago based Ethiopian Art Players presented the first black drama by a black playwright, Willis Richardson's one-act play The Chip Woman's Fortune. The first full-length black drama by a black playwright, Garland Anderson's Appearance, was produced in 1925. However both plays had short runs: sixteen performances for The Chip Woman's Fortune and twenty-three performances for

[32] Robert Edmond Jones became one of the foremost designers of the 20th century. Emily Hapgood was the wife of Norman Hapgood, and editor and drama critic. Torrence's three one-act plays are now collectively know as Three Plays for a Negro Theatre.

Appearances.[33] Furthermore, black drama receiving the most acclaim (at least by white audiences) was written by white playwrights, such as Eugene O'Neill, DuBose Heyward, and Paul Green. According to Huggins:

> [The writing of black drama by white playwrights] was not so much a wave of liberalism in the theatre's attitude toward race as it was the development of theatrical realism in the United States. Until about 1915, the genteel restraints on American theatre were almost total. Respectable drama was European or melodramatic. Realism and naturalism entered cautiously through Europeans such as Ibsen. American realism in the theatre, however, was a more difficult matter. It appears that the Negro subject permitted easier entry for Americans into sordid and "realistic" subjects than could any possible white counterpart. The kind of subjects that European playwrights had long treated--crime, passion (lust), human limitation--could more comfortably be given to Negro characters than to white in these years. (294)

Furthermore, Huggins believed that the black, "as he was traditionally conceived" could be more easily perceived as a tragic character than the white. The black's "efforts at manhood had necessarily to fall short; the tradition offered no other possibility. So, when American dramatists wanted to come close to reality--human limitation--the

[33] The Ethiopian Art Players performed on Broadway for sixteen performances. The Chip Woman's Fortune was one of three works performed by the Players, but it was replaced by another play after its first week on Broadway. The actual number of performances for Fortune is not known. See Willis Richardson, Interview, 5 March 1972, Audio-cassette tape, Hatch-Billops Oral History Collection, Cohen Library, City College of New York.

Negro was more readily available as a subject than whites" (294).

Although blacks such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke commended black drama by white playwrights, most blacks regardless of education or income did not appreciate these works. In an article on the black audience, Lewis satirized the regular patrons of the black theatre:

> [They are] unlettered and lewd folks, laborers and menials and hoidens and hoodlums and persons who are materially prosperous but spiritually bankrupt. . . [This audience enjoys] exaggerated buffoonery, obscene farce and sex-exciting dancing, such curiosities as giants, midgets, acrobats, musical seals and mathematical jackasses. ("The Theatre," 214)

In contrast, the "educated classes" of blacks only went to the theatre after the production was critically acclaimed. Lewis believed:

> [W]hen the higher type of Negro goes into the theatre he commonly ignores his own tastes as well as the desires of the lower elements in the audience and demands that the performance be adjusted to a set of standards alien to both. He insists on the Negro theatre copying the suave manners and conventions of the comtemporary white theatre, unaware that the white stage reflects the racial experience of a people whose cultural background has never resembled ours since the beginnings of history. ("The Theatre," 214-15)

Despite the differences in class and expectations of the theatre, blacks criticized the black drama by white playwrights, including what some scholars believe is one of the best plays of the genre and period, Eugene O'Neill's The Emperor Jones. When O'Neill's drama was presented at the Lincoln Theatre:

> [The regular patrons] didn't know what to make of The Emperor Jones on a stage where "Shake That Thing" was formerly the rage. And when the Emperor Jones started running naked through the forest, hearing the Little Frightened Fears, naturally they howled with laughter.
>
> "Them ain't no ghosts, fool!" the spectators cried from the orchestra. "Why don't you come out o' that jungle-back to Harlem where you belong?"
>
> In the manner of Stokowski hearing a cough at the Academy of Music, Jules Bledsoe [who played the title role] stopped dead in his tracks, advanced to the footlights, and proceeded to lecture his audience on manners in the theatre. But the audience wanted none of The Emperor Jones. And their manners had been all right at all the other shows at the Lincoln, where they took part in the performances at will. So when Brutus continued his flight, the audience again howled with laughter. And that was the end of The Emperor Jones on 135th Street. (Hughes, 258-59)

Moreover, while they applauded Charles Giplin's performance in the title role of the premier production, "the matter of O'Neill's script, however, was an outrage to many Harlem critics" (Monroe, 97). When the Howard University Players produced the drama, the patrons "wondered why the University would stoop to allow its students to give a performance of a play in which the leading character was a crap-shooter and escaped convict. [A "respected" English teacher] went so far as to say that O'Neill had no standing as a playwright" (Richardson, 123). Black poet and literary critic William Stanley Braithwaite included The Emperor Jones in his critique of black drama by white authors:

> In all these plays, disregarding the artistic quality of achievement, they are the sordid aspects of life and undesirable types of characters which are dramatized. The best and highest class of racial life has not yet been discovered for literary treatment by white authors. (206)

Moreover, black critics were also dissatisfied with the black theatre, as a whole. In 1924, Lewis stated:

> What we call the Negro Theatre is an anemic sort of thing that does not reflect Negro life, Negro fancies or Negro ideas. It reflects the 100 per cent American Theatre at its middling and cheapest. This gives us the funny phenomenon of a body of stage folks making virtually no effort at all to represent the life and manners of their race. Even the musical show, which pretends to present genuine Sambo buffoonery, really does nothing of the sort, but instead palms off the chocolate drop banalities of the minstrel show of thirty years ago. ("Dogday," 291)

Furthermore, many critics agreed with Montogomery Gregory's contention that "white writers cannot descirbe the feelings in the heart of American Negroes today" ("Why," 640).[34] They believed that it would ultimately be the black playwright who would create realistic depictions of black life for the American theatre. Nevertheless, in 1924 when Kenneth MacGowan of Theatre Arts Magazine asked Gregory to recommend an one-act black drama, he "was chagrined at not being able to recommend a single play by a Negro author that would meet his requirements" (Gregory, "No 'Count Boy," 121).[35]

Both Charles Johnson and W.E.B. Du Bois were keenly aware ofall the call for scripts by black authors. Consequently, both editors included playwriting divisions in

[34] At this time, Montgomery Gregory was Professor of English and Director of the Howard University Players.

[35] Theatre Arts published white playwright Paul Green's black drama, The No 'Count Boy.

their respective literary competitions.

The Opportunity and Crisis Play Contests--The 1925 Competition

For the 1925 Opportunity competition, the plays were to "deal with some phase of Negro life, either directly or indirectly; otherwise there were no restrictions. They may be romantic, realistic, humorous, and [were to] be judged upon their quality as a good play" ("Opportunity's," 277). The play division had not length of text restrictions.

Opportunity used a distinguished panel of three whites and one black as judges of the plays: Alexander Woollcott, Robert Benchley, Edith Isaacs, and Montgomery Gregory. According to Brooks Atkinson, the drama critic of the New York Herald--Alexander Woollcott--was "the foremost critic on Broadway until he retired in 1928" (161). Scholar Morris Burns believed Woollcott to be "disenchanted with the characterization of the Negro in American drama, as well as the treatment of the Negro in the theatre" (191). In 1922, Woollcott wrote, "And always with one shining exception [The Emperor Jones], we have never seen a play of Negro life and character which was not at least a little condescending. There has always been the most painfully acute consciousness on the part of the playwright that he was on a slumming party" (1).

Robert Benchley, drama critic for Life magazine, had worked with Opportunity's parent organization, the Urban League, even before World War I. his biographer, Norris

Yates contended:

> [Benchley] spoke out increasingly against racism after reading The Negro Faces American by Herbert J. Seligman and Darkwater by W.E.B. Du Bois. . . [H]e had hailed the performance of the Negro actor Charles Gilpin in O'Neill's The Emporor Jones as indicative that Negro performers had long since been ready "for more serious work than rolling dice in a musical comedy or limping about with lumbago after "de young mars" Godfrey."
>
> His use of the term "race" and his reference to the "native genius for emotional expression" possessed by the Negro suggests that Benchley had not cleared quite all the stereotyped ideas out of his mind. Be that as it may, he attacked objectors to the miscegenation theme in All God's Chillun Got Wings, and exploded when the Theatre Guild relegated a Negro to the balcony. (71, 73)

Edith Isaacs was the influential editor of Theatre Arts Magazine. She knew many of the leading black intellectuals and writers and also arranged, with Alain Locke, a New York exhibition of primitive African art in the early 1920s. She would later write the history, The Negro in the American Theatre, which was published in 1947 (Sicherman, 370).

At the time of the Opportunity contest announcement, Montgomery Gregory had just assumed a position as superintendent of the black public schools in Atlantic City, New Jersey. He was "influenced" by George Pierce Baker and the 47 Workshop while studying at Harvard ("T. Montgomery Gregory," 40). He received his B.A. from Harvard in 1910 and taught English at Harvard University until 1924 (Kellner, 144). In 1916, Gregory and Alain Locke founded the Stylus Society, a literary club at Howard. After being involved

with various dramatic groups, Gregory and Locke also initiated the Howard Players who gave their first performance in 1921.[36]

Gregory served as director of the Players which received some assistance from such white theatre artists as Marie Moore-Forrest and Cleon Throckmorton.[37] For the black theatre, Gregory championed the folk play as opposed to propaganda dramas. Furthermore, he believed that folk plays "would prove a potent agency for the amelioration of race friction and misunderstandings" ("For," 350). Clearly, Gregory held a belief in drama's potential for creating racial harmony that Charles Johnson had for black authored literature, in general.

The winning plays, all one-acts, were first announced at Opportunity's awards dinner for the contestants held in New York on May 1, 1925. In the play division, first prize ($60) went to Geroge Dewey Lipscomb, a Professor of Languages and Literature at Wiley College (Marshall, Texas) for his drama, Frances. Two writers shared the second prize ($35)--Warren McDonald for Humble Instrument and Zora Neale Hurston for Color Struck. Little information could be found

[36] The first performance of the Howard Players was Ridgely Torrence's Simon the Cyrenian.

[37] Marie Moore-Forrest was a nationally known director of community drama and pageants. Cleon Throckmorton provided technical assistance for the Provincetown Players and became an acclaimed set designer and theatre architect.

concerning McDonald except that he lived in Philadelphia. Hurston was a protege of Charles Johnson. That year, the Opportunity contest also awarded her with an honorable mention for her play, Spears, and second prize and an honorable mention for her short stories, "Spunk" and "Black Death," respectively. May Miller, daughter of an influential Howard University administrator, received the third prize ($15) for her play, The Bog Guide. Besides Hurston, honorable mentions were awarded to poet and dramatist Eloise Bibb Thompson for Cooped Up; and Willis Richardson, the author of The Chip Woman's Fortune, for his drama, Fall of the Conjurer. Opportunity published only one of the award winning plays, Frances.[38]

In an editorial on the contest, Johnson stated that, "The significance of the plays may be sensed when one considers that the plays about Negro life available in this country may be counted on the fingers of one hand. The contest brought to light about sixty-five, many of which have a distinct merit and are producible" ("The Contest," 130). Furthermore, a letter from playwrighting judge Robert Benchley made the following claim:

> [The plays were] much better than the average submitted in Professor Baker's Harvard course, in which I was a judge two years ago . . . The dialogue in all the plays, with the exception

[38] See. G. D. Lipscomb, Frances, Opportunity 3 (May 1925), 148-53.

> of the artificially native (African) ones, is particularly good and far above the average dialogue in play contests. (Walrond, 20)

Besides the publishing of six plays and theatre reviews,[39] the drama division of the Opportunity literary contest was that magazine's most significant involvement with the theatre. In contrast, Crisis and its editor, W.E.B. Du Bois, displayed a greater interest in promoting black drama and its production.

Since it's inception, Crisis often featured play reviews and essays on the black theatre. In 1917, the magazine selected Ridgley Torrence as one of the "Men of the Month," for his Three Plays for a Negro Theatre, because "No white man has written of colored people more sympathetically . . . No one has done as much as he in opening up to them a new field of art, and none ever approached the people in a more generous spirit" ("Men," 256). From 1920-1923, the journal published three short plays by black writers.[40]

[39] The six plays published by Opportunity were: G.D. Lipscomb's Frances 3 (May 1925) 148-53; Frank Wilson's Sugar Cain 4 (June 1926) 181-84; Georgia Douglas Johnson's Plumes 5 (July 1927) 200-01, 217-18; Marita Bonner's The Pot-Maker 5 (July 1927) 43-46; Doris Price's Two God's: A Minaret 10 (Dec 1932) 380-83, 389; and Stanley Richard's Distric of Columbia 23 (April-June 1945) 74-77.

[40] The plays published by Crisis were Joseph Cotter's On the Fields of France 20 (June 1920) 77; Willis Richardson's The Deacon's Awakening 21 (Nov 1920) 10-15; and Ottie Graham's Holiday 26 (May 1923) 12-17.

Moreover, W.E.B. Du Bois was personally involved with the theatre. In 1908, Horizon magazine published his one-act play, The Christ of the Andes (1-14).[41] In 1911, Du Bois outline the script for the pagent, "The Star of Ethiopia." Its first production was staged at the New York Emancipation Exposition in 1913. Other performances were held in Washington, D.C. in 1915, Philadelphia in 1916, and Los Angeles in 1924 (Du Bois, Autobiography, 270).

In 1920, Du Bois founded a children's magazine, The Brownies' Book, which was published through 1921. The Book included four children's plays by fledgling black playwright Willis Richardson. Du Bois also recommended Richardson to the Ethiopian Art Players--the group who would perform Chip Woman's Fortune for Broadway audiences in 1923 (Haskins, 81).

In a 1921 editorial entitled, "Negro Art," Du Bois criticized blacks who insisted that black art only "tell the best and highest in us . . . The more highly trained we become the less can we laugh at Negro comedy--we will have it all tragedy and triumph of dark Right over pale Villainy" (55). As a consequence, he believed black writers and artists were cautious in depicting certain seamier aspects of black life for fear that their own race may criticize them. Thus, without these restraints, white writers may be freer to portray a more realistic depiction of black life.

[41] Later, Du Bois wrote, "George Washington and Black Folk: A Pageant for the Centenary, 1732-1932," Crisis 39 (April 1932) 121-24.

Du Bois commended the black plays of white dramatists Edward Sheldon, Ridgley Torrence, and Eugene O'Neill and called them the "forerunners" of black playwrights who will write about Afro-American life.[42]

In a 1923 article for Theatre Magazine, Du Bois primarily defended the recent Broadway performances of the Ethiopian Art Players. However, he also advocated the development of black drama by Afro-American writers and actors, despite his earlier view that black audience attitudes may hinder realistic portraits (12, 68).

When Crisis announced its literary contest in October 1924, unlike contestants for Opportunity's competition, readers of Du Bois's magazine had some conception of the philosophy of black drama held by the editor. Furthermore, Crisis provided specific advice for its prospective play-writing entrants. According to contest rules, "Plays must deal with some phase of Negro history or experience and should occupy from five to seven pages of The Crisis in length" ("Any, Crisis, 24). Unlike Opportunity, Crisis provided contestants with an article on playwriting by black writer Mark Seybolt ("Play-wrighting," 164-65). Seybolt recommended playwriting books and offered writing tips to dramatists. The plays were to be written for "colored folk"; however, the dramatists were encouraged

[42] Edward Sheldon wrote The Nigger which was produced on Broadway in 1909.

not to "confine" themselves to themes depicting "sorrow among black folk." Also, Seybolt urged writers to think of stories of "sunshine and kindness and ambition and hope." Most important, it appeared as if Crisis understood the stage of development which characterized most of these writers. Seybolt stated that in George Baker's playwriting text, Dramatic Technique:

> [He] points out [that] most attempts at writing plays fall into two classes--the well-written but trite; the fresh and interesting but badly written. It is the second class which interests The Crisis. The birthborn gift is there but only study and experience will develop it. (164)

To judge these plays written for a black audience, Crisis assembled a panel of three--two blacks and one white: Charles Burroughs, Lester Walton, and Eugene O'Neill. Born in Galveston, Texas in 1875, Charles Burroughs graduated from Wilberforce University (Ohio) in 1897. He studied for one year at the Boston School of Expression and lectured on Shakespeare for the New York public schools. He served as an actor and director with black little theatre groups and made a career out of giving readings for black churches and civic organizations. Crisis named him one of the "Men of the Month," in 1912, and in the following year, he staged Du Bois's pageant "The Star of Ethiopia" in New York

("Men," 119).[43]

Born in St. Louis in 1882, Lester Walton worked as a journalist for several of the city's newspapers before coming to New York in 1906. From 1908-14 and 1917-19, he served as a drama critic and managing editor for the Harlem newspaper, New York Age. He managed the Lafayette Theatre, 1914-16 and 1919-21, and joined the staff of New York World in 1922 (Fleming, 533).[44] In the 1928 article, "Across the Footlights," Walton criticized white writers of black life for portraying "the race at its worst." He also stated his belief in the American stage as an entertainer and educator which could potentially bring about racial harmony.[45] Clearly, Walton was certainly in agreement with the beliefs of Charles Johnson and Montgomery Gregory, but he never served as an Opportunity judge.

The career of Eugene O'Neill, certainly, needs not to be viewed in this text. Following the success of the Pulitzer Prize winning Beyond the Horizon, the 1920

[43] In 1928, his wife went on a trip with his two sons (aged 6 and 9) to the Soviet Union. So that they would be raised in what she thought was an environment free of racism, Mrs. Burroughs left the boys in Russia. Charles Burroughs never saw his sons again. [Charles Burroughs Moorland Research Center, Howard University]

[44] Walton served on the staff of the New York Tribune in 1931 and was U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, 1935-46.

[45] These statements are based on excerpts of the Walton article reprinted in John Monroe, "A Record of the Black Theatre in New York City: 1920-29," Diss. U. of Texas at Austin (1980) 126.

production of The Emperor Jones established O'Neill as one of America's promising young playwrights. Curiously, biographies of the dramatist pay little attention to his relationships with blacks with the exception of his feelings toward Emporor Jones star, Charles Gilpin.[46] However, this author of two other black dramas, The Dreamy Kid and All God's Chillum Got Wings, had contacts with the black community and was written about quite extensively in the black press. In an article entitled, "Reflections on O'Neill's Plays," the black actor, Paul Robeson wrote that he had "met and talked with Mr. O'Neill. If ever there was a broad, liberal-minded man, he is one. He has Negro friends and appreciated them for their true worth. He would be the last to cast any slur on the colored people" (369-70). Eugene O'Neill wrote Montgomery Gregory concerning his attmept to establish a National Negro Theatre with the Howard Players. The playwright stated that he was "thoroughly in sympathy with [this] undertaking, for I believe as strongly as you do that the gifts of the Negro can--and will--bring to our native drama are invaluable and to a dramatist, they open up new and intriguing opportunities" (Gregory, "Chronology," 417). In a letter to The Messenger,

[46] These biographies include Arthur and Barbara Gelb's O'Neill (New York: Harper, 1974); and Louis Sheaffer's O'Neill: Son and Playwright (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968) and O'Neill: Son and Artist (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973).

O'Neill wrote:

> I have read a good number of plays written by Negroes and they were always bad plays--badly written, conceived, constructed--without the slightest trace of true feeling for drama--unoriginal--and, what revolted me the most, bad imitations in method and thought of conventional white plays! . . . [Instead, black writers should] [b]e yourselves! Don't reach out for our stuff which we call good! Make your stuff and your good! You have within your race an opportunity--and a shining goal!--for new forms, new significance. Every white who has sense ought to envy you! We look around with accustomed eyes at somewhat jaded landscapes--at least too familiar--while to you life ought to be as green--and as deep--as the sea! There ought to be a Negro play written by a Negro that no white could every have conceived or executed. By this I don't mean greater--because all art is equally great--but your, your own, an expression of what is deep in you, is you, by you!! (O'Neill, 17)

Thus, it appeared as if O'Neill, like Du Bois, encouraged the writing of black drama by blacks. Indeed, the Crisis editor and playwright admired each other. According to writer, Herbert Aptheker, "cordiality marked the long relationship" between the two men (Du Bois, Correspondence, 294). O'Neill wrote to Du Bois that it would be an "honor" to judge the play entries of the literary contest (Du Bois, Correspondence, 295).[47] However, one can only speculate on the dramatist's condition when reading these plays sometime between May-August, 1925. His biographer, Louis Sheaffer, claimed that beginning in April 1925, O'Neill

[47] In 1931, O'Neill accepted a position on the Advisory Board for a Crisis contest offering prizes for the best published books written by blacks.

would "be more or less under the influence of drink or suffering its aftereffects" for the rest of the year (175).

The Crisis literary contest drew only twenty plays, forty-five less than Opportunity's competition.[48] The winners were announced at a Crisis dinner for contestants in New York on August 14, 1925. First prize ($75) was awared to Willis Richardson for The Broken Banjo. Already familiar to Crisis and former Brownies' Magazine readers and several black little theatre groups, Richardson had also received an honorable mention for a play submitted to the Opportunity competition. Opportunity reported that Broken Banjo was performed at the Crisis dinner ("Amy," Opportunity, 287). Second and third prizes ($40 and $10, respectively) went to two unknown authors. Ruth Gaines Shelton of St. Louis received second place honors for The Church Fight and Myrtle Smith Livingston of Greely, Colorado earned the third prize for the drama, For Unborn Children. While Opportunity only published one of its

[48] The author can only guess why there was such a disparity between the number of play entries received by Opportunity and Crisis. Crisis's total cash awards for plays exceeded its rival by $15. Perhaps the dramatists believed Opportunity's competition to be more prestigious than the Crisis contest, since two of its judges were Broadway critics, another was the editor of an influential theatre magazine, and another had headed a well-known black theatre group. In contrast, the Crisis judges, with the exception of Eugene O'Neill, were little recognized outside of New York. Or, perhaps Crisis offered so much advice on playwriting that prospective contestants believed the contest to be too restrictive and, thus, did not bother to enter the competition. Or, since Opportunity announced its contest before Crisis, writers may have sent entries to the former magazine and neglected the latter.

1925 prize dramas, Crisis published all three of its award winning plays.[49]

The 1926 Competition

The total cash prizes for plays offered by Opportunity remained at $110. However, this year, the play division was judged by two blacks and two whites: Montgomery Gregory, Paul Robeson, David Belasco, and Stark Young. Gregory was the only judge from the 1925 jury to be a member of the panel in 1926. Paul Robeson was still a young actor and singer when asked to be a judge. Born in 1898 in Philadelphia, he earned a law degree from Columbia in 1923. However, three years before graduation, he appeared in a Players' Guild production of Ridgley Torrence's Simon the Cyrenian at the Harlem YMCA.[50] Audience members, Kenneth MacGowan and Robert Edmond Jones, offered Robeson the title role in The Emperor Jones. The novice actor declined the part, because he believed the "play portrayed blacks as savages" (Haskins, 73). His adversity to O'Neill's work did not last as Robeson starred in a revival of Jones

[49] See Willis Richardson, The Broken Banjo, Crisis 31 (Feb 1926) 167-71 and 31 (March 1926) 225-281; Ruth Gaines Shelton, The Church Fight, Crisis 32 (May 1926) 17-21; and Myrtle Smith Livingston, For Unborn Children, Crisis 32 (July 1926) 122-25.

[50] Crisis play judge Charles Burroughs and Frank Wilson, an actor and first prize winner of the 1926 Opportunity play division, also appeared in this production. See Monroe, 159-60.

while preparing for the opening of the dramatist's controversial All God's Chillun Got Wings (Sheaffer, 140). In fact, in an article defending O'Neill's plays, he appeared to agree with Du Bois's criticism of black audiences.

> We [blacks] are too self-conscious, too afraid of showing all phases which are of greatest dramatic value. The great mass of our group discourage any member who has the courage to fight these petty prejudices. (369)

David Belasco was one of America's most famous producers and directors. Both Opportunity and Crisis published favorable reviews of Belasco's 1926 production of the black life drama, Lulu Belle, although the two lead characters were played by whites in blackface.[51] In fact, according to Belasco, all of the black characters were originally to be played by whites; however, he later changed his mind after deciding the production would then lack validity (Belasco, 17-18).

Stark Young served as the drama critic for the New Republic and, later, joined the staff of Theatre Arts. He directed Eugene O'Neill's Welded in 1924 and wrote some unsuccessful plays, "as well as, admired translations of Chekhov" (Bordman, 731). In 1926, Young accepted a position on the play panel, although he wrote to the Opportunity

[51] For the play reviews on Lulu Belle, see "White Is Black," Opportunity 4 (April 1926) 134-35; Hubert H. Harrison, "The Significance of Lulu Belle," Opportunity 4 (July 1926) 228-29; and "The Theatre: Lulu Belle," Crisis 32 (May 1926) 34.

editor, "I consistently refuse to read manuscripts and for the most part books, for they distract and confuse me except in very definite and desired instances" ("Judges," 340). In 1927, he wrote an article entitled, "Negro Material in the Theatre." He criticized the patronizing attitudes of whites who, in accordance with the current "Negro vogue," seemed to be overzealous in their praise of black drama and actors. Yet in the same article, Young condescendingly stated:

> Negroes are by nature a superb acting medium. They have voices that are engaging by their strangeness to our ears and that are theatrical because they are moving and warm and flexible. They have flexible bodies and perfect relaxation; they have a quick response and a gift of rapport and mutual interest among themselves that is unfailing. They have, too, very often, a kind of simple humanity and sweetness that is touching and persuasive, a freshness and spontaneity that is disarming, and a suggestion of power and force, brutality and abandon that heightens the impression of that vitality by which the stage comes alive. (331)

The contest winners were announced at the Opportunity dinner held on May 1, 1926 where Paul Robeson "spoke for the plays" ("Awards," 186). First prize ($60) was awarded to popular Harlem actor and playwright, Frank Wilson, for Sugar Cain. Wilson's drama was the only one of the 1926 award winning plays published by Opportunity.[52] Second prize ($35) went to a Professor of Romance Languages at

[52] See Frank Wilson, Sugar Cain, Opportunity 4 (June 1926) 181-84, 201-03.

West Virginia State College, John Matheus, for 'Cruiter. Matheus had won first prize for his short story, "Fog," in the 1925 Opportunity contest. The writer was also awarded several other prizes in the 1926 Opportunity competition: first prize for his personal experience sketch, "Sand"; and honorable mentions for a short story and three poems. Third prize ($15) was awarded to Warren McDonald for the drama, Blood. Last year, McDonald won second place honors for another play and, in the 1926 competition, his short story, "A Matter of Inches," received an honorable mention.

Opportunity cited two of Zora Neale Hurston's plays--a revised version of Color Struck and The First One--for honorable mentions. Hurston had won awards for her plays and short stories in the 1925 contest and, this year, she was also awarded second prize for her short story, "Muttsy." May Miller, last year's third place drama winner, received an honorable mention for her play, The Cuss'd Thing. A Washington, D.C. woman better known as a poet, Georgia Douglas Johnson, was awarded honorable mentions for her drama Blue Blood and two poems, "Song of the Sinner" and "Song of Many Loves."

The Crisis editor went beyond the publications of plays and the literary contest to promote black drama. In

1926, Du Bois founded the Krigwa Theatre Movement.[53] In a July 1926 article, the Crisis editor stated the principles of the Movement.

> The plays of a real Negro theatre must be: 1. About us. That is, they must have plots which reveal Negro life as it is. 2. By us. That is, they must be written by Negro authors who understand from birth and continual association just what it means to be Negro today. 3. For us. That is, the theatre must cater primarily to negro audiences and be supported and sustained by their entertainment and approval. 4. Near us. The theatre must be in a Negro neighborhood near the mass of ordinary Negro people. ("Krigwa Players," 134)

Two months before the publication of this article, Du Bois's Harlem branch of the Krigwa Players presented three one-act plays under the direction of Charles Burroughs. The plays, Willis Richardson's The Broken Banjo and The Compromise and Ruth Gaines Shelton's The Church Fight, were written by Crisis award winning dramatists. According to Du Bois, the Players performed to "enthusiastic" full-house audiences "averaging 200 persons" for each show ("Krigwa Players," 136).

Critic Theophilus Lewis objected to the name, "Krigwa," because it sounds like somebody with a sore throat beginning to gargle" ("I Hate," 182).[54] Nevertheless, Krigwa

[53] Regina Andrews, a Harlem librarian and supporter of black writers and artists, believed that the Krigwa Theatre Movement was inspired by the Howard Players. See Loften Mitchell, Voices of the Black Theatre (Clifton, NJ: James T. White, 1975) 80.

[54] Krigwa had been spelled CRIGWA. The initials stood for the Crisis Guild of Writers and Artists.

branches opened in major cities, such as Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Cleveland" (Edmonds, 21).

Crisis increased its total cash awards to the play division from $125 to $150.[55] Also, the cash prizes were only awarded to the first and second place award winners. An all-black jury now judged the plays: last year's Crisis judges Lester Walton and Charles Burroughs; and one who had served on the Opportunity 1925 and 1926 panels, Montgomery Gregory.

As in 1925, Willis Richardson won first place honors ($100), this year, for his full-length drama, Bootblack Lover.[56] Second Place ($50) went to West Indian born Eulalie Spence for her drama, Foreign Mail. A New York school teacher, Spence had written one-act plays and acted with Harlem little theatre groups, including the Krigwa Players. A recent graduate of Oberlin College, Randolph Edmonds received honorable mentions for Peter Stith and Illicit Love. None of the 1926 award winning plays were published by Crisis.

At the October 25, 1926 Crisis dinner for contestants,

[56] Bootblack Lover was the only full-length play which won an award during the history of the Crisis and Opportunity contests. Obviously, the author did not adhere to last year's rule which restricted the length of the text to five to seven pages of Crisis. It is not known how many other full-length plays were submitted to the Crisis and Opportunity contests.

the Krigwa Players presented Eulalie Spence's Foreign Mail and a non-award winning entry by W.J. Jefferson entitled, Mandy. Also, it was announced that contestants who had won first or second place honors in the 1925 or 1926 competitions were ineligible for the 1927 contest. As a consequence, the rule disqualified Willis Richardson for next year's contest.

The 1927 Competition

The Opportunity editor had been pleased with the progress of the short story and poetry contestants. He spoke proudly of these writers' accomplishments in two editorials, "The Contest" (291-92) and "Stories and Poetry" (5). The plays, however, were a different matter. Charles Johnson admitted his dissatisfaction with the efforts of the playwrights in a January 1927 editorial, "On the Need of Better Plays" (5-6). Johnson blamed contemporary audiences for influencing dramatists to write "low comedy which [had] succeeded commercially, and a few propagandistic efforts of a defensive character." He remained hopeful that others shared his support for drama that would depict "more faithful pictures of reality." Johnson believed that plays had the potential for "the forceful interpretation of Negro life itself, a service which the stage undoubtedly can perform with as great, if not greater, directness and power than either fiction or poetry."

Three whites and one black served on the panel for

the 1927 contest: Edith Isaacs, Lula Vollmer, Paul Green, and Paul Robeson. Isaacs and Robeson had served previously as judges in 1925 and 1926, respectively. Lula Vollmer worked in the box office of the Theatre Guild; however, she was best known for the writing of folk plays. Her most successful play, Sun-Up, raised over $40,000 for the education of Southern mountain people (Bordman, 694). Folk playwright, Paul Green, was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina. Green received the 1926 Pulitzer Prize for the black drama, In Abraham's Bosom. He had also published his anthology, Lonesome Road: Six Plays for a Negro Theatre. In 1927, Montgomery Gregory stated that this dramatist "has to his credit, with the possible exception of Eugene O'Neill, the finest contribution of Negro plays yet written" ("Chronology," 421).

The judges chose Georgia Douglas Johnson's Plumes as the first place winner ($60). The drama was the only 1927 award winning play published by Opportunity.[57] Last year, Johnson had received honorable mentions for a play and poems. The 1926 second place winner of the Crisis contest, Eulalie Spence, now won Opportunity's second prize ($35) for the play, The Hunch. Spence also shared the third prize ($15) with a newcomer from New Jersey, William Jackson. Spence wrote the Starter, while Jackson won for his play,

[57] See Georgia Douglas Johnson, Plumes, Opportunity 5 (July 1927) 200-01, 271-18.

Four Eleven. Last year's Crisis honorable mention winner, Randolph Edmonds, continued to receive this citation. This time, Opportunity awarded him a honorable mention for Bleeding Hearts. The awards were presented at the annual Opportunity dinner for contestants.

At Crisis, Du Bois must have been proud of his little theatre group. In January 1927, the Krigwa Players presented three one-acts--Eulalie Spences' Foreign Mail and Her, and W.J. Jefferson's Mandy--at the 135th Street Library in Harlem. The group earned much greater acclaim when it performed Eulalie Spence's Fool's Errand at the National Little Theatre Tournament in New York on May 7, 1927. The comedy won the $200 Samuel French Prize for the best unpublished work. Unfortunately, according to Spence, the Players soon broke up over a dispute concerning the prize money.[58] Du Bois accepted the award to pay production expenses; however, the actors thought that they would also get a share of the prize. When they received no compensation,

[58] While Spence claimed that the Harlem Krigwa Players did not perform after 1927, there is a record of a Krigwa Players group performing at the National Little Theatre Tournament of 1928. The group performed Aftermath, a play by a Washington, D.C. teacher, Mary Burrill. Burrill had taught at the high school during the period that Willis Richardson was a student there. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that these Players, who were associated with the Worker's Drama League of Manhattan, were the same Harlem group initiated by Du Bois. See Belcher, 395.

the group dissolved. This disappointed Du Bois, "because he though he had established a permanent little theatre group" (Spence, Interview).[59]

The depth of Du Bois's disappointment in the failure of his theatre group became apparent when one reads his editorial, "Paying for Plays" (7-8), published in November 1926, months before the Players broke up. Thus far, plays published in Crisis were generating production interest.[60] In the editorial, Du Bois asked prospective producers for $5 for performance rights--$2.50 to Crisis and $2.50 to the dramatist. Still, the editor conceded that blacks had objected to this payment. Du Bois stated that this dispute exemplified the "singular attitude of our people toward artists and writers. Plumbers, carpenters and bricklayers we pay without question; the workman is worthy of his hire. But if a man writes a play, and a good play, he is lucky if he earns first-class postage upon it" (7). Thus, while the editor viewed Crisis plays as a way to earn revenue for the magazine, Du Boise, also, wanted to give some financial

[59] The author has no information on the longevity of the Krigwa branches, except for the Washington, D.C. group. According to interviews of members, Willis Richardson and May Miller, the Washington, D.C. Krigwa Players were quite active and performed well into the 1930s.

[60] Crisis had published six plays by this time. Three were Crisis award winners. See footnotes, #35 and #45, for the names and publication citations for these plays.

support to the writer. Furthermore, Du Bois revealed his attitude toward the commercial prospects of black-authored drama:

> Of course, [the black writer] may sell it commercially to some producer on Broadway; but in that case it would not be a Negro play or if it is a Negro play it will not be about the kind of Negro you and I know or want to know. If it is a Negro play that will interest us and depict our life, experience and humor, it cannot be sold to the ordinary theatrical producer, but it can be produced in our churches and lodges and halls; and if it is worth producing there it is worth paying for. (7-8)

Indeed, these are the words of the same man who championed Broadway black drama written by whites who was telling writers of his race not to strive to the "Great White Way." For Du Bois, the hope for the development of black playwrights lay with the production of their works by black little theatre groups. Certainly, a year later, the demise of his own drama group must have deeply distressed Du Bois.

For Crisis's 1927 competition, Du Bois restructured the contest without notifying the contestants. The works of each entrant competed against those of another regardless of whether one submitted short stories, plays, or essays or a combination of these genres. The editor graded all of the entries and decided which were eligible for prizes. With the assistance of unnamed consultants, Crisis awarded first prize ($200--a sizable sum in 1927) to Marita Bonner. Bonner had submitted: two plays, The Purple Flower and Exit, an Illusion; a short story, "Drab Rambles,"; and

an essay, "The Young Blood Hungers." This teacher from Washington, D.C. had also won first prize for an essay in the 1925 Crisis contest and an honorable mention for a short story in the 1925 Opportunity competition. The 1927 Crisis second prize ($100) went to Brenda Ray Moryck, also of Washington, D.C., for her short stories, "Old Days and New," "Days," and "Her Little Brother." Former Opportunity and Crisis award winner, Eulalie Spence earned third prize ($50) for her plays, Hot Stuff and Undertow. Crisis also named eight writers who received honorable mentions, but did not list their entries. Of the eight, Randolph Edmonds and John Matheus had previously won play awards in the Crisis and/or Opportunity contests.

The cash prizes were mailed to the contestants. This year, Crisis held no dinner in their honor. Furthermore, with the exception of writing another pageant (see footnote #36), Du Bois devoted less of his time to the promotion of the theatre.

Conclusions

In a 1929 edition of Carolina Magazine devoted to plays by black dramatists, Lewis Alexander wrote:

> Nothing has done more to incite interest among race writers, in the possibilities of the folk play than the literary prizes offered in recent contests by Opportunity Magazine and The Crisis . . . The contests and prizes offered reassured the race writers that, it was worthwhile, for some of them . . . had been writing a decade or more with little or not attention at all. The new spirit of the contests reincarnated

> the old writers and moved the aspiring young dreamers to take up their pens and write. (45)

Indeed, the contests brought to the forefront fifteen black dramatists and thirty plays. Not surprisingly, nineteen of these plays were written by authors based in New York and Washington, D.C. However, eleven works also earned awards from Los Angeles, Greely (Colorado), St. Louis, Philadelphia, Marshall (Texas), Institute (W. Virginia), Oberlin (Ohio), and Montclair (New Jersey). Three dramatists received awards from both magazines.[61] Seven writers won more than one play prize from the same magazine.[62] Five won play awards and also prizes for work in another genre.[63]

As will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter IV, some of the winners personally knew or may have know Charles Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois, friends of the magazine editors, or contest judges. Losers may have suspected the judging in the competitions if aware of these connections and the fact that there were so many repeat winners in the play category and other divisions. After being prompted

[61] Randolph Edmonds, Willis Richardson, and Eulalie Spence.

[62] Randolph Edmonds, Zora Neale Hurston, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Warren McDonald, May Miller, Willis Richardson, and Eulalie Spence.

[63] Marita Bonner, Zora Neale Hurston, Georgia Douglas Johnson, John Matheus, and Warren McDonald.

by "several inquiries," Johnson defended the integrity of the Opportunity contest in an August 1926 editorial ("Questions," 241). He stated that the entries were ranked by the judges in each division. Awards were based on a mathematical formula. Johnson also contended that "Manuscripts and not names are considered."

Nevertheless, the most important observation to be made about the play contests, thus far, has to do with the attitudes toward this division as shown by the Opportunity and Crisis editors. Charles Johnson had thought the Opportunity competition would elicit dramas which would further the movement for racial harmony. The plays were to be written by black dramatists, but these works were to affect white racial opinions. Johnson sought the approval of influential whites and, therefore, assembled play panels which were predominately white in 1925 and 1927. In 1926, the drama jury included two whites and two blacks.

It is not known if or how the judges influenced Johnson's opinion of the plays. Some of the judges connected with the Broadway stage may have been more concerned with the commercial potential of the works rather than their acceptance to black little theatre audiences. Of course, one Broadway critic, Robert Benchley, had enthusiastic praise (see p. 53) for the 1925 play entries and one wonders if this had any affect on Johnson's attitude. Indeed, the Opportunity editor had stated that many of the 1925 plays had a "distinct merit and are producible." In light

of later statements by Johnson concerning the poor quality of play division entries, this pronouncement now appears suspect. Other than Benchley's, statements by judges directly commenting on the contest could not be found. However, in a 1935 Opportunity article, "The Negro and the Theatre," Edith Isaacs, a judge of the 1925 and 1927 competitions wrote:

> I am bound to say that I have never read a play of Negro life written by a Negro--nor, for that matter, any play written by a Negro--that even approached first rate quality. (177)

When Johnson suspended the competition soon after the 1927 contest, the editor was still dissatisfied with the playwriting efforts. He suggested that the dramatists needed more time to develop their craft ("Opportunity Contest," 254). It now appeared as if Johnson had realized that his expectations for the play division had been unrealistic; however, one wonders why it took the editor so long to reach this conclusion. Surely, he must have been aware that the American theatre had not been open to blacks until recently. Many of the professional legitimate theatres were segregated or did not sell tickets to blacks. For example, Edith Isaacs admitted that at the historic 1917 performance of Three Plays for a Negro Theatre, the auditorium was "solidly white except for a few Negro friends that we had bullied the house manager into permitting us to have as guests in our boxes" (174). In 1922, Alexander Woollcott criticized the management of the Sam Harris

Theatre for restricting blacks to the balcony for the production of Mary Wiborg's black drama, Taboo (1). The famous National Theatre in Washington, D.C. barred black patrons until an Actor's Equity protest encouraged a change of policy in the 1950s (Bordman, 499).

Even black actors who later won acclaim on the American stage had to attend segregated classes at the renowned American Academy of Dramatic Arts (Monroe, 163). Furthermore, it was not uncommon for whites to play black characters in blackface throughout the 1920s. Indeed, it was with the black little theatre groups that famous black actors such as Charles Gilpin, Paul Robeson, Frank Wilson, Rose McClendon, and Abbie Mitchell received their initial dramatic acting experiences. The black playwright also gained experience by working with black theatre groups. In fact, the first Broadway play by a black, Willis Richardson's The Chip Woman's Fortune, was produced by a black company from Chicago.

W.E.B. Du Bois understood these facts about the American theatre. While he applauded the black drama of some white writers, he did not promote the commercial theatre for black authors. From the beginning, the Crisis contest encouraged the writing of black plays for black audiences. Only one white judge served on the play division panel. Unlike Opportunity, Crisis also used the services of a black drama critic. Furthermore, Du Bois attempted to provide a forum for black plays. He initiated the

Krigwa Little Theatre Movement to promote the establishment of drama groups that would produce these works. Therefore, Du Bois realized that in order for the dramatist to develop his talents, he needed not only to see his work on paper, but more practically, the play should be refined during rehearsals and performed before an audience.

In conclusion, the Opportunity and Crisis editors held greatly different expectations for the plays of their respective contests. This difference is primarily due to the fact that Johnson was concerned with affecting white racial attitudes, while Du Bois wanted to direct playwriting efforts to the black community. Not surprisingly, the two men formed different conclusions regarding the success of their competitions. In retrospect, it appears that Du Bois had a more realistic view than Johnson of the early stage of development which characterized the talents of most black dramatists at the time of the contests.

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CHAPTER III

THE AWARD WINNING PLAYS

Opportunity and Crisis awarded honors to thirty plays by fifteen black authors. Most of the plays share similar characteristics. Typically, the prize winners are contemporary realistic one-act dramas. They include black characters of various types and dispositions and often feature whites. Most are set in the interior of a house or apartment and require little technical expertise to produce.

The following discussion of the prize winning plays are arranged by topic: (1) race dramas; (2) miscegnation dramas; (3) complexion plays; (4) domestic plays; and (5) religious life plays. For each of the nineteen plays with extant original scripts,[64] the section begins with a synopsis of the story. All plays are one-acts and set in the 1920s unless otherwise noted. Whenever appropriate,

[64] Frances, The Bog Guide, The Broken Banjo, The Church Fight, For Unborn Children, Sugar Cain, 'Cruiter, Color Struck (1926 award winning version), The First One, The Cuss'd Thing, Blue Blood, Bootblack Lover, Plumes The Hunch, The Starter, Bleeding Hearts, The Purple Flower, Exit, an Illusion, and Undertow.

each section cites the use of music and dance, extraordinary technical requirements, non-realistic staging devices, and the relevancy of the play's subject to its contemporary audience. Also, critical comments are also provided concerning selected elements of each play. This section may include such topics as the organization and plausibility of the plot and appropriateness of character actions and speech.

Of the remaining eleven plays with non-extant original scripts, no other information could be found besides their authors and awards for five plays: Hot Stuff, Spears, Four Eleven, Foreign Mail, and Fall of the Conjurer. Nevertheless, story synopses and critiques from revised versions, play-reader reports, and production reviews are used for the six other non-extant original scripts.[65] These sources are utilized to provide some indication as to the original plays' subjects, plots, characters, and merit. However, since the original scripts were unavailable, no attempt was made to critically discuss these plays by this author.

Race Dramas

Frances by G. D. Lipscomb
First Prize Opportunity--1925
Script: Opportunity 3 (May 1925) 148-53.

The melodrama depicts a spineless black man whose greed ultimately leads to his death. The play is set on a farm in Mississippi. Here, a black farmer named Abram

[65] Humble Instrument, Color Struck (1925 award winning version), Cooped Up, Blood, Illicit Love, and Four Eleven.

lives with his neice, Frances. Frances is in love with a black teacher, George Mannus. After Abram leaves the house, George arrives to tell Frances that he is leaving for Chicago. George had become a civil rights advocate much to the displeasure of the white residents. One of these whites, Charles Thawson, also holds the mortgage on Abram's farm. George informs Frances that he recently hit Thawson because he had insulted the two of them. Consequently, Thawson threatened to have George lynched if he did not leave town in twenty-four hours. George plans to leave for the North at 9:00 PM and wants Frances to go with him. Initially, Frances is reluctant to leave out of loyalty to her guardian who does not like George. However, she finally consents and plans to meet George at a friends house at 8:50 PM.

After George leaves, Abram returns home followed soon by Thawson. Abram encourages Frances to be hospitable to Thawson, but she refuses. Thawson believes that she has been influenced by George. Thawson then contends that unless Frances becomes his mistress, Abram will never obtain the title to the farm although he has faithfully made many mortgage payments. Enraged, Abram fights with Thawson not for Frances's honor, but because his payments have not lessened his debt. At play's end, a fight between Abram and Thawson leaves both men dead as a clock strikes nine.

George and Frances are representative of blacks who

deplored the social and economic disparities between blacks and whites in the rural South. They are young, educated, and speak standard English. However, Afro-Americans who opposed the status quo often faced the threat of violent reprisals or banishment. Accordingly, George must leave the region or face a certain death. Likewise, by resisting the demands of the white mortgagee, Frances also places herself and her uncle in a precarious situation.

In contrast, Abram and Thawson are supporters of the status quo. They are uneducated, selfish, middle-aged, and unconcerned with racial equality. They also speak in a dialect that, at times, is difficult to understand, as the following passage exemplifies:

> Abram: I got to step down across de ditchbank to ole man Humphrey's to speak to him 'bout gittin' his drag. We goin' to drag back ez fur ez de school tomorrow . . . By de way-- de County ain't gwine to fix dat road up pas' de school like dey had 'cided. (148)

However, the play shows that those who put their faith in this unjust system will utimately be destroyed by it. Both Abram and Thawson are killed after the former character realizes that the system cannot be trusted.

The play has obvious similarities to an often used melodramatic plot of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century. This popular story concerns a family who will lose their farm unless the pretty young daughter succumbs to the mortgagee's evil designs. However, Frances differs from this prototype in several important ways. Usually,

the daughter's "true love" defeats the evil mortgagee and thereby saves the family farm. In contrast, Frances's lover does not return to "save the day" and it is not apparent whether George and Frances will ever see each other again. More importantly, the family members are usually sympathetic characters, but in Frances, Abram is as contemptible as the mortgagee. For example, Abram enourages Thawson's desires for his neice. When Frances spurns the white man's attentions, Abram says, "D'aint nothin' 't all mattah wid huh, Cap [Charles Thawson], but lonesome. Bin quahlin' all ev'nin' heah wid me; thought you had done fo'gut huh. You show punished huh by not comin' roun' dooin' o' de pas' mont. (To Frances) You little ole big-eyed, good-lookin' rascal, you knows you wants to be right in Mistah Charles' ahms" (151). At the end of the play, Abram does not fight with Thawson because the man wants Frances as payment for the land. Instead, he is furious because his monetary payments were made for nought. When Abram and Thawson are both killed during their struggle, no remorse is elicited for either character. Their deaths symbolize the death of an unjust system--an objective which many people were trying to make a reality.

Frances aptly dramatizes the oppressive way of life endured by many blacks of the rural South. According to the playwright, blacks must oppose the system or they will inevitably be destroyed by it.

Sugar Cain by Frank Wilson
First Prize Opportunity--1926
Script: Opportunity 4 (June 1926) 181-84, 201-03.

The melodrama centers on Sugar Cain--a young black woman with a child borne out of wedlock. In a Georgia farmhouse lives the Cain family--Paul, his wife Martha, son Fred, and daughter Sugar. Although never married, Sugar has a two year old daughter whose father she refuses to identify. Paul assumes that the father is Howard--a Northern college student who had lived with the Cain family there before the time the play is set. However, before Martha and Fred go to church, Sugar tells her mother that Howard did not impregnate her.

Still ignorant of the true identity of Sugar's child, Paul threatens to kill Howard, if he ever returns. Subsequestly, Howard does arrive to ask Sugar to marry him. Paul attempts to shoot him, but Sugar stands in front of Howard. She reveals that a white neighbor, Lee Drayton, is the father of her child. Enraged, Howard runs off to kill Lee. He soon returns saying that Lee had died during their struggle when his head struck a rock. Afterwards, Martha returns to tell them that the Drayton home was on fire and Fred had gone there to save the life of Lee's mother.

Fred soon enters telling of how he carried Mrs. Drayton to safety as a crowd cheered him on. He also says that Lee's body was found "burned ter a crisp" inside the house. Howard and Martha surmise Lee's fate after his head had struck a rock during his fight with Howard:

> Howard: I guess he was only stunned; when he fell in the yard, he came to, saw the fire, and rushed in to save his mother--
> Martha: An wen he got in de house, God punished fer his sins. (203)

The play ends with Martha tending to the wounds Fred received from the fire; Paul walking "dejectedly" up [sic] the stairs; and Howard and Sugar embracing each other.

The play is burdened with many weaknesses. The entire play takes place in one scene with no breaks to allow for the passage of time. All of the action, with the exception of Paul threatening Howard with a gun, is described not shown. This leads to some implausible situations. For instance, within the short playing of the melodrama, the author wants the audience to believe that Fred can argue with his father; get dressed for church; go to church; see a fire at the Drayton's; rescue Mrs. Drayton; and still have time to tell the family about his heroic deed.

Several important aspects of the story are not adequately explained. For instance, Howard is supposedly in love with Sugar, but he has not communicated with her for three years. When he does return to the Cain home, he simply states, "I told you [Sugar] I'd come back after I graduated. Three years is a long time--but I'm happy now" (201). Did Howard come to realize that he wanted to marry Sugar while he was away or was she just to have faith that he would return and not expect any communication from him for three years? Furthermore, the reason why Sugar succumbed to Lee's desires does not appear to be plausible. She

states that Lee threatened "to bring the clan down" on her family if she did not submit herself to him. However, other Draytons besides Lee's mother, are not mentioned in the play. Moreover, Martha quotes Mrs. Drayton as having said, "We's all brudders and sisters in de sight ob de Lord. We got ter live tergether in Heaven, so me mought well git used ter it down hyer on earth" (193). Therefore, with such an unprejudiced mother, how poignant could Lee's threat be?

The characters are as ludricous as the story. For instance, Paul boasts that he understands white people and tells Fred that "if dey hadn't bin thinkin fer yo, whar would yo be now--running round Africa half naked, an yo wouldn't knowed B fum Bull fros" (182). Howard, who initially believed Lee had been killed when his head struck a rock during their fight, "quiety" states, "God almighty placed that rock there to save me from being a murderer" (202). Furthermore, the characters seem to be able to slip in and our of their black dialect at weill. For example, Sugar asserts, "Dat ain't his chile." However, a few lines later she plainly says, "Lee Drayton is the father . . . It's the truth, Mom" (200-01).

Sugar Cain concerns a serious subject--the rape of a black woman by a white man. However, the gravity of the matter is obscured by the play's story line which is too complex for this melodrama with such a meager text. Moreover, character actions are implausible and, at times, laughable

in this play which instead should be of a more realistic and serious nature.

Blood by Warren McDonald
Third Prize Opportunity--1926
Script: Unavailable
Synopsis Source: A combination of two 1937 playreader reports by John Rimassa and Arthur Vogel, Federal Theatre Project Collection, George Mason University Library.

In this melodrama, Josie Gates is distraught that her son, Eddie, has recently been attacked by the Ku Klux Klan. Eddie's friend, Andy, believes that a white man named Gabe Smith led the attack. Josie finds this hard to believe since, years earlier, a blood transfusion from her husband to Gabe had saved the life of this hemophiliac. After Andy leaves, Gabe comes to Josie in search of aid for his bleeding arm. After Josie dresses his wound, she discovers his Klan costume and realizes that he was probably involved in the attack on her son. When confronted with her suspicions, Gabe confesses that he was responsible for her son's injuries. He claims he did it because Eddie threatened to reveal that he had once received a black person's blood. Unable to feel any pity for Gabe, Josie removes the tourniquet and allows the hemophiliac to bleed to death.

Comments--John Rimassa:

> A naively conceived melodrama carried to lurid extremes, which might be all right if the dialogue suited the action. But the dialogue is completely inadequate. Stock characters harangue one another with stilted essays.

Comments--Arthur Vogel:

> The author completely neglects to emphasize the

full background of the people in his play. Gabe is just a villain, when one sees how clearly he could have become the victim of the play, by his fear of being discovered to have Negro blood in his veins, which would ostracise him in the southern town. The resolution is reached by a melodramatic device.

The First One by Zora Neale Hurston
Honorable Mention Opportunity--1926
Script: Ebony and Topaz. Ed. Charles S. Johnson (New York: National Urban League, 1927) 53-57.

The play satirizes the story concerning Noah's curse on his son, Ham.[66] The comedy is set in a valley in the Ararats[67] three years after the Great Flood. Noah and his family provide sacrifices to the Lord to commemorate their deliverance from the Flood. Noah drinks wine to forget the horror of that disaster and soon becomes drunk. He goes to his tent and Ham joins him. As he leaves the tent, Ham laughs because his father had unknowingly stripped himself of all of his clothes. Ham passes out from drinking too much wine and falls behind an alter.

Ham's brothers, Shem and Japheth are convinced by their wives that Ham had ridiculed Noah and should be punished. The brothers cover their father's naked body and tell him what has happened. Still drunk, Noah then denies Ham any share in his bequest and decrees that he and his decendants will be black. The family is horrified by the

[66] See Genesis 9:20-27.

[67] Located in modern-day Turkey.

severity of Noah's curse and attempts to change his mind once he sobers. Noah relents and appeals to God to nullify his decree; however, it is too late. When Ham reappears from behind the alter, he has a dark skin. At plays's end, Ham and his wife leave the valley implying that they will never see the other family members again.

The humor of this play is better understood by those familiar with its biblical counterpart and its erroneous historical interpretation.[68] According to the Bible, all living creatures on earth were destroyed in the Great Flood with the exception of Noah, his family, and the animals he collected. Finding sanctuary in an ark, the survivors stayed on the boat for many months until it rested in the Ararat mountains. After the Flood, God blessed Noah's family and told them to populate the earth. Thus, it is believed that Noah's three sons--Shem, Ham, and Japheth--are the patriarchs of all the peoples of the earth. Ham is said to be the father of Canaan, Cush, Put, and Mizraim. The descendants of Canaan settled in Palestine, while those of Cush, Put, and Mizraim prospered in Ethiopia, Egypt, and northern Africa before populating most of the remaining inhabitable regions of the continent.

In the biblical account of Noah's curse of Ham, Noah only condemned Ham's son Canaan and his descendants to be a

[68] See Genesis 6-10 for the biblical account.

"servant of servants" (Genesis 9:25). There is also no mention of Ham or any of his immediate family becoming black. However, this story was used by Europeans and, later, Americans to justify the enslavement of Ham's black African descendants from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries.

With this knowledge, the first entrance of Ham in the play would probably evoke laughter from the audience. Even at this point in the story, Ham and his family already exhibit many stereotypical characteristics of blacks. For example, Ham and his family are late for the commemoration. While his own father wears a shabby robe, Ham is costumed in a white goat skin with a wreath about his head. A bird is also perched on his shoulder. Moreover, his wife and child are ornately dressed in flowers and bright colors. He does little, if any, manual labor for he prefers to sing and play an instrument while his wife dances. He can also be characterized as a fun-loving person who can find humor in any situation. The audience would certainly recognize Ham as the embodiment of most black comedic traits.

The First One is both a witty and poignant satire. It deftly lampoons a once common belief of the origin and fate of blacks.

Bleeding Hearts by Randolph Edmonds
Honorable Mention Opportunity--1927
Script: Six Plays for a Negro Theatre. (Boston: Walter H. White, 1934) 106-27.

The drama depicts the final moments in the life of a critically ill woman. The play takes place in the South in the dilapidated house of a field hand, Joggison Taylor. While his wife, Miranda, lies ill in her bed, Joggison must work in the fields for Marse Tom, a plantation owner. As the play begins, a neighbor--Sis Jenny--comes to the Taylor home to help Joggison's daughter, Carrie, take care of Miranda. Her mother has become so ill that Carrie sent her brother, Buster, to get their father from the fields; however, Marse Tom intercepted the boy and brought him back home.

Marse Tom tells Carrie that the family is indebted to him, therefore, Joggison will not be allowed to leave the fields until the day's work is completed. He also complains that his wife now has to perform all of his family's household chores since Carrie and her mother are unavilable.

After the plantation owner leaves, a prayer band arrives. Led by a minister, the group of church members have come to console and pray for Miranda. After several hymns and prayers, Miranda becomes ecstatic and suddenly dies. Subsequently, with the exception of the minister, the prayer band leaves.

When Joggison arrives, the preacher tells him of his wife's death. Joggison becomes bitter and denounces God;

however, the minister and Carrie persuade him to repent. Joggison then decides to avenge his wife's death, but the minister convinces him to change his mind. The bereaved husband finally announces that he will leave the United States to escape its injustices.

There are some obvious weaknesses to the play. Marse Tom is the stereotypical white plantation owner who cares little about the well-being of his workers. Insensitive to her worsening condition, he tells Miranda, "What in the devil is the matter with you, Auntie? You're grunting like a sick sow" (110). However, more important, the ending of the play should be better developed. In only three pages of dialogue, Joggison has three different responses to his wife's death. Furthermore, when he finally concludes that he must leave the country, one has no idea where he plans to go. The minister and Carrie fail to tell Joggison that it was Marse Tom who prevented Buster from getting him before his wife died. As for their response to Joggison's final assertion, the script notes that they do not speak, but only "stare widely at him" (127). Clearly the play required at least one more scene in which Joggison can confront Marse Tom and more credibly decide the future course of his family.

Nevertheless, the play can be commended for its informative view of rural Souther life. For example, a doctor has already examined Miranda, but her care does not solely depend on standard medical practices. Sis Jenny supplements

the doctor's care with home remedies. She tells Miranda:

> Sis Jenny: Yuh'se got a pretty bad cold. Ah'se greasing up yo' haid wid dis Musterole. Den Ah'se gwine tuh make a hot poultice tuh put tuh yo' sides, an' giv' yuh some onion syrup an' pine-tag tea. Dat'll sweat dat cold outen yuh in no time. (108)

Also, the play reveals that the unjust treatment of blacks by whites is accepted by some blacks as an intrinsic part of their life in the South. For instance, after Marse Tom leaves, Sis Jenny tries to comfort Carrie by telling her that his attitude was to be expected.

> Sis Jenny: (Soothingly) De white folks does anything dey want down heah, honey. Hit's scandelous de way dey treat us po' cullud folks, but we can't do nothin' but grin an' make believe lak we lak hit. Ah'se been grinnin' in dere face so long dat whenever I see a white face I commence tuh grin befo' I realize what Ah'se doin'. (112)

Nevertheless, other blacks want a better life for their children. When Buster informs Miranda that he wants to be a field hand like his father, she tells him to instead go to school and emulate Booker T. Washington. Furthermore, the drama provides a realistic depiction of the religious practices of a prayer band that are still faithfully performed today.

Although there are some weaknesses, Bleeding Hearts' story and characters are of great interest. The drama's strength lies in its fasciniating portrait of Southern rural life.

The Purple Flower by Marita Bonner
First Prize Crisis--1927
ScriptL Black Theater USA. Ed. James Hatch (New York: Free Press, 1974) 202-07.

The allegory prescribes a militant solution for blacks to overcome oppression by whites. When the play begins, the White Devils are in "Somewhere" on the side of a hill. The Us's [blacks] sit in "Nowhere" in a valley with their faces toward "Somewhere." The White Devils sing a song about not wanting the Us's to ever be on par with them.

To be equal with the White Devils, the Us's must reach the purple "Flower-of-Life-at-Its-Fullest." However, the White Devils will not let the Us's get to it.

Various Us's discuss strategies to reach the purple flower. These plans include: working diligently to convince the White Devils that they deserve the flower; telling God to act on their problem; and trying to bribe the White Devils with gold. After concluding that none of these strategies have been successful in the past, the Old Man finally provides the Us's with another option. The Old Man makes an appeal to the living Us's and the spirits of their ancestors. In an iron pot, he asks the Us's to put dust, books, gold, and blood inside of it, because these ingredients are needed to form the New Man. The elements for the creation of this new being each has symbolic significance. According to the Bible, God formed the first man from dust (Genesis 2:7). The books provide knowledge and gold allows people the means to acquire clothing and food. The blood

is needed to give life to the New Man.

According to the Old Man, blood will be shed when the Us's and White Devils fight each other. Us's may die in the struggle, but he claims there is no other way to reach the purple flower. The play ends with the first of the Us's to volunteer to fight the White Devils.

The author gives the audience only one view of the White Devils. They are deceitful tyrants who exploit the Us's and give them nothing in return. All White Devils are alike, thus, the author cites no characteristics to distinguish one from the other.

> [The White Devils] must be artful little things with soft wide eyes such as you would expect to find in an angle. Soft hair that flops around their horns. Their horns glow red all the time--now with blood--now with eternal fire--now with deceit--now with unholy desire. (202)

In contrast, the Us's "can be as white as the White Devils, as brown as the earth, as black as the center of a poppy. They may look as if they were something or nothing" (202). The author gives the Us's a variety of names to denote different types of characters, such as Old Lady, Cornerstone, Sweet, Average, Finest Blood, and New Comer. Each age group--young, middle-aged, and old--is blamed for a failed strategy to reach the purple flower. Nevertheless, the Old Man recognizes that it will take the concerted efforts of the entire community to finally obtain their objective. Morevover, the Old Man contends that "God is using [each Us] for His instrument" to fight

the White Devils (206); thus, their mission can also be seen as a "holy" offensive against a cruel and insensitive opponent. The violent plan would meet with little support if the White Devils were reasonable or showed any redeeming qualities that would suggest the possibility of racial harmony in the future. Therefore, the dramatist must portray the White Devils as the personification of evil to convince the Us's and ultimately the audience that the Old Man's solution is justifiable.

The author is the only one of the prize winning playwrights to use expressionistic techniques.[69] The script provides a description of the stage which is to be "divided horizontally into two sections, upper and lower, by a thin board" (202). The main action of the play is to take place on the upper stage and the lighting of the lower stage is "never quite clear." At times, "action that takes place on the upper stage is duplicated on the lower" and the actors become so violent thay they crack boards that divide the stage (202). The script also calls for a drummer and dancing by the Us's and White Devils.

The Purple Flower shows that its author is well adept at using the stage for propaganda. Futhermore, it should be noted that at the end of this script the dramatist

[69] Expressionism is also utilized in the dramatist's other prize winning play, Exit, an Illusion.

asked if blacks were ready for such a revolution. This is significant because the play was written four decades before these views were more commonly expressed by radical blacks in the 1960s. The script leaves one to wonder how many blacks in the 1920s agreed with the plays final solution to white dominance.

Miscegnation Drama

The Bog Guide by May Miller
Third Prize Opportunity--1925
Script: Typescript. May Miller personal collection.

In this drama, an African girl avenges the mistreatment of her mulatto English father. The play takes place in an African marsh. Here, an Englishman named Rupert Masters is searching for his cousin, Chauncey Bayne. Rupert explains to his English companion, Elwood Bealer, that he and his cousin were in love with the same woman called Audrian. When Audrian consented to marry Chauncey, Rupert revealed a secret that ended their engagement. He disclosed that Chauncey's mother was a mulatto. Since Chauncey's mother married into this Caucasian family, then only her son was "tainted" with her black blood. "Disgraced," Chauncy left England and was recently spotted by a friend of Rupert's on an African expedition. Remorseful due to his treatment of Chauncey, Rupert wants to find his cousin and bring him back to England.

While Rupert leaves his friend in order to find a bog guide, a fourteen year old girl named Sabali meets

Elwood. The girl is the daughter of Chauncey and an African dancer who have recently died of a tropical disease. She discloses that she will soon die from the same malady.

Sabali leads Elwood away as Rupert reenters the scene. He has heard of Chauncey's fate from a local trader and when Sabali returns without Elwood, Rupert surmises that she is his cousin's daughter. He tells her that he wants to take her back to England. However, she instead avenges her father's ill-fated life by leading Rupert to a mire where they both sink to their death.

The play concerns miscegenation; however, unlike other dramas employing this subject, this play uses English and African characters instead of those of the Southern region of the U.S. Nevertheless, the development of the English characters is weak and their speech seems to be no different than an American's except for the phrase, "old chap," which is inserted several times into the dialogue.

By far, the character of Sabali is of greater interest than the Englishman. According to the script, the young woman is only to be partially clothed with her breasts exposed.[70] As the following passage exemplified, she speaks in a manner that is sensual and erotic.

> Sabali: (poninting to her naked breast) I am Sabali. I sprang from the dreams of Flotsam and the music of the dancer. Their passionate

[70]Of course, this costume would have been quite controversial if displayed before audiences of the 1920s.

> love gave me body. (7)

She tells a provocative story of how her father left "Faraway Land [England], where men build structures to hide their wickedness and clothes their bodies to cover black souls--a land inhabited by vices masquerading under fair names" (7). Her father changed his name to Flotsam and came to the "Island of Love" [Africa].

> Sabali: [Here] [h]e saw the beautiful black body of the dancer sway and bend as graceful as the flames by whose light she was dancing. He loved her beauty and they came out here a little away from the others. But the love of one from Faraway Land and a dancer of a tribe has its hours of sould torture. There were times when even a wonderful love failed, and Flotsam suffered! T'is not so easy to forget the structures, the clothes, and even the masqueraders of Faraway Land. But then I came. The dancer named me Sabali, her music, but Flotsam called me solid land, his haven at last. (8)

As Sabali continues, one begins to wish that the playwright had chosen to dramatize this story rather than the one she actually wrote.

The technical requirements for the play are more difficult to fulfill than those for other prize winning plays. The text described a realistic set which has a great sensual appeal.

> Scene: Back stage and to the side upstage the narled [sic] trunks of trees twist as if to bend over a stretch of marsh land that begins about center stage and extends off to the left. A rotting stump on the margin of the swamp adds to the atmosphere of decay. The rest of the stage is covered with vivid green moss and vines which seem to reach out from the quagmire.
>
> It is near the end of the day. A heavy mist hangs over the tree tops. The wild life of the

> forest is stilled except for an oaacsional cry from afar. (2)

Furthermore, a trap is necessary to allow Sabali and Rupert to seem as if they are sinking into a quagmire. The bog setting provides a metaphor to the drama since Rupert's former prejudice and Sabali's obsession with vengence had "mired" their lives.

Unlike other award winning plays, The Bog Guide is not set in the U.S. or utilize American characters. Also, the setting is exotic and technically more complicated than those for other prize dramas. Nevertheless, the play is burdened with much expostion and little action. The story Sabali tells of her father is much more interesting than the one dramatized.

For Unborn Children by Mrytle Smith Livingston
Third Prize Crisis--1925
Script: Black Theatre USA. Ed. James Hatch (New York: Free Press, 1974) 185-87.

The melodrama shows the consequence of a black man's involvement with a white woman. The play takes place in a middle class black home in the South. As the drama begins, a young woman named Marion and her grandmother, Grandma Carlson, wait anxiously for Marion's brother, Leroy. Leroy is a young lawyer who has been secretly dating a white woman. He plans to marry her and move to the North. Marion and Grandma Carlson are vehemently opposed to Leroy's plans. When the young man returns home, he tells them that on the next day he and the woman will leave the South. The

two women try to persuade him to change his mind. They are unsuccessful until Grandman Carlson reveals that Leroy and Marion's mother was a white woman who "hated" them because they were not truly of her race. Leroy's grandmother contends that if he wants to avoid this fate for his "unborn children," then he must not marry his white fiance.

As Leroy contemplates his dilemma, his fiance arrives to tell him that a white mob is coming to lynch him. However, Leroy does not try to escape. Instead, he apologizes to his sister and grandmother for not realizing earlier that they were right. He tells his fiance to find someone to love of her own race and "victoriously" walks outside to be lynched by the waiting mob.

Clearly, the author is telling the audience that miscegnation is bad and can only lead to misery for blacks and whites. In the following tirade, Marion sets forth her objections to her brother's involvement with a white woman:

> Marion: I wouldn't go a step with you and your white woman if I was going to be killed for it! If you've lost your self-respect, I still have mine! I wouldn't spit on a woman like her! There must be something terribly wrong with her, for white women don't marry colored men when they can get anybody else! You poor fool! If it's color you want, why couldn't you stay in your own race? We have women who are as white as any white person could be! My Gos! What is to become of us when our own men throw us down? Even if you do love her can't you find your backbone to conquer it for the sake of your race? I know they're as much to blame as we are, but intermarriage doesn't hurt them as much as it does us; laws would never have been passed against it if the states could have believed white women would turn Negro men down, but they knew they

> wouldn't; they can make fools out of them too easily, and you're too much of a dupe to see it! Well, if you marry her, may God help me never to breathe your name again! (186)

Through Marion and Grandma Carlson, the author depicts the sentiments of many blacks opposed to intimate interracial relations; however, the subsequent actions of the protagonist--Leroy--are implausible. By play's end, as the family hears the lynch mob approaching, Grandma Carlson "clutches her heart" and "falls on her knees and prays." Then, "a light breaks over [Leroy's] face and his is transfigured; a gleam of holiness comes into his eyes; looking heavenward." Leroy exclaims, "Thy will be done, O Lord!," apologizes to the women, and realizes his certain fate. As this "sacrificial lamb" walks off-stage, he announces to the waiting mob, "I'm coming, gentlemen!" (187).

Only those keenly aware of the hundreds of actual lynchings of blacks would be moved by Leroy's "heroic," yet, unbelievable actions at play's end.[71] However, despite this implausible ending, the drama does deftly express the opinions of many blacks opposed to miscegnation.

[71]For the reported number of lynchings of blacks in the U.S. during the late-nineteenth and tentieth centuries, see Lerone Bennett, Jr., Before the Mayflower, 5th ed. (Chicago: Johnson Pub. Co., 1982) 494, 500-24 passim, 541, 548, 551.

Blue Blood by Georgia Douglas Johnson
Honorable Mention Opportunity--1926
Script: Fifty More Contemporary One-Act Plays. Ed. Frank Shay (New York: Appleton, 1928) 293-304.

In this drama, the mothers of a betrothed couple discover that their children cannot marry. The play takes place in Georgia at the home of Mrs. Bush and her daughter May. As the drama begins, Mrs. Bush is busily preparing food for the wedding of her daughter and John Temple who both have fair complexions. Mrs. Bush would rather her daughter marry a dark skinned local doctor named Randolph Strong, but May prefers John. John's mother, Mrs. Temple, arrives at the Bush home to help with the wedding preparations. During the course of the women's conversation, it is discovered that May and John have the same father--a rich white banker. The women inform May and Randolph of the dilemma, but not John. Mrs. Bush believes that if they were to tell John, the young man would murder his white father. Randolph asks May to elope with him and she accepts. Happily, the families now have a reason to cancel John's and May's wedding without divulging the identity of the children's real father.

The playwright uses the theme of miscegnation in a trivial and incredible story. Even the solution to the character's predicament is too ridiculous for the audience to accept. From the beginning of the play, Mrs. Bush appears to be much more interested in Randolph than is May. Mrs. Bush is displeased that May had refused his marriage

proposal a year earlier and tells Randolph that her daughter was "turning her back on the best fellow in this town, when she turned you down. I knows a good man when I see one" (299). When Randolph asks May to elope with him at the play's end, she admits that she does not love him. However, the author has May go with Randolph despite her feelings for him. Why could not have May simply told John that she had changed her mind and, consequently, could not marry him?

Most of the dialogue of the play occurs between Mrs. Bush and Mrs. Temple. The latter implies that she belongs to a higher social class than the former. To exemplify class differences, Mrs. Temple speaks standard English, while Mrs. Bush uses a black dialect. Curiously, May also speaks standard English apparently unaffected by her mother's speech and social class. In fact, since Randolph Strong also uses standard English and miscegnation is not peculiar to the South, the audience would have little clue as to the play's setting in Georgia.

Blue Blood is a common play. Though it employs the serious theme of miscegnation, the drama is burdened with an uninteresting plot and unsatisfactory ending.

Illicit Love by Randolph Edmonds
Honorable Mention Crisis--1926
Script: Unavailable
Synopsis Source: Allen Williams, "Sheppard Randolph Edmonds: His Contributions to Black Educational Theatre." Diss. Indiana University, 1972.

Illicit Love (in three acts) is a variation on

> the Romeo and Juliet story. In this account Romeo is a handsome son of a Black sharecropper, and Juliet is the daughter of the Southern plantation owner. They meet regularly at the spring which is hidden in the woods not far from the houses. Such love in that section is, of course, illicit love. Despite great vows of fidelity and plans for running away, the ending is inevitable. Their meetings are discovered and the father shoots the boy. (228)

Complexion Plays

Color Struck by Zora Neale Hurston
Honorable Mention Opportunity--1926
Script: Fire!! 1.1 (1926) 7-14.

This drama concerns a black woman who is unable to sustain a relationship with a black man because she despises her own dark skin. The first of three scenes take place in 1900 in Florida. In Scene 1, blacks from Jacksonville board a train taking them to compete in a cakewalk contest.[72] The last couple to board the train is John, a "light browned skinned" man and Emma, a dark skinned woman. John had to coax Emma to board the train, because she though John had been flirting with Effie, a mulatto. Effie is traveling to

[72]Rooted in a tradition that began in slavery days, the cakewalk became a dance fad after it was featured in Sam T. Jack's Creole Show in 1890. Contests were soon held throughout the country in which well-dressed couples promenaded about a large room or dance hall. "The winners were those who had style, flashiness of manner, elegance of costume, and could execute intricate figures and strutting steps to the rousing music." See Nathan Huggins, Harlem Renaissance (London: Oxford UP, 1971) 273-74.

the contest alone since she had an argument with her boy-friend and refused to compete with him.

The next two scenes take place at the dance hall. In Scene 2, as John and Emma begin to eat from their supper-basket, Effie offers the couple two pieces of her homemade pie. Emma refuses, but John accepts her offering. When the couple's names are called, Emma does not want John to compete because she is afraid other women will be attracted to him. John tries to convince Emma that her jealousy has no basis, in fact, but she continues to refuse to enter the contest. Finally, John chooses to compete with Effie. Scene 3 depicts the competition in which John and Effie triumphantly win the grand prize--a huge chocolate cake.

Scene 4 takes place twenty years after the competition in a shack in Jacksonville. Here, Emma lives with her critically ill mulatto daughter. John, who had moved to Philadelphia and propsered, has returned to the city to find Emma. He arrives at her home and asks her to marry him. She tells him that she has a daughter out-of-wedlock, but he is no less reluctant to marry her. John tells Emma to obtain a black doctor for her daughter, but she refuses. Instead, she decides to obtain a white doctor who lives nearby. When Emma returns, she becomes furious when she sees that John has wet his hankerchief and placed it on the sick girl's head. When John realizes that Emma is even jealous of her own daughter, he leaves her. Subsequently, the girl dies and the doctor gives Emma a box of pills to

help her to sleep. The play ends with Emma crying in a rocking chair alone beside her dead daughter.

At times the play can be quite humorous. For instance, in Scene 1, a man called Dinky tries to flirt with Effie who is sitting along on the train. While waiting for his girlfriend--Ada--to board, Dinky puts his arm around Effie.

> Effie: Take yo' arms from 'round me, Dinky! Gwan hug yo' Ada!
> Dinky: (in mock indignation) Do you think I'd look at Ada when Ah got a chance tuh be wid you? Ah always wuz sweet on you, but you let ole Mullet-head Sam cut me out.
> Another Man: (with head out the window) Just look at de darkies coming! (With head inside the coach) Hey, Dinky! Heah come Ada wid a great big basket [of food].
> (Dinky jumps up from beside Effie and rushes to exit right. In a moment Dinky and Ada enter and take a seat near the entrance. Everyone in the coach laughs.) (7)

The main focus of the play, self-hatred of ones own skin color, is indeed an experience familiar to blacks from slavery days through the mid-twentieth century. To many blacks, a light skin was preferred to a dark one. Color Struck attempted to show the effects of this belief on a dark skinned person. However, while the playwright has logically developed the story and provided realistic dialogue for the first three scenes, the drama becomes incredibly melodramatic in Scene 4.

According to the script in Scene 4, John returned to the South to marry Emma because he "couldn't die happy is [he] didn't" (12-13). It does not bother him that Emma had a mulatto child out-of-wedlock. Furthermore, this liberal

man fails to even ask how she could have had intercourse with a white man when Emma could not even bear for him to look at a light skinned black woman. Emma is also able to get a white doctor for her daughter, although this was certainly not common during this period. The climax of the scene would probably elicit laughter if performed. At this point, Emma returns from the doctor's office and sees that John is at her daughter's bed.

> Emma: I knowed it! (She strikes him.) A half white skin. (She rushes at him again. John staggers back and catches her hands.)
> John: Emma!
> Emma: (struggles to free her hands) Let me go so I can kill you. Come sneaking in here like a pole cat!
> John: (slowly, after a long pause) So this is the woman I've been wearing over my heart like a rose for twenty years! She so despises her own skin that she can't believe any one else could love it!
> (Emma writhes to free herself.)
> John: Twenty years! Twenty years of adoration, of hunger, of worship! (On the verge of tears he crosses the door and exits quietly, closing the door after him.)

To subsequently have the daughter die adds little to this story which fails to achieve the realism and poignancy the dramatist attempted to include.

Nevertheless, another striking feature of the play concerns the amount of music and dancing that it includes. At the beginning of the play, the script notes that the "strumming of stringed instruments" should be heard amongst the sounds of the train and people talking. Also in Scene 1, several songs are sung and there is dancing. In Scene 3, there are only a few spoken lines for its main focus is

on the cakewalk competition which is to last for seven to nine minutes.

Besides the musical needs, the text calls for elaborate technical requirements. The drama uses three different interiors: a train coach; dance hall; and shack. The script cites many set and personal properties for each setting. Moreover, the play takes place in two different time periods. The first three scenes take place in 1900 and, of course, require sets to reflect this era. Costumes from this period are also needed for the thirty to forty cast members required for these scenes. In contrast, Scene 4 takes place twenty years later with only four characters for this period. While no special lighting needs are cited for Scenes 1-3, Scene 4 is to begin with moonlight seeming to be the only source of illumination for the shack. Midway into the scene, a lamp must appear to provide the light for the house until wind seemingly blows it out at the end of the play.

The first three scenes of Color Struck are finely crafted. The characters of John and Emma are interesting and sensitively portrayed. Music and dance also complement these scenes as the entertainments provide a lively atmosphere in contrast to Emma's self-defeating and depressing demeanor. In contrast, Scene 4 is incredible and unnesessary. This final scene only further complicates production requirements. Instead, the play could end after Scene 3 and the audience would still conclude that Emma is destined for an unhappy

life without dramatizing it.

Exit, an Illusion by Marita Bonner
First Prize Crisis--1927
Script: Crisis 36 (October 1929) 335-36, 352.

This dream play concerns the relationship between a black man and woman of contrasting complexions. The drama takes place in a dilapidated studio apartment. The story begins with Dot--a fair-skinned woman--sleeping on a sofa-bed, while Buddy--a dark skinned man--lies on the floor underneath the woman's dangling arm.[73] When they awaken, Dot gets out of bed and begins to apply makeup to her face to prepare for a date with Exit Mann. Buddy becomes jealous as he is convinced that Exit is a white man.

When Dot reveals that she has known Exit for the greater part of her life, the banter between she and Buddy becomes bitter. Dot tells Buddy that he can stop Exit from seeing her if he loves her; however, Buddy will not admit his affections for her.

Exit mysertiously appears in the room, but his face cannot be seen due to the lighting on him or the positioning of his body. An overcoat and hat also conceal his his identity. Buddy takes a pistol and fires it toward Exit, but the bullet misses him and hits a light fixture

[73] The conventions of the day prohibited the author from placing both characters in the same bed.

which puts the set into darkness. Buddy strikes a match whose light reveals Exit's face covered by a mask symbolizing death and Dot's lifeless body.

After a blackout, the setting returns to that found at the beginning of the script. As before, Dot and Buddy are asleep when the woman suddenly finds it difficult to breathe. She tries to awaken Buddy but she dies before he realizes what is happening. As in the dream, she is dead before she can hear him declare his love for her.

The dramatist has fashioned a compelling psychological drama based on the strength of the protrayal of two lower class black characters. Both Dot and Buddy speak a black urban dialect and live in a desparate environment. Yet, the two are separated by the color of their skins. Buddy is "blackly brown with thin high poised features that mark a keen black man" (335). Furthermore, Buddy's "slender body is caste for high things"--one of them being Dot, a "high yella" woman (335). Apparently, Buddy's only attraction to Dot is her fair skin for she is sickly and "flat where she should curve, sunken where she should be flat" (335).

While Buddy is attracted to her color, he is also threatened by it. He knows that she can easily pass for white, and, thus, be seen with a white man without drawing much attention from those unaware of her race. Understandably, Buddy is jealous of her date with Exit and attempts to stop her from going; however, Dot will not heed his pleas.

> Buddy: Where you think you're going?
> Dot: I got a date I tell you!
> Buddy: An' I tell you you ain't going to keep it!
> Dot: Aw cut that stuff! How long since you could tell me when to go and when to come! Store that stuff! (335)

Dot then encourages his jealousy by heavily applying white powder to her face and suggesting that she may not actually be black. Buddy does not believe her and only becomes angrier. His fury leads to tragic results which is mirrored in the fateful ending of the play.

The drama utilizes more complex technical requirements than those for the other prize winning plays. The author provides meticulous details of the apartment which includes at least one item--red kid pumps- that had a particular significance to audiences of the early-twentieth century. The shoes which were placedon the edge of a table was believed to have been an omen that its owner would soon die. Thus, from the beginning of the play, audience members aware of this superstition would be forewarned of the drama's fateful ending.

The lighting requirements heighten the tension of the play. When Exit appears, he is to seem ominous as he stands "half in shadow" (336). When Buddy confronts Exit, "Dot's color is bright. Her eyes glow in the semi-shadow. The lights in the room seem dimmer" (336). When Buddy shoots out the light fixture, he strikes a match that is to seemingly provide enough light to reveal Exit's identity and Dot's dead body. Undoubtedly, such lighting complementing this drama would produce a horrific effect.

While the author does not describe Buddy's costume, she does provide details for Dot and Exit's clothing. Dot is to wear a thin nightgown to show her unflattering body. To prepare herself for her meeting with death later into the scene, Dot puts on a black turban and sealskin coat. Exit is dressed in dark colors as a symbol of his sinister and designs. While he wears a common overcoat and hat, his face must be covered by a mask symbolically representing death.

As in her other award winning play--The Purple Flower--the dramatist employs expressionistic devices in this psychological drama. Exit, an Illusion features deftly drawn characters and a shrewd use of technical elements in this engaging and fascinating play.

Domestic Plays

Cooped Up by Eloise Bibb Thompson
Honorable Mention Opportunity--1925
Script: Unavailable
Synopsis Source: George S. Schuyler, "Ethiopian Nights Entertainment," Messenger 6 (Nov 1924) 342-43. In this article, the critic reviews the 15 October 1924 performance of Cooped Up at the Lafayette Theatre.

> The play is excellent and contained the best acting of the evening. Cleo the keeper of a rooming house in a settlement near New Orleans on the Mississippi River is smitten with Scipie Johnson, a worker on the levee who has married a simple minded girl. In order to separate the newly-wed couple, Cleo persuades one Julius, a local sheik, and also a roomer, to make love to Scipio's wife, and advises the wife to return his affections. Julius soon becomes so enamored that he proposes flight to the big city. Torn by conflicting emotions Cassie, the young wife, reluctantly agrees to go. Cleo, elated at the success of her deep laid plans, throws herself,

> figuratively speaking, at the feet of Scipio telling him of her love. Scipio, whom the breaking of the levee has brought back home to save his wife, is enraged when he learns of the duplicity of Cleo, and spurns her. In the meantime, Cassie returns to replace a black bag containing all Scipio's money in its former hiding place she having eluded Julius at the train; and a reconciliation is effected when all is explained and understood . . . the entire performance was highly satisfactory in every way. Here is a play well worth seeing again. (343)

The Broken Banjo by Willis Richardson
First Prize Crisis--1925
Script: Plays of Negro Life. Ed. Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory (New York: Harper, 1927) 302-20.

In this drama, a man's obsession with his banjo has tragic consequences. The play takes place in a house rented by Matt Turner and his wife, Emma. The drama begins with Matt playing his banjo. His wife demands that he stop playing and instead split some firewood. An argument ensues concerning Matt's dislike of Emma's bother and cousin, Sam and Adam. Subsequently, Matt tells his wife that he is going to the store to buy some music; however, she asks him to instead buy her a pair of shoes. He agrees to purchase them, if she will not allow Sam and Adam to ever again come to their home. She consents to this condition, but her two relatives arrive shortly after Matt leaves.

When Emma tells them that Matt does not want them in his house, Sam says that if her husband does not change his mind, he will reveal Matt's infamous secret to the police. He then informs Emma that he had seen Matt kill a man

because he had broken Matt's banjo. Emma says that she does not believe the story, but lets them remain in the house. Subsequently, Sam and Adam play Matt's banjo and break it. Matt returns home and becomes enraged when he sees the broken instrument. Sam reveals to Matt that he knows of his crime. Matt threatens Sam's and Adam's lives to force them to swear on the Bible that they will not divulge any knowledge of his offense. The two take the oath and leave; however, Emma convinces Matt thay they are not to be trusted. Matt prepares to get away, but Sam returns with a policeman to arrest him.

The broken banjo is a symbol of the family members who are divided by their self-serving interests and lack of support for each other. Emma is a nagging wife who berates her husband throughout the play. At the beginning of the play as Matt plays his banjo, Emma's first words to her husband are far from encouraging: "Matt, for God's sake stop that noise! . . . Ah got a headache and Ah'm tired o' hearin' that bum music" (303). She complains about needing several dollars to buy a pair of secondhand shoes, although it is later revealed that she had saved $140 which she hid in a mattress. Moreover, she tells her husband that she saved the money because she had little faith in his ability to control his emotions. Emma tells Matt, "Ah been denyin' maself things that Ah wanted and needed and savin' a little at a time, cause Ah knowed with that temper o' yours you'd get in trouble one time of the other" (318-19).

Matt is as unappealing as his wife. When Emma asks him, "Is you got any friends at all?," Matt answers, "No, Ah ain't got no friends. Ain't nobody likes me but you, and you ain't crazy about me" (305). Although the script notes that he "is not by any means a good player" (303), Matt is more concerned with his banjo than the welfare of his wife and relatives. For instance, although his earnings are meager, Matt wanted to spend $5 for music without asking is there were any necessities that first should be purchased.

Accordingly, Sam and Adam show a lack of concern for family unity. They are freeloaders who are ungrateful for the meals Emma and Matt have provided them in the past. Emma's brother, Sam, betrays Matt by divulging his infamous secret which results in the break up of the family.

Unlike most plays, the Broken Banjo lacks sympathetic characters. However, the playwright chose these pitiful characters to exemplify the fate of a family whose members are self-serving and untrustworthy.

'Cruiter by John Matheus
Second Prize Opportunity--1926
Script: Black Theatre USA. Ed. James Hatch (New York: Free Press, 1974) 226-32.

In this drama, a young black man decides that his family should migrate to the North to seek greater freedom and employment opportunities. The play takes place in rural Georgia in the cabin of Granny, her grandson Sonny, and grandson's wife Sissy. It is the spring of 1918,

shortly after the U.S. has entered World War I. In the first scene, Sonny complains about their lives. Both he and Sissy work in the fields, but they are unable to do little more than to obtain food and a place to live. Their landlord has kept him out of the draft to continue working his lands; however, Sonny sees his current circumstances as being no better than slavery. He tells Granny that a white man is recruiting blacks to work in a munitions factory in the North. Sonny believes he should accept the offer and take Sissy and Granny with him. The recruiter arrives to tell Sonny that he will be by at 11:00 PM to take the family to the train station. Sissy supports the move, but Granny is reluctant to go.

In the second scene when the recruiter returns that night, Granny refuses to leave when he tells her that the family dog cannot make the trip. Sonny and Sissy try to persuade her to change her mind, but she is unyielding. Sonny gives her some money and promises to send her more whenever he receives a paycheck. After they leave, Granny is alone in the cabin with the dog. Twice, she thinks she hears knocking at the door, but each time she opens it no one is there. She finally resigns herself to this omen which suggests her imminent death.

The playwright, who is also a linguist, uses a rural Georgian dialect for the play. Often, as the following excerpt exemplifies, the dialogue is difficult to understand. However, this style of speech does add to the authenticity

of the play's setting.

> Sonny: (taking down the washpan and dipping water from the bucket in to the pan) Well, us done planted a haf'n acre co'n. (washing his face vigorously) Ah don't know whut Ah'm goin' to do 'bout de cotton dis yeah, ef Ah don't go tuh wah.
> Sissy: (dropping down in the doorsil) Phew! Mah back is sho' breakin'--stoopin' and stoopin', drappin' dat co'n.
> Granny: Well, yo' know yo' pappy allus use tuh put in de cotton tuh pay Mistah Bob fo' he's rations fum de Commissary.
> Sonny: But dere warn't nary a pesky ole weevil then neither. 'Sides Mistah Bob done tol' me de guv'ment wanted somethin' t'eat. Say dat de Germans ah goin' to sta've us out an' we mus' plant co'n an' taters an' sich. He lows too, Ah got tuh gi' 'em all us maks dis yeah, 'scusin' ouh keep, tuh he'p him fo' not sendin' me to camp. (Matheus, 227)

The author has created Granny and Sonny as symbols of the "old" and "new" Negroes, respectively. Granny is described as a "typical Negro Mammy." Accordingly, she wears a bandana and sings spirituals. Moreover, she is unwilling to leave the South, even though aware of its hardships and the fact that her mother and Sonny's parents have worked hard and died there with no apparent gain to the family. This seventy-two year old woman states, "Ah'm too puny to leave heah now, too far gone mahself" (229).

Sonny is a progressive man who wants to seek a better way of life for his family. At the age of twenty-three, the young man believes the rumors that the North represents freedom and opportunity for blacks that may never be available in the South. He asserts that in the North "we kin be treated lak fo'ks" (228).

'Cruiter depicts a scene familiar to many blacks since the late-nineteenth century. The author skillfully contrasts two dominant attitudes--one which is stagnate and dying, while the other is progressive and seeking a new life. Blacks with the former attitude are bound to the South although aware of its exploitative practices. Those with the latter attitude perceive the North to be a panacea for many of their problems.

The Bootblack Lover by Willis Richardson
First Prize Crisis--1926
Script: Typescript. Hatch-Billops Collection.

In this full-length drama, a young woman has an affair with a bootblack although it is contrary to her parents; advice.[74] The play takes place in a rooming house operated by the Martin family. Rachel Martin and her daughter, Dot, perform most of the household duties. Rachel's husband, Sam, lost his job four years earlier and has not since worked. In Act I, both parents and the boarders voice their disapproval of Dot's romantic relationship with a bootblack named Hoagy Wells. However, Dot does not want to end her affair and even allows Hoagy to meet her at home after her parents and the boarders have gone to bed. However, at the end of the act, a boarder named Sarah Mosely accidently learns of the lovers rendevous.

In Act II, two weeks later, Sarah tells Rachel and Sam

[74] A bootblack cleans and polishes shoes for a living.

of the lovers' meeting. When the trio hear Hoagy and Dot approaching the house, they hide to hear their conversation. Sarah and the parents learn that Hoagy and Dot have indeed been meeting, but on a more intimate basis than they had thought. Dot tells Hoagy she is pregnant and wants to know if he will marry her. When the trio come out of hiding, Sam wants to beat Hoagy with a stick, but Rachel persuades him to be merciful. Subsequently, Hoagy decides that he will marry Dot.

Act III takes place a year later. The baby did not live; however, Dot and Hoagy are happily married. Rachel and Sam's estimation of Hoagy also changes. At dinner, Hoagy announces that he is expanding his business. The expansion will permit Hoagy to hire someone to continue his shoe shining trade and another person to sell such items as cigars and magazines. Hoagy will serve as the manager and buyer for the business. He offers Sam the sales clerk position and he readily accepts. At play's end, Rachel tells Hoagy that he has "been a blessin' to this house." Hoagy answers, "Ah think this house has been a blessin' to me" (III, 21).

In contrast to the family depicted in Richardson's The Broken Banjo, the playwright uses the Martin family to show how the encouragement of each family member's abilities can strengthen and unify the group. Dot acts as the catalyst for her family which was once divided by self-serving interests. In contrast to other characters who speak with

a black dialect, Dot uses standard English because the author wants her to appear more intelligent and sophisticated than the other characters. While Rachel constantly berates her husband, Dot steadfastly defends her lover against disparagement. Initially, even Hoagy belittles his occupation, but she commends his work despite his attitude. After she marries him, the boarders notice that Hoagy "has improved in a year." Furthermore, according to Sarah, Hoagy has bettered himself because "Dot's been workin' on him. A good woman can make somethin' out of a man" (III, 14). Dot has boosted Hoagy's confidence which prompted him to expand his business. For this up-and-coming young man, she even attempts to improve his demeanor.

> Dot: I want you [Hoagy] to show them a thing or two. When you come down to eat use your best table manners. Don't eat with your knife, don't make a noise drinking your coffee, and please don't lick your fingers. (III, 10)

Indeed, the change in Hoagy can be seen as nothing short of being miraculous since only a year earlier he had told her:

> Hoagy: What would be the use of me thinkin' about gettin' married? ma a bootblack [sic]? And besides, Ah don't believe so much in gettin' married nohow. Ah almost believe in free love. Ah don't believe in bein' bound, makes trouble mostly. When people're free there's not so much chance of trouble.

Moreover, Dot's transformation of Hoagy's character leads to his success in business and allows him to employ Dot's father. Consequently, with a new job, Sam finds an improved sense of self-esteem and better relations with his wife.

However, this play does have a few problems. Very

little action takes place in the full length play. Primarily, the characters give their opinions about each other, but very little of this dialogue advances the action of the play. Furthermore, the script is weakened by character behavior that is implausible or not adequately explained. For example, Sam has not worked for four years, yet, no reason is given to explain why he has not obtained another position. Curiously, his family does not complain that he had poor work habits before he lost his job. Therefore, why was Sam so reluctant to work before Hoagy finally offered him a position? Another peculiar character behavior concerns Sarah Mosely. The boarder allows two weeks to pass before she informs Rachel of the lovers' trysts. When questioned why she waited so long to reveal this information, Sarah unconvincingly states that, "Ah kept puttin' it off and puttin' it off. Ah didn't know whether you'd like it or not if Ah said anything about it; but this evenin' Ah made up ma mind to tell you. You know how a thing worries you when you think you ought to do it and then again you think you oughtn't" (II, 13).

Despite these problems, the message of Bootblack Lover is clear. Family unity and prosperity are possible if each member has confidence in and encourages the abilities of one another.

Peter Stith by Randolph Edmonds
Honorable Mention Crisis--1926
Script: Unavailable
Revised Edition: Old Man Pete. Six Plays for a Negro Theatre. (Boston: Walter H. Baker, 1934) 38-60.

In this drama, an elderly Southern-bred couple-- Pete Collier and his wife, Mandy--live in Harlem with their adult off-spring. Although their children had invited them to come to the North, they and their spouses are now embarrassed by their parents' rustic manners. When Pete and Mandy discover how their children perceive them, they decide to secretly return to the South. However, on their way to the train station, the couple get caught in a blizzard and freeze to death.

Plumes by Georgia Douglas Johnson
First Prize Opportunity--1927
Script: Plays of Negro Life. Ed. Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory (New York: Harper, 1927) 288-99.

In this drama, a woman allows her miserly attitude and superstition to interfere with her decision to seek medical care for her daughter. The play takes place in the South in a humble two-room cottage. Here, Charity Brown is caring for her critically ill daughter, Emmerline. A friend, Tildy, visits to inquire about the girl's condition. Soon, the women's dialogue concerns the high cost of medical care. To these women, spending money on a doctor is a futile act since the patient will probably die anyways. Moreover, they contend that the medical bills prohibit the surviving relatives to provide an adequate funeral for the deceased.

At Charity's insistence, Tildy reads the coffee grinds in her friend's cup. Tildy says that she saw the signs of a funeral procession and, subsequently, one passes by the house. The doctor arrives and, after examining Emmerline, tells Charity that an operation is imperative. He is willing to peform it for less than the actual price ($50), but the decision to operate must be made soon. Charity is reluctant to permit the operation when she learns that there is no guarantee that it will be successful. She asks the doctor for more time to make the decision, but soon after he leaves Charity's daughter dies.

The two female central characters would almost be comical if the circumstances were not so serious. Charity appears to be more concerned with funerals than the treatment of the living.

> Charity: I been thinking 'bout Zeke these last few days--how he was put away--
> Tildy: I wouldn't worry 'bout him now. He's out of his troubles.
> Charity: I know. But it worries me when I think about how he was put away . . . that ugly pine coffin, jest one shabby old hack and nothing else to show--to show--what we thought about him.
> Tildy: Hush, sister! Don't you worry over him. He's happy now, anyhow.
> Charity: I can't help it! Then little Bessie. We all jest scrooged in one hack and took her little coffin in our alp all the way to the graveyard. (Breaks out crying.)
> Tildy: Do hust, sister Charity. You done the best you could. Poor folks got to make the best of it. The Lord understands--
> Charity: I know that--but I made up my mind the time Bessie went that the next one of us what died would have a shore nuff funeral, everything grand,--with plumes! (291-92)

Furthermore, when Charity must decide whether to allow the doctor to operate, Tildy encourages he not to permit it.

> Tildy: I can't see what's the use myself. He can't save her with no operation--Coffee grounds don't lie.
> Charity: It would take all the money I got for the operation and then what about puttin' her away? He can't save her--don't even promise ter. I know he can't--I feel . . . I feel it . . .
> Tildy: It's in the air . . . (298-99)

Both central characters use a black dialect, but their manner of speaking is not consistent. Throughout the text, the characters are able to go from this dialect to standard English for no apparent reason.

In Plumes, the dramatist depicts Southern characters who allow superstition to influence their lives. More important, the author deftly dramatizes the fate of many poor families who allow monetary decisions to interfere with their decision to seek medical care.

The Hunch by Eulalie Spence
Second Prize Opportunity--1927
Script: Carolina Magazine 57 (M1y 1927) 21-30.

In this drama, a woman learns that her fiance is already married. The story takes place in a Harlem apartment rented by a young woman from Raleigh, North Carolina named Mavis Cunningham. As the play begins, Mavis is preparing to elope with a numbers agent, Bert Jackson.[75] As

[75] A numbers agent collects bets and distributes money to the winners.

she waits for Bert to arrive, her landlady, Mrs. Reed comes by to discuss her plans. During the course of their conversation, they talk about Mavis's former suitor, Steve Collins. Mavis says that when Steve left on a trip to Philadelphia on the day before, he asked her to place a bet of 50 cents on #271 with two numbers agents. She consented and place the bet with Bert and another agent named Mitchell. Mrs. Reed tells her that the number was indeed a winner and, subsequently, Mitchell arrives with the winnings totaling $250.

After Mitchell and Mrs. Reed leave, Bert enters the scene. He claims that he remembered the numbers she requested, but did not recall their order. Thus he placed a bet on five different combinations including #271 at 10 cents each. Consequently, her payoff on the winning number was only $67. Mavis accepts her fiance's explanation until Steve arrives. Steve has brought along Bert's wife from Philadelphia to prove to Mavis that her marriage would not be legitimate. Furthermore, he proves that Bert did place 50 cents on #271 and was trying to cheat him out of his winnings. After Steve threatens him with a revolver, Bert leaves; however, Mavis claims she is still in love with him. Steve offers to give her half his winnings and suggests that she visit her family in Raleight. She refuses, because she is too ashamed that her plans to marry Bert had failed. At play's end, Steve finally convinces her to go with him to a caberet.

If one remembers that the Opportunity awards were sponsored by Harlem's most famous numbers banker--Casper Holstein--one can understand a few of the character choices. The characters never question the legitimacy of the numbers game for Mrs. Reed and Steve play it regularly and Bert and Mitchell earn a living from it. Instead, the controversy centers on the fairness of one of its agents. Probably out of consideration for Holstein, the playwright provides contrasting examples of good and crooked agents.

The drama has several major problems. The playwright fails to adequately develop the central character, Mavis Cunningham. The script does not reveal whether she has a job or depends on Bert for support. If Bert supported Mavis, then perhaps one could understand her attraction to this man she has only known for four weeks. Furthermore, although Mavis is from the South, her speech does not differ from the Harlem-bred characters. This would be understandable only if one is to believe that she had lived in Harlem for so long that she had lost all trace of a Southern accent.

Nevertheless, the weakest part of the play is its ending. The drama is only ten pages in length, but the climax occurs on the seventh page. For the rest of the play, Steve and Mavis discuss the latter's options and, when no consensus is reached, they decide to seek entertainment. Not only is this ending tedious and implausible, it also fails to suggest the future direction of Mavis's

fate.

The Hunch is a common play. It could be improved with a more shrewdly drawn protrayal of Mavis Cunningham and a more satisfactory ending.

The Starter by Eulalie Spence
Third Prize Opportunity--1927
Script: Plays of Negro Life. Ed. Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory (New York: Harper, 1927) 206-14.

More of a skit than a play, the comedy concerns the relationship between a young New York City black man and woman. On a curb side bench in Harlem, Thomas Jefferson Kelly discusses the future of his relationship with his girlfriend, Georgia. Kelly wants Georgia to marry him and she initially seems to be receptive to the idea. However, George then asks him about his savings account and the quality of the ring she expects to receive. At play's end, Kelly is so taken aback by her prying posture that when she asks him, "Is we engaged?," he answers, "Lawd! Do we have to go all over that? (In a kindlier tone) Keep yuh eyes on them [street] lights, Honey an'--an' forget it" (214).

The comedy succeeds in finding humor in a common situation. The wit of the play is exemplified in the following excerpt.

> Georgia: How much [money] yuh got saves, T.J.?
> T.J. Kelly: (frowning) Ain't that a little personal, Honey?
> Georgia: Ah doan' think so--but co'se ef yuh doan' feel like sayin'--
> T.J. Kelly: I have fifty-five dollars! That's not so bad for--
> Georgia: Fer a stater! (She draws away from him coldly) Yuh mean yuh ain't got mo'n fifty-five dollors an' you wukin' steady?

T.J. Kelly: An' me dressing like a gentleman an'paying dues in a club an' two Societies an' a Lodge? An taking you to the theatre twice a week--
Georgia: Movies--an' doan' yuh ferget it!
T.J. Kelly: (angrily) So, that's how you feel about it--is it? Don't I take you to dances? Didn't we go to Coney last week and a cabaret Monday night? How the devil you expect me to have money?
Georgia: (coldly) Nobuddy asked yuh nothin' 'bout marryin'--you's the one mentioned it--
T.J. Kelly: Sure, but that don't give you no right to ask 'bout my bank account. (211-12)

The dramatist uses broadly drawn characters for this sketch. T. J. Kelly is not unlike other comic black male characters on the early-twentieth century. He takes pride in his dress and hums or whistles a popular tune several times during the scene. He is also demonstrative in his affections toward Georgia. For instance, he greets her with a passionate kiss. However, unlike the stereotype, Kelly is no slacker and is very proud of his job as an elevator attendant.[76]

In contrast, Georgia exemplifies the stereotypical overbearing black woman. She belittles Kelly's savings of $55 and compares it to her more substantial $200 nest egg. Although her boyfriend has a meager income, she demands that he buy her an expensive engagement ring. While Georgia wants Kelly to obtain a better job, she has no such ambitions for herself.

[76] As an elevator attendant, Kelly informs department store customers which elevators are going up or down.

> Georgia: Ef we got married yuh would'n' mind mah stayin' home when things was slow, would yuh, T.J. (T.J. swallows painfully) Gee, it would be great tuh be able tuh stay in bed mornin's. Yuh know, T.J., the thought uh hittin' de chillies has driv' plenty into matrimony befo' now. Gee! Tuh lie in bed on a cole winter mornin' when de sleet an' rain er batterin' at de winders! (213)

The Starter is a witty sketch that utilizes typical black stereotypes of the era. Its strength lies in its ability to find humor in a common situation.

Undertow by Eulalie Spence
Third Prize Crisis--1927
Script: Black Theater USA. Ed. James Hatch (New York: Free Press, 1974) 193-200.

The domestic melodrama concerns a troubled married couple and the "other woman." Set in Harlem, the play takes place in the dining room of a boarding house owned by Dan and his wife Hattie. As the play begins, Hattie waits for her husband who has not yet come home for supper. Their son, Charley, asks Hattie for $5. She refuses until he says that he will tell her a secret about his father in exchange for the money. She agrees to these terms and Charley informs her that he had recently seen his father with a woman he suspected to be a former lover.

After Charley leaves, Dan comes home to an icy reception by Hattie. She refuses to get his supper or allow him to prepare his own meal. Consequently, Dan leaves and Clem, "the other woman," arrives to confront Hattie. Twenty years earlier, Clem was a prostitute who had an affair with Dan when Hattie was pregnant with Charley. It is not clear

why the affair ended, but Clem returned to her Virginia birthplace and obtained a legitimate job. Though many years have passed since their affair, Clem has never stopped loving Dan. Now, back in Harlem, she rekindled their romance and is asking Hattie to divorce Dan so they can marry.

Hattie refuses to divorce Dan, but says that he is free to go with her. Still, Clem insists that Hattie divorce him, as Dan returns home. Clem confesses that she wants to marry Dan because their previous affair produced a daughter named Lucy. Now a grown woman, Lucy will soon marry into a respectable family. Lucy believes that her father died when she was a baby and Clem does not want to reveal the truth to her daughter. Nor does she want to cause a scandal by living with a man without the benefit of clergy.

Unmoved by Clem's story, Hattie threatens to contact Lucy to inform her of her illegitimate birth and mother's scarlet past. Enraged, Dan chokes Hattie until he heeds Clem's pleas to release her. However, when he loosens his grip, Hattie falls and strikes her head against the base of the mantle and dies. At play's end, Dan persuades Clem to return to Virginia and decides that he must go to prison as a consequence of his actions.

Unlike the Southern characters of other award winning dramas, such as 'Cruiter and The Cuss'd Thing, Clem chose to return to the South where she improved her status.

Moreover, she has been more successful in the upbringing of her daughter than Dan and Hattie in raising their son. According to Clem, her daughter is educated, refined, and engaged to a "fine feller whut'll be able tuh take care uv her" (198). In contrast, Charley is uneducated, spoiled, unemployed, and fond of playing the "numbers." Thus, in this play, it seems that it is the Southerners rather than the Northerners who are progressive.

Nevertheless, Clem also fits the sentimental stereotype of the "other woman." She is kind, sympathetic, faithful, and understands her lover even more than his wife. Accordingly, Hattie fits the pattern of the overbearing wife. She belittles her husband and treats him like a child. Although she realizes that Dan prefers to be with Clem, Hattie refuses to give him a divorce.

Although Clem and Hattie are typical stock characters, Dan seems to be the wrong choice for this type of melodrama. Usually, the husband is an appealing character who loves the "other woman," but remains in an unhappy marriage out of a sense of loyalty to his wife and children. However, in this play, one wonders why Hattie had married Dan and why Clem wants him. As evidenced in the following excerpt, Dan is a spineless man who is no match for his nagging wife:

> Dan: (dropping his coat and hat upon a chair) Sorry, Ah'm late, Hattie. (she does not answer) Ah ain't had no supper. Reckon Ah'll get it an' eat in de kitchen.
> Hattie: (icily) Reckon yuh'll hang dat coat an'

hat in de hall whar dey belongs.
Dan: (Apologetically) Sure. Dunno how Ah come tuh ferget. (he goes out with his clothes and returns almost immediately. He looks timidly at Hattie, then passes on toward the kitchen door)
Hattie: (fiercely) Keep outa dat kitchen!
Dan: But Ah'm hungry, Hattie. Ah ain't had nuthin's tuh eat.
Hattie: Whar yuh bin, dat yur ain't had nuthin' tuh eat? (Dan doesn't answer) Yuh kain say, kin yuh? (194-95)

When Dan returns home and finds Clem confronting his wife, his initial reaction is to look "fearfully from Clem to Hattie and then back again to Clem" (197). While Clem would rather Dan obtain a divorce, she admits that he is "fer quittin' an' never sayin' a word tuh Hattie but jes' goin' off, me an' him together" (197). When Dan finally displays a sign of vitality, he choose an impetuous action that has tragic consequences. At play's end, the story does not elicit sympathy for Dan or the women foolish enough to want him.

The Undertow is a common melodrama concerning infidelity. It is burdened with the characterization of a gutless man who is unconvincingly the object of attention by the two women. The one noteworthy aspect of the play is that one of the characters found success in the South, instead of the North as it is usually protrayed in other award winning plays.

Religious Life Plays

Humble Instrument by Warren McDonald
Second Prize Opportunity--1925
Script: Unavailable
Synopsis Source: A combination of two 1937 playreader reports by john Rimassa and Arthur Vogel, Federal Theatre Project Collection, George Mason University Library.

In this comedy, a gambler named Doug wants to buy a player piano with his recent winnings, while his wife would rather put the money toward their son's education. Their minister, an ex-gambler, tries to convince Doug to quit the sport. Doug says that he will quit if the parson can beat him at a game of craps. The minister consents unaware that Doug is using a pair of loaded dice. Nevertheless, despite his trickery, Doug loses to the minister. Doug concludes that the game must have been divinely influenced and, consequently, decides to lead a better life.

Comments--John Rimassa:

> Here is a simple little story that would require sharp character delineation and clever dialogue to carry it into the category of a play. Unfortunately the author merely supplied clumsy stage directions and wordy, explanatory dialogue. He should be encouraged to write (plays or preferrably stories); however, he should learn that mere notes for a story or play are so many notes until dramatized.

Comments--Arthur Vogel

> The author selects good ideas, but fails to develop them. He schematizes his endings, and deals with physical impossibilities. If he had only exposed that the dice were not loaded, but that through some mistake, Doug thought they were, then Doug's conversion would have some reality to it. As it is, it is wish-fulfillment.

The Church Fight by Ruth Gaines Shelton
Second Prize Crisis--1925
Script: Black Theater USA. Ed. James Hatch (New York: Free Press, 1974) 189-91.

In this comedy, church members conspire to oust their minister. The play takes place in the home of Brother Ananias and his wife, Sister Sapphira. The story begins with Brother Ananias preparing to leave for work. He tells his wife that he will not contribute any more money to the church as long as the current minister, Parson Procrastinator, remains. After he leaves, Sister Sapphira welcomes seven church members who arrive to discuss the matter. Six of the members--Sister Sapphira, Brother Judas, Sister Meddler, Sister Take-It-Back, Sister Two-Face, and Sister Instigator--want to expel the minister, while two others--Sister Experience and Brother Investigator--argue that the charges against him are inaccurate and not serious enough to warrant his removal.

Parson Procrastinator arrives unexpectantly and now no one will admit they are against him. After making sure that the minutes reflect support for him, the minister leaves. However, as the play closes, Brother Investigator who seems to be a true supporter of the minister, now speaks against him. Consequently, the other members once again argue for the pastor's expulsion.

The comedy shows its audience the consequence of trying to remove a minister based on information that is inaccurate or superficial. Without evidence to support

their claims, the antagonists flounder when confronted by the astute minister. Furthermore, the author reveals that these church members will continue to be dissatisfied as long as someone is willing to initiate ill-feelings toward the pastor. The dramatist seems to be telling the audience that their own church life could be more harmonious, if they do not imitate these hypocritical characters.

Besides being didactic, the play is very entertaining. The wit can be seen in the following excerpt as some members attempt to agree on a chage against their minister.

> Sister Meddler: I think we ought to find out where Brother Procrastinator got his money from to buy that $7,000 house on 6th Street.
> Sister Sapphira: Oh yes! I forgot that. That does seem funny when we poor creatures can't hardly get a crust of bread to eat; now, there's a charge agin him right there.
> Sister Meddler: That's so, I never thought of that. That is a good charge agin him.
> Brother Investigator: What's that, Sister Meddler?
> Sister Sapphira: Why he bought a big house on 6th Street and paid a whole lot of money spot cash for it.
> Brother Investigator: Well what can you do about it? That was his affair so long as he does not infringe on ours.
> Sister Instigator: I don't know why it ain't a charge against him. It gives our church a bad name to have the parson flashing money around like he was a rich man and then agin where did he git all that money anyway? I know Morning Glory Baptist Church didn't give it to him, because we only pay him $10 a week.
> Sister Meddler: He don't deserve but $5 a week. (190)

The author uses allegorical character names to reveal personality traits. The qualities attributable to such church members as Sister Meddler and Sister Instigator are

obvious; however, those of Brother Ananias and Sister Sapphira would only be familiar to audience members who know of their biblical counterparts.[77]

The behavior and lines spoken by each character are consistent with their names except for Parson Procrastinator. Unlike the trait identified in his name, the minister does not hesitate to meet controversy head-on and deals with the matter expeditiously. Thus, it appears that his name is a misnomer, unless the dramatist is suggesting that the church members wrongly attribute this quality to him.

The dramatist uses the character's costumes and personal props to allow the audience to recognize character stereotypes more readily. For example, Sister Two-Face wears a hat with a veil to indicate her deceitful nature and Sister Experience carries a pencil and book to signify her knowledge. Although stereotypes, the characters have recognizable complements not only in the church, but in most organizations. For example, how many groups have included a Brother Judas who speaks against a person in his absence, but offers support in his presence.

The Church Fight is a spirited comedy that deftly

[77] In Jeruselem after the acension of Christ, Christians shared their wealth with each other. Following this practice, Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold some of their property, but only offered part of the proceeds for distribution to poorer members of the church. The couple died after their deception was revealed. See Acts 4:32-5:12.

portrays characters which are very familiar to the audience. Not only does it entertain, but it also teaches by depicting the fate of a group burdened with hypocrites.

The Cuss'd Thing by May Miller
Honorable Mention Opportunity--1926
Script: Typescript. May Miller personal collection.

The drama depicts a conflict between a man and his wife concerning a performance of secular music. The play takes place in a Harlem apartment rented by Sampson Lee and his pregnant wife, Marthy. As the play begins, Marthy is out shopping while Sampson is playing his mandolin with a friend, Jim Watkins, who accompanies him on his coronet. On Jim's recommendation, Sampson obtained a job as a musician for the black musical, Runnin' Wild. Sampson has not yet told his wife about the job because for religious reasons she objects to the playing of secular music.

When Marthy comes home, she is tired and overheated from her errand; however, Sampson wants to discuss his new job with her since he must soon leave for rehearsal. As expected, Marthy tries to persuade him to quit the job and even informs him of a dream she had recently that provided an omen that death was imminent. Sampson tries to allay her fears and convinces his wife to go to the bedroom to rest.

Marthy's condition becomes more serious and requires the attentions of a neighbor who is an experienced midwife. nevertheless, at play's end, Marthy loses her baby and,

consequently, Sampson decides not to play with the orchestra.

For this drama, it is important that Marthy and Sampson were not raised in Harlem, but in the South. It was commonly believed that Southerners were more inclined than Northerners to be superstitious and think that it is a sin to play secular music. In fact, superstition and negative attitudes toward secular music can be found in many different cultures around the world. However, the playwright must have thought that the central characters' behavior would be more convincing, if they were from the South.

Nevertheless, the author does not want the audience to believe that Northern attitudes are preferred to Southern. This is evident in Harlem-bred Jim Watkins reaction to Marthy's miscarriage. He callously says to her husband, "Com' on Sampson, we've wasted 'nough time. Aint you goin' to rehearsal now with Marthy all right?" (19)

None of the characters uses standard English; however, the playwright distinguishes the speech of the Northerners from that of the Southerners. The differences in style can be seen in the following passage as Jim and Sampson wait for further information about Marthy's sickly condition.

> Jim: Do you think?
> Sampson: I ain't athinkin' nuthin' now.
> Jim: Oh, come on man. Don' cha know everythin's goin' to be all right?
> Sampson: (sullenly) How I know dat?
> Jim: Ain't Ma Banks the midwife the best for blocks 'round. Gee! I wish I had dollars in my pocket now for every one of the little black babies she's delivered in this block.
> Sampson: But maybe dere warn't no cuss'd thing agin dem.

Jim: What 'cha mean now?
Sampson: Nuthin'. (17)

The Cuss'd Thing shows how religious beliefs can affect one's participation in the secular world. This conflict between religious and secular attitudes is not uncommon even in today's society.

Summary

The prize winning plays depict a variety of issues, attitudes, and life styles of Afro-Americans of the early-twentieth century. Most of the plays utilized situations familiar to their contemporary audience. The problems of racial injustice, miscegnation, and lynching were pressing issues of the day and are understandably often used as subjects of the plays. For the most part, the South is portrayed as a place where the exploitation of blacks by whites and superstitious beliefs are commonplace. Nevertheless, while many of the plays criticized the status quo, only The Purple Flower advocated its overthrow.

Award winners also dealt with domestic issues and religious life. Family unity and conflicting secular and religious attitudes were popular themes. The portrayal of caring male/female relationships in such plays as Bootblack Lover and The Cuss'd Thing is also significant. Before the 1921 production of Shuffle Along, these loving relationships were uncommon in black drama.

The plays present a variety of black characters. Some are stereotypical, such as the overbearing black woman and

happy-go-lucky man found in The Starter. However, other characters are not so easily characterized. Standard English is reserved for those who are educated and/or middle class, while the other black characters use some form of black dialect.

With a few exceptions, the white characters tend to come from the same mold. They are usually white Southern males who exploit the labor of blacks and desire to have sexual relations with black women. They are crude, ruthless, and seemingly subhuman.

All but two of the plays can be classified as realistic. Both plays which were exceptions to this characteristic were written by Marita Bonner. In The Purple Flower and Exit, an Illusion, Bonner uses expressionistic devices which other contemporary playwrights such as Elmer Rice and Eugene O'Neill were also employing in some of their works.

Song, instrumental music, and dance were incorporated into eleven of the plays. The use of these elements in these works may have been of greater interest to contemporary audiences accustomed to the black musical theatre.

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CHAPTER IV

THE PRIZE WINNING DRAMATISTS

Fifteen black writers contributed thirty plays which received honors in the Opportunity and Crisis literary contests. The average award winning dramatist was young and had at least earned a B.A. degree. After the contests, most retained some sort of connection with the educational, community, or commercial theatre. However, playwriting never served as the primary source of income for any of the award winners.

The subsequent section provides individual biographies of the prize winning playwrights. Each biography cites the writer's major achievements, especially those which concern the theatre. The appendix supplements this section by listing each author's plays and productions of these works. Script sources, as well as, selected theatre articles by the dramatists are also noted. Following the biographies, a summary cites similarities between the writers' lives and playwriting careers. Also, conclusions are made concerning the dramatists' contributions to the black theatre.

Playwright Biographies

Marita Bonner (1899-1971)

Bonner was born in Brookline, Massachusetts. At Radcliff College, she studied English and comparative

literature. Active in musical clubs, she twice won the Radcliffe song competition in 1919 and 1922 for "The Heathen Song" and "The China Lady," respectively (Bonner. Archive file). During her junior year at Radcliffe, she was chosen to be one of sixteen undergraduate and graduate students to study creative writing with the acclaimed instructor of English, Professor Charles Townsend Copeland (Bonner. Intro., 63).

After receiving a B.A. from Radcliffe in 1922, Bonner taught at the Bluefield Colored Institute in Bluefield, Virginia from 1922-24 and Armstrong High School in Washington, D.C. from 1924-30 (Kellner, 45). While in Washington, D.C., she was a member of a literary club, the "Saturday Nighters," which met at the home of a writer who also became a prize winning playwright, Georgia Douglas Johnson (Hughes, 216).

In 1925, Bonner won first prize in the Crisis competition for her incisive essay, "On Being young--A Woman--and Colored." Crisis published this work and, in the same year, Opportunity included her short story--"The Hands"--in its August 1925 issue although it had only earned a honorable mention citation. Opportunity was also the first to publish a play by Bonner--The Pot Maker--in its February 1927 issue. In December of that same year, Crisis announced that she had won first place honors for "Drab Rambles" (short story), "The Young Blood Hungers" (essay), and plays--The Purple Flower and Exit, an Illusion. Crisis

published Purple Flower and Exit in January 1928 and October 1929, respectively.

For fourteen years, Bonner suspended her work as an educator when she married an accountant named William Occomy in 1930. During this time, she bore three children, worked as a secretary for Washington, D.C.'s first settlement house for blacks, ran a soup kitchen for children, and was an active member of her Baptist church (Bonner. Archive file). She also served as an advisor to the Washington, D.C. branch of the Krigwa Players which was active from 1927-35. According to another former member of the Players and a Crisis prize winning playwright, Willis Richardson, the theatre group did not perform any of Bonner's plays. In fact, in a 1974 interview of Richardson, he seemed surprised when informed by the interviewer that Bonner had ever written plays. In fact, despite her awards for two dramas, Bonner was better known for her short stories. Crisis and Opportunity published fourteen of these works from 1925-41.

After 1941, there is no evidence of further theatrical or creative writing activities by Bonner. The Occomy family moved to Chicago where Bonner taught at Phillips High School from 1944-49 and Doolittle School from 1950-63.[78]

[78] The Doolittle School served educationally retarded children.

In 1971, she died "from complications after a fire in her Chicago apartment" (Bonner. Archive file).

(Sheppard) Randolph Edmonds (1900-83)

Born in Lawrenceville, Virginia, Edmonds wrote at least six unpublished plays by the time of his graduation from Oberlin College in 1926 (Williams, 378). During that same year in which he earned a B.A. degree, he received honorable mentions in the Crisis competition of Illicit Love and Peter Stith. In 1927, Opportunity also granted another one of his plays--Bleeding Hearts--a honorable mention citation. Later, Peter Stith was revised and retitled Old Man Pete. In 1934, Pete, Bleeding Hearts, and four other dramas were published in a collection of Edmonds' works, Six Plays for a Negro Theatre. Crisis and Opportunity did not publish any of his plays; however, from 1930-39, the journals featured seven articles by Edmonds on drama, the black educational theatre, and higher education.

In 1930, as a drama professor at Morgan State University, Edmonds founded the Negro Intercollegiate Drama Association. The organization promoted theatrical activities at predominately black educational institutions. He earned a M.A. from Columbia University and, subsequently, studied at the Yale School of Drama, Dublin University, and London

School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art.[79] In 1935, he established the first drama department at a predominately black university--Dillard University in New Orleans. While in Louisiana, he founded the High School Drama Association and served as a theatre consultant to high schools in that state, as well as, Georgia, Florida, and the Carolinas (Flowers, 3). He also established the Southern Association of Drama and Speech Arts (SADSA).[80] Later, he served as chair of the Theatre Arts Department at Florida A & M University in Tallahassee for twenty-three years. On behalf of the U.S. State Department in 1958, he and the A & M Players toured Liberia, Sierre Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Egypt (Williams, 150). In 1970, the SADSA honored Edmonds as the "Dean of Black Academic Theatre." According to scholar Allen Williams, "The title is fitting, for it is doubtful that any other individual has contributed more to the development of interest in theatre and in dramatic organizations in Black colleges" (1).

Edmonds wrote forty-eight plays of which thirteen are full-length and eighteen are published. Besides Six Plays, eleven other works were published in two other collections, Shades and Shadows in 1930 and The Land of Cotton and Other

[79] See footnote in a reprinted article by Edmonds, "The Negro Little Theatre Movement," Encore (Sept 1984) 17.

[80] The SADSA is currently known as the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (NADSA).

Plays in 1942. Other scripts by Edmonds can also be found in other anthologies of black drama.

In 1936, Bleeding Hearts was submitted to the Federal Theatre Project Playreading Department; however, it was not accepted for production. Nevertheless, many of Edmond's plays were produced by other theatre groups across the country. For example, one of the earliest productions of his dramas was by the Dunbar Forum at Oberlin College in 1927. The Forum produced Silas Brown and the Crisis award winning play, Peter Stith (Hicklin, 165). The SADSA sponsored a playwriting competition in Edmonds's name and held a three day festival of his plays in 1948.[81]

Edmonds lectured at over thirty colleges and universities in the U.S. and abroad ("S. Randolph Edmonds," 77). Twice married, he was also the father of two children--Henri Edmonds, a Howard University theatre professor, and Randolph Jr., a physician in Los Angeles (Flowers, 4).

Zora Neale Hurston (1901-60)

Born in Eatonville, Florida, Hurston supported herself through various odd jobs after her mother died in 1904. As a teenager, she served as a wardrobe girl for a traveling Gilbert and Sullivan company in the South. She studied at Morgan Academy in Baltimore from 1916-18 and Howard Prep in Washington, D.C. from 1918-19 to prepare herself for a

[81] See footnote #79 for source.

college education (Hemenway, 17-18).

From 1919-24, Hurston intermittently took courses at Howard University. During this time, she attended many meetings of Georgia Douglas Johnson's "Saturday Nighters" and was a member of a Howard literary club, the Stylus (Hemnway, 19). The Stylus was founded by Howard University Professors Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory. Locke was a close associate of Opportunity editor Charles Johnson. Moreover, in 1925 and 1926, Gregory was an Opportunity play judge and served on the Crisis drama panel in 1926. In May 1921, Hurston's first short story, "John Redding Goes to Sea," was published in Stylus magazine.

"John Redding" caught the attention of Charles Johnson and she became a protege of the Opportunity editor. In its December 1924 issue, Opportunity published one of her short stories entitled "Drenched in Light." In 1925 and 1926, Hurston received awards in the Opportunity competition for three short stories and four plays--Color Struck-1925, Spears, The First One, and Color Struck-1926. In 1926, Hurston, Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes, and other black writers founded a short lived magazine called Fire!! which published the revised version of Color Struck. While Opportunity published two of her prize winning short stories--"Muttsy" and "Spunk," the journal printed none of her plays. However, in 1927, Charles Johnson included The First One in a collection of short literary works and articles entitled Ebony and Topaz.

Hurston received a scholarship from Barnard College and earned an A.B. degree in 1928. Subsequently, she studied black folklore of the South with the assistance of a fellowship from the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Later, other research trips provided material for articles and books on folklore and voodoo practices which established Hurston as a noted anthropologist (Kellner, 180-81).

Based on her folklore studies, Hurston and Langston Hughes colloborated on a three act comedy entitled Mule Bone. Unknown to Hughes, an unfinished version was sent for review by the famed Gilpin Players in Cleveland. When Hughes was informed of the group's intent to perform the work, the author was outraged. The play was never produced and was "the center of a quarrel that transformed Hughes and Hurston from intimate friends to lifelong enemies" (Hemenway, 136).[82]

In 1931, Hurston was one of fifteen authors of the Broadway revue, Fast and Furious. She wrote three of the show's thirty-seven sketches and acted in one of the scenes. The show only lasted seven performances. Hurston also wrote sketches for a revue called Jungle Scandals, but the show failed to open (Hemenway, 175, 76).

[82] For a discussion on the controversy, see "Mule Bone" in Robert Hemenway's Zora Neale Hurston (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1977) 136-57.

Again using her folklore research, Hurston staged a show entitled The Great Day which featured folktales, songs, and dances. In 1932, financed by a loan from one of her patrons, the show was given one performance each at the John Golden Theater and New School for Social Research in New York. In 1933 and 1934, various versions of the show were produced throughout Florida and in Chicago under the titles of From Sun to Sun and Singing Steel, respectively (Hemenway, 177-205 passim).[83]

From 1935-36, Hurston was hired as a non-relief writer for the famed Lafayette Theatre Unit of the Federal Theatre Project. Unit Director John Houseman called her "our most talented writer on the project" (205). Houseman considered but decided not to produce her black version of Lysistrata because: "It scandalized both Left and Right by its saltiness, which was considered injurious to the serious Negro image they both, in their different way, desired to create" (205).

After a folklore research trip to Haiti and Jamaica, Hurston was hired by the North Carolina College for Negroes to organize a drama program in 1939. During her year at the College, she accomplished little; however, dramatist

[83] Hurston believed that some of the religious scenes from Hall Johnson's 1933 play, Run Little Chillun, "were stloen directly from The Great Day." See Hemenway, 202.

and University of North Carolina Professor Paul Green invited Hurston to attend his playwriting seminar at his home. She "quickly became the 'star'" of the course and discussed plans with Green to collaborate on a play, but the project never materialized (Hemenway, 253).

From 1941-42, Hurston served as a writer for Paramount Studios (Rush, 405-06). In 1944, she colloborated with Dorothy Waring on a musical comedy entitled Polk County. The show was never produced and marked the end of Hurston's playwriting career (Hemenway, 298).

From 1934-48, Hurston also wrote four novels and an autobiography. Of these books, her most famous work is Their Eyes Were Watching God, published in 1937. After her last novel, Hurston lived "in obscurity" in Florida for twelve years before her death in 1960 (Kellner, 181).

William Jackson (?)

A native of Montclair, New Jersey, Jackson attended Howard University and Lincoln College in Jefferson City, Missouri before earning a B.A. degree at Columbia University in 1923. In 1925, he received third place honors in the Opportunity competition for the play, Four Eleven. The magazine quoted him as saying:

> As yet, there is nothing much of importance in my career . . . I am interested in building: building themes for plays, as well as building small houses for people. I favor the latter just now for material gain, and the former as a means of expressing life as it reacts on me, and as I react to it. ("Contest Spotlight," 205)

Little else could be found about Jackson's life besides his association with black little theatre groups from 1926-31. In 1926, he was in the cast of a program of three plays--Sugar Cain, Flies, and Color Worship--by another Opportunity award winning dramatist, Frank Wilson. The bill was presented by the Aldridge Players of New York (Monroe, 231). Jackson also performed with the New York branch of the Krigwa Players in a 1927 production of Her, Foreign Mail and Mandy. The first two plays on the bill were written by Crisis and Opportunity award winning author, Eulalie Spence (Monroe, 181). In 1929, Jackson founded the New York based Negro Experimental Theatre with former Messenger drama critic Theophilus Lewis and the former literary editor of Opportunity, Jessie Fauset (Monroe, 235).

Only two references could be found of productions of Jackson's plays. In 1927, the Bank Street Players of Newark, New Jersey present Four Eleven (Monroe, 232-33). Also, The Harlem Players produced Jackson's one act play, Burning the Mortgage in 1931 (Hicklin, 528).

Georgia Douglas Johnson (1886-1966)

Born in Atlanta, she attended Atlanta University and Oberlin Conservatory of Music. She taught school is Alabama before her marriage to Henry Lincoln Johnson in 1903 (Peplow, 526). The couple moved to Washington, D.C. where two sons were born by the Johnson's third year of marriage (Yenser,

288).

Johnson was already an established writer before the competitions were initiated. According to James Weldon Johnson, "She was the first colored woman after Frances Harper to gain general recognition as a poet" (181). From 1916-24, Crisis published thirteen of her poems. Two collections of her poetry, The Heart of a Woman and Bronze[84] were also published in 1918 and 1922, respectively.

In the early 1920s, Johnson initiated a literary salon at her home whose members were known as the "Saturday Nighters" (Lewis, 67). The group met to read and discuss the latest literary efforts of its members. The club included future prize winning dramatists Marita Bonner, Zora Neale Hurston, May Miller, and Willis Richardson and, at times, was visited by Alain Locke, W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes and other famed writers and intellectuals (Lewis, 127).

In the 1926 Opportunity competition, two of Johnson's poems--"Song of the Sinner" and "Son of Many Loves"--and a drama, Blue Blood, received honorable mention citations. Editor Frank Shay included Blue Blood in the 1926 anthology, Fifty More Contemporary One-Act Plays. Also in 1926, Opportunity granted Johnson first place honors for her play, Plumes. The July 1927 issue of Opportunity featured

[84] W.E.B. Du Bois wrote the introduction to Bronze.

Plumes and Samuel French also published the play during the same year. Furthermore, Plumes is included in at least five anthologies, most recently, editor Judith Barlow's Plays by American Women, 1900-1930, published in 1985. Johnson wrote at least twenty-one other plays of which only three have been published--A Sunday Morning in the South: With Negro Church Background, Frederick Douglass, and William and Ellen Craft.

Numerous little theatre groups have produced Blue Blood (Hicklin, 178). Plumes has also been performed by such New York groups as the Sekondi Players (Monroe, 189) and the Negro Experimental Theatre (Kellner, 263). Blue Blood and Plumes were submitted for possible production by the Federal Theatre Project. Both received mixed reviews from playreaders and were not produced.

Despite her playwriting efforts, Johnson still was best known as a poet. Her last collection of poems, Share My World, was published in 1962. Moreover, her works have been included in numerous journals and poetry anthologies. According to James Hatch, in her later years, "Mrs. Johnson might have seemed eccentric to some, but to those who knew her she was a loveable woman, and above all a true artist, who continued to write and publish poetry until her death at the age of eighty" (211).

George Dewey Lipscomb (1898-1957)

The native of Freeport, Illinois was the son of a man who had spent thirteen years of his life as a slave (Lipscomb, "The Negro's Struggle," 5). Through an oratorical contest, Lipscomb won a scholarship to Northwestern University. As a sophomore, he won the prestigious Kirk Prize for oratory and was the first black to represent Northwestern at the Northern Oratorical League Contest in 1919. In 1921 and 1932, Northwestern granted him a B.A. and M.A., respectively, in English (Lipscomb. Archive file).

Lipscomb was a professor of language and literature at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas when he won first place honors in the 1925 Opportunity competition for his melodrama, Frances. The journal featured the play in its May 1925 issue. Frances was submitted for possible production by the Federal Theatre Project. The work was recommended for production by playreaders although one commented that the script was of "questionable artistry" (Rimassa). Nevertheless, the play was not performed by any of the Project's producing units. There is no evidence of any other dramas by Lipscomb with the exception of an unpublished script, Daniel.[85]

[85] Genevieve Fabre wrongly attributes the play, Compromise, to Lipscomb in Afro-American Poetry and Drama, 1760-1979 (Detroit: Gale, 1979) 322. Compromise was actually written by Willis Richardson.

After leaving Wiley College in 1929, he taught English, speech, debating, and dramatics at West Virginia State College in Institute, Virginia from 1929-31 and Howard University from 1931-35. Beginning in 1936, he worked at a Chicago branch of the post office. It is now known how long he was employed there; however, in the 1940s he found publishers for three of his works--a classic comic book adaptation of A Christmas Carol, Tales from the Land of Simba, and Dr. George Washingto Carver, Scientist.[86] Lipscomb died in the Veterans Administration Hospital, Bronx, New York in 1957 (Lipscomb. Archive file).

Myrtle Smith Livingston (1902-72)

Born in Holly Grove, Arkansas, she moved with her family to Denver at the age of eight. She studied pharmacy at Howard University from 1920-22 (Yenser, 333). In 1925, Livingston won third place honors in the Crisis competition for the play, For Unborn Children. Crisis published this play in its July 1926 issue. When she received notification of her prize, she had just recently married William Livingston, M.D. A year later she earned a B.A. degree at Colorado State Teachers College in Greeley, Colorado (Yenser, 333).

From 1928-72, Livingston taught health and physical

[86] The biography of Dr. Carver was co-authored by W.E.B. Du Bois's second wife, Shirley Graham.

education at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. According to the Lincoln University Alumni Bulletin (April 1972), she "once considered a career as a playwright . . . Livingston stated, 'Several of the student groups have performed some of my plays and I have written skits and shows for some of the sororities and fraternities to perform'" (Livingston. Archive file). However, none of these scripts can now be located.

Livingston earned a M.A. at Columbia University in 1940. In 1974, she died in Hawaii where she had shared a condominium with her sister since 1972. In Jefferson City, a park was named in her honor (Livingston. Archive file).

John Matheus (1887-1883)

A native of Keyser, West Virginia, Matheus married Maude Roberts in 1909. He earned a B.A. (cum laude) from Western Reserve University in 1910. From 1911-22, he served as Professor of Latin and Modern Foreign Languages at Florida A & M College. He also received a M.A. from Columbia University in 1921 and joined the Romance languages faculty at West Virginia State College. Furthermore, he studied at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1925 (Yenser, 367).

Crisis became one of Matheus's earliest publishers when the journal featured his poem, "In the Night," in its February 1920 issue. In 1926, Crisis literary judges awarded Matheus first place honors for his short story, "Swamp Moccasin." However, the writer received many more

honors from Opportunity. From 1925-27, Opportunity judges granted awards to three of Matheus's short stories, three poems, one personal experience sketch, and the play--'Cruiter. Of these award winners, the journal published "Fog" (short story), "Sand" (personal experience sketch), and 'Cruiter.

In 1927, Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory included 'Cruiter in the anthology, Plays of Negro Life. In their biographical sketch of Matheus, the editors stated that he "is one of the most promising of the writers of the 'Young Negro' group" (405). Later, 'Cruiter was submitted for possible production by the Federal Theatre Project. The play received favorable reviews; however, no evidence can be found that indicated that it was ever performed by any of the Project's producing units.

In 1928 and 1929, Matheus wrote three other plays--Black Damp, Tambour, and Ti Yette. Black Damp was included in the anthology, Plays and Pageants from the Life of the Negro. In 1929, he also wrote the libretto for an opera set in Haiti entitled Ouanga. In 1949, the opera was first performed by H.T. Burleight Music Association in South Bend, Indiana (Kellner, 274).

After the literary contests, Matheus contributed short stories and articles to Crisis and Opportunity until the late 1930s. However, neither magazine published any other dramas with the exception of 'Cruiter. His short stories and poetry have also been included in many anthologies and

his articles on literature have been published by such journals as the College Language Association Journal, Modern Lanugage Journal, and Bulletin of the Association of American Colleges.

He remained a Professor of Romance Languages at West Virginia State College until 1953. However, he interrupted his teaching duties to serve as a secretary to Charles S. Johnson on the International Commission of Inquiry to Liberia, in 1930. He also directed a program in Haiti to teach English in its national schools from 1945-46 (Rush, 533). In 1978, West Virginia State College awarded him the Doctor of Letters degree. In 1983, Matheus died in Tallahassee where he had lived for at least five or six years (Matheus. Archive file).

Warren McDonald (?)

Very little information could be found concerning this writer from Philadelphia. Opportunity awarded him second place honors in 1925 for his play, Humble Instrument. In 1926, Opportunity granted third prize to the drama, Blood, and a honorable mention to his short story, "A Matter of Inches." In the journal's June 1926 issue, McDonald stated: "As yet I have not accomplished enough to furnish material for even a brief sketch. I am one of those people who do not have any good excuse or reason for scribbling--but who insist upon doing it" ("Our Prize," 188).

Opportunity published "A Matter of Inches," but neither of McDonald's award winning plays. Blood and Humble Instrument were submitted to the Federal Theatre Project; however, neither of the works was recommended for production by the Project's playreaders.

May Miller (1899-)

Born in Washington, D.C., she is the daughter of Kelly Miller--a renowned sociologist and professor and dean of Howard University's College of Liberal Arts from 1907-25. Throughout her youth, the Miller home was often visited by such artists and intellectuals as Paul Laurence Dunbar, William Stanley Braithwaite, and W.E.B. Du Bois (Tate, 32).

In a personal interview with May Miller in 1985, she stated that she had a "happy" childhood and was greatly influenced by her father. Kelly Miller encouraged his children to enjoy the arts and often recited poetry for their pleasure. Consequently, May Miller began writing at an early age. Her first poem was published by The School Progress for Teachers, Parents and Pupils--a magazine based in Philadelphia. A few years later at the age of fifteen, Miller won the first prize award of $3 for a story entitled "Wireless in Squirreldom." The contest was sponsored by the Washington Post in 1914.

Theatre also excited Miller as a youth. She attended dance classes and was "inspired by acting in the little

plays in grammar school" (Miller. Interview). School Progress published her first play, Pandora's Box in two parts in July 1914 and January 1915. She earned fifty cents for this script. Furthermore, Miller acted, danced and served as choreographer for school and community groups until the early 1940s.

Miller entered Howard University in 1916 where she was taught English by Montgomery Gregory. Gregory also directed her in a Howard Dramatic Club production of The Truth by Clyde Fitch. Her play, Within the Shadow won first prize in a Howard University drama contest. The play was performed as one of the activities at her commencement in 1920.

Miller was a member of Georgia Douglas Johnson's "Saturday Nighters." Moreover, Johnson was her mentor who Miller visited numerous times in addition to the club meetings.

Although her father served on the editorial board of Crisis and was an influential member of the NAACP, Miller did not send any entries to the Crisis literary contest. Instead, she sent plays to Opportunity where her former professor, Montgomery Gregory, served as a judge in 1925 and 1926. She was awarded third place honors for The Bog Guide in 1925 and a honorable mention citation for The Cuss'd Thing in 1926. Neither of these plays were ever published; however, in 1926, The Bog Guide was performed by the New York based Intercollegiate Association

at Harlem's Imperial Elks Auditorium (Monroe, 230-31).

During the years she won the Opportunity awards, Miller studied drama under Frederick Koch at Columbia University for two summer terms.[87] In 1927, she became one of the members of the Krigwa Players of Washington, D.C. which also included award winning dramatists Marita Bonner and Willis Richardson.

Besides the works previous mentioned, Miller wrote ten other plays. Eight of these plays have been published in Carolina Magazine in 1929, Plays and Pageants in 1930, and Negro History in Thirteen Plays in 1935. A comedy--Riding the Goat--which was published in Plays and Pageants caused quite a controversy in the black community. Some blacks objected to Miller's use of the word "nigger" which appeared six times in the text. In an article in the Baltimore newspaper, The Afro-American, she defended the use of the word as necessary to the depiction of the speech employed by the play's characters ("Plays Written," 3). Negro History was jointly edited by Miller and Richardson. According to Miller, Carter Woodson--an acclaimed black historian--attended one of Johnson's literary club meetings and suggested that a group of plays be written on selected famous blacks. Carter insisted that black male authors write dramas about the black men, while females were

[87] Frederick Koch was the director of the famed Carolina Playmakers at the University of North Carolina.

delegated stories concerning the black women. Besides Miller and Richardson, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Helen Webb Harris, and Randolph Edmonds contributed plays to the anthology. Miller believes that these and many other plays were performed by black little theatre and educational institutions across the country without her permission (Miller. Interview).

Miller married John Sullivan and taught at Frederick Douglas High School until she retired for health reasons in 1943. She did not believe that she could again write for the theatre since she had no access to the stage. She contended, "One needs a platform to write plays . . . You really learn through performance" (Miller. Interview).

Since her retirement from teaching and the theatre, Miller has had a successful career as a poet. From 1959-83, eight volumes of her poetry have been published, most recently, The Ransomed Wait. Many general literature and poetry anthologies have included her works, as well as, such magazines and newspapers as Essence, The Nation, and The New York Times. She has served as poet-in-residence at Monmouth College in Indiana, the University of Wisconsin, Bluefield West Virginia State College, Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, and Southern University (Miller, Ransomed, 73-77 passim). O.B. Hardison--Director, Folger Shakespeare Library--called her "a Washington institution as well as a Washington poet--one of the three senior poets [of the city] and . . . without question its most distinguished

black poet" (Miller, Ransomed, jacket cover).

As of this writing, Miller still lives in Washington, D.C. and is quite active as a poetry reader at various events. The National Conference on Black Theatre has selected her as the recipient of the Second Annual Mister Brown Award for 1986 in honor of her contributions to the development of black drama (Hay. Letter).

Willis Richardson (1889-1977)

Born in Wilmington, North Carolina, he lived in Washington, D.C. since the age of nine until the end of his life. In 1906, he graduated from Dunbar High School and in 1910 obtained a job as a clerk for the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing. In 1914, he married Mary Jones and within six years the couple had three children (Yenser, 439).

According to a 1974 interview of Richardson, he saw a production of the race propaganda play, Rachel in 1916. The drama was written by a teacher from his former high school and produced by the Washington, D.C. branch of the NAACP. Unimpressed, Richardson thought he could write a better play. From 1916-18, he took a correspondence course in poetry and drama from a company based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In a 1972 interview of Richardson, he stated that he allowed a librarian at Howard University to critique his plays. Subsequently, Richardson contacted Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory who directed the Howard University

Players. Richardson stated that Locke and Gregory "liked my writing and they wanted to put on a play of mine, but you see the President of Howard was a white man at that time, and they couldn't get his consent, and they couldn't get the consent of the head of the English Department."

Richardson then began to submit his work to Crisis editor W.E.B. Du Bois. In 1919, Crisis published an essay by Richardson entitled, "The Hope of a Negro Drama." The November 1920 issue of the magazine also included his one act play, The Deacon's Awakening. The play was staged by a little theatre group in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1921. Also, four of his children's plays were published in issues of a newly created magazine for children--The Brownies' Book. The new journal was edited by Du Bois and published from 1920-21 (Peterson, 116).

In 1922, on a recommendation by Du Bois, the Ethiopian Art Players of Chicago decided to produce one of Richardson's plays--The Chip Woman's Fortune (Haskins, 81). The one act was used as the curtain raiser on a bill which included Oscar Wilde's Salome and an adaptation of William Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors. In 1923, the Players performed at the Howard and Lafayette Theatres in Washington, D.C. and New York, respectively. On May 7 of that year, the bill was produced at the Frazee Theatre on Broadway. Although the production lasted only sixteen performances, Richardson's Chip Woman's Fortune has the distinction of being the first drama on Broadway by a black author.

Following his Broadway premiere, Richardson's services were now in demand. In 1924, he wrote two articles--"Propaganda in the Theatre" and "The Negro and the Stage"--for The Messenger and Opportunity, respectively. In 1925, Opportunity published two more of his articles, "The Unpleasant Play" and "The Negro Audience." Furthermore, the Howard Players were not able to produce his plays--the first being Mortgaged in 1924. Also, the Gilpin Players of Cleveland staged Richardson's The Compromise in February 1925 (Peterson, 119).

Therefore, his name probably came as not surprise to Opportunity and Crisis readers who saw it listed among the play award winners. In 1925, he received an honorable mention for Fall of the Conjurer in the Opportunity contest; whereas, in the Crisis competition he was awarded first place honors for The Broken Banjo. In 1926, he again received the first prize in the Crisis contest, this time for the full-length drama, The Boot Black Lover. In 1926, Crisis published The Broken Banjo and the drama also won the Edith Schwarb Cup of the Yale University Theatre in 1928 (Rush, 629). From 1925-34, Broken Banjo was produced by at least ten theatre groups in such cities as New York, Atlanta, San Antonio, and Los Angeles (Hicklin, 536). The play was also submitted to the Federal Theatre Project for possible production. It received mixed reviews from play-readers and, consequently, not performed by any of the Project's producing units.

In Washington, D.C., Richardson was a member of Georgia Douglas Johnson's "Saturday Nighters." He was also one of the founders of the city's branch of the Krigwa Players. The organization produced plays from 1927-35 including those by Richardson and other award winning dramatists such as John Matheus and Eulalie Spence.

As a dramatist, Richardson wrote forty-six plays of which nineteen were published. Many general literature and drama anthologies have included Richardson's plays, as well as, journals such as Carolina Magazine and a newspaper based in Hungary called Ujsag. Most of these plays are one acts; however, he did write five full-length plays--The Amateur Prostitute, The Visiting Lady, Joy Ride, The Broken Banjo, and The Flight of the Natives.[88] He also edited three black drama anthologies--Plays and Pageants in 1930, Negro History (ed. with May Miller in 1935),[89] The King's Dilemma and Other Plays for Children in 1956.[90]

There are records of many productions of Richardson's plays by black community and educational theatre groups since the early 1920s.

[88] The Broken Banjo and The Flight of the Natives were full-length versions of plays originally written as one acts.

[89] See discussion on this anthology on p. 168.

[90] Many of the works in this volume originally appeared in Du Bois's Brownies' Magazine.

> [Furthermore,] the plays, at least those that were published, were utilized many more times by amateur groups whose activities did not attract the press. As Richardson himself acknowledged in a taped interview, his plays were produced hundreds of times around the country, but since the sponsors generally did not contact him for permission, he could not even approximate a total number of productions. (Monroe, 144)

With the exeption of Randolph Edmonds, Richardson was the most published and produced playwright of the Opportunity and Crisis award winners. However, earnings from playwrighting only supplemented his income which was primarily derived from his job as a clerk with the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

After he retired from government service in 1954, Richardson continued to write plays, but he also directed his literary efforts to another genre--the short story. According to a 1974 interview of Richardson, he planned to publish a collection of twelve short stories. At the time of the interview, he had written eleven of these works. Although this collection was never published, one of the stories--"He Holds His Head Too High"--was included in the July 1967 issue of Crisis. Richardson died in Washington, D.C. at the age of eighty-eight.

Ruth Gaines Shelton (1872-?)

Born in Glasgow, Missouri, she completed the normal course at Wilberforce University (Wilberforce, Ohio) in 1895. She taught school in Montgomery, Missouri before marrying William Shelton in 1898. The daughter of a prominent

Methodist minister in Chicago, Mrs. Shelton began to write and stage plays for churches, clubs, and schools in 1906. The titles of her works include Lord Earlington's Broken Vow, Gena, the Lost Child, Mr. Church, Parson Dewdrop's Bride, and Aunt Hagar's Children (Yenser, 469).

Her comedy, The Church Fight, won second place honors in the Crisis competition of 1925. At the age of fifty-three, Shelton was one of the oldest of the literary contestants. At that time, she also had three children and two grandsons (Shelton, Intro., 17).

Crisis published The Church Fight and the New York based Krigwa Players performed it in 1926 (Du Bois, "Krigwa Players," 136). It was also submitted to the Federal Theatre Project Playreading Department; however, it was not accepted for production. No other information about the life of Shelton could be found.

Eulalie Spence (1894-1981)

Born in the West Indies, Spence immigrated to the United States with her family in 1902. Spence completed the normal course at the New York Training School for Teachers. She also elected courses in English at the City College of New York and Columbia University. At the latter school, she studied playwrighting under dramatist Hatcher Hughes (Locke, 406).[91]

[91] In 1923, Hatcher Hughes won the Pulitzer Prize for his melodrama, Hell-Bent fer Heaven.

Spence was a student of the National Ethiopian Art Theatre School.[92] In 1924, the School produced Spence's Being Forty as one of three plays performed at a midnight show in the Lafayette Theatre (Schuyler, 342-43).[93] Spence and two of her sisters became active with Du Bois's Krigwa Players in Harlem. The group was directed by Charles Burroughs--a drama judge for the 1925 and 1926 Crisis contests.

In 1926, Spence's Foreign Mail received second place honors in the Crisis competition and this prize winning play was also performed by the Krigwas Players at the awards dinner for the contestants. In January 1927, the Players produced Foreign Mail and another play by Spence entitled Her. In May 1927, the Players entered their production of Spence's comedy, The Fool's Errand, in the National Little Theatre Tournament. The play won the Samuel French Prize for original playwriting; however, the $200 award was accepted by Du Bois to pay for production expenses. Since neither the dramatist or actors received a share of the prize as they had expected, the Players soon

[92] The New York based School opened in March 1924 to train black teachers in dramatic arts, dancing, public speaking, and diction. Several teachers from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts headed its predominately white faculty. The School provided courses for at least 450 students and produced programs featuring dance, music, and drama by black writers before closing in 1925. See Monroe, 163-73.

[93] The bill also included a play by another award winning dramatist--Cooped Up by Eloise Bibb Thompson.

broke up as a consequence of the resulting dispute (Spence. Interview). Nevertheless, Spence's Hot Stuff and The Undertow won third place honors in the 1927 Crisis competition. Moreover, earlier in that year, her plays--The Hunch and The Starter--earned second and third prizes, respectively, in the Opportunity contest.

Neither Crisis or Opportunity published any of Spence's plays. However, in 1928, she contributed to Opportunity an essay on black drama and a review of a production by the Negro Art Players. The essay, entitled "A Criticism of the Negro Drama," is of particular interest because of the advice she offered to black authors who want to write for Broadway.

> May I advise these earnest few . . . to avoid the drama of propaganda if they would not meet with certain disaster? Many a serious aspirant for dramatic honors has fallen by the wayside because he would insist on his lynchings or his rape. The white man is cold and unresponsive to this subject and the Negro, himself, is hurt and humuliated by it. We go to the theatre for entertainment, not to have old fires and hates rekindled. (180)

Spence applied this philosophy to the writing of her own plays. In a 1973 interview she stated, "A play should never be used for propaganda."

Besides the award winners, Spence wrote at least seven other plays from 1924-32. In 1932, Spence dramatized a novel by Roy Flannagan entitled The Whipping. She acquired an agent from the Century Play Co. who scheduled its premier in Bridgeport, Connecticut; however, the comedy did not

open. Subsequently, Spence wrote a screenplay version of The Whipping which her agent sold to Paramount Pictures for $5,000 in 1934. Like the stage version, the film script was never produced (Spence. Interview).

Five of Spence's plays--The Episode, Fool's Errand, The Hunch, The Starter, and The Undertow--have been publsihed.[94] The Starter was submitted to the Federal Theatre Project where playreaders have it favorable reviews as a vaudeville sketch. It is not believed that the Project's producing units ever performed this play; however, Spence claims she received requests "from as far west as California asking for permission to put it on . . . because it is a human comedy" (Spence. Interview). Other plays by Spence such as The Hunch and La Divina Pastor have been performed, respectively, by the Krigwa Players of Washington, D.C. (Program. May Miller) and the New York Association for the Blind (Hicklin, 172).

Since the 1920s, Spence taught speech and served as the Dramatic Society coach for Brooklyn's Eastern District High School. In the 1930s, Joseph Papp was one of her students (Spence. Interview).[95] In 1937 and 1939, she

[94] Many black theatre reference books list Samuel French as the publisher of Foreign Mail; however, in a telephone interview (8 July 1985), a company representative denied that the work was ever published.

[95] Joseph Papp is best known as the founder of the acclaimed New York Shakespeare Festival.

earned a B.A. and M.A. at Teachers College in New York and Columbia University, respectively (Hatch, 192). She died in New York at the age of eighty-seven.

Eloise Bibb Thompson (1878-1927)

Born and raised in New Orleans, she has the distinction of being of the few blacks to have published a collection of poems in the nineteenth century. Entitled Poems, she was only seventeen when this collection first became available to the public in 1895. She attended a college prepartory program at Oberlin Academy from 1899-1901, before teaching in the New Orleans public school system from 1901-03. In 1907, she earned a B.A. degree at Teachers' College, Howard University. After working as head resident of a black settlement house in Washington, D.C., she married journalist Noah Thompson in 1911 (Sherman, 204).

The couple moved to Los Angeles where Noah gained a national reputation on the editorial staff of the Evening Express and Morning Tribune; and as a special feature writer for the Los Angeles Tribune and Morning Sun. Eloise bore a son and participated in many activities of the Catholic Church including the writing of poetry and articles for the official periodical of the Los Angeles and Monterrey diocese (Beasley, 254).

In 1915, Mrs. Thompson wrote a scenario for a screenplay entitled A Reply to the Clansman. According to a 1925 article, several producers, including D.W. Griffith, were

interested in the project. One agent for Triangle Film Corporation paid her $500 for the scenario; however, the story was never produced ("A Playwright," 63). From 1920-24, three of Thompson's plays--Africannus, Cooped Up, and Caught--were produced by little theatre groups in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago, respectively. Like Spence, in 1924 Thompson was a student at the National Ethiopian Art Theatre School (Schuyler, 342).

In March 1924, Opportunity published one of Thompson's poems, "After Reading Bryant's Lines to a Waterfowl." Furthermore, the journals' February 1925 issue featured an unprecedented article, entitled "A Playwright," which promoted Thompson's playwriting career. Therefore, Opportunity readers were probably not surprised to find Thompson's name listed among the award winners for 1925. Cooped Up, a play which had already been produced, earned a honorable mention for the dramatist.

Opportunity did not publish her 1925 award winning play; however, it did print two of her short stories--"Mademoiselle 'Taise" in 1925 and "Masks" in 1927. Moreover, her husband became the journals' business manager in Feburary 1927. Nevertheless, in that same, Eloise died at the age of forty-nine.

Frank Wilson (1886-1956)

The New York native was orphaned by the age of eight. Subsequently, he worked as a "doorboy" to support himself

and enrolled in a night school course to supplement his meager education (Sisk, 5). According to Wilson:

> The first deep impression made upon me in reference to the Negro in the theatre was in 1903, when Williams and Walker appeared at the New York Theatre in In Dahomey . . . In those days I never heard of the Negro doing anything in the drama in the theatre. He hanced and he sang. If you went to a manager and told him you were an actor he'd immediately take you into a backroom, point at the floor and tell you 'Go ahead. Act.' That was your cue to dance. (7)

Wilson organized a singing quartet--the Carolina Comedy Four--which performed for twelve years in vaudeville for $15 a week. However, for a more adequate income, he obtained a job as a postman (Sisk, 5).

Despite his full-time position with the post office, Wilson continued to perform; however, he now focused his efforts to the dramatic stage. In 1914, he began to write sketches for the Lincoln Theatre. Every six weeks he staged and even acted in these plays with such titles as Race Pride, The Frisco Kid, and Happy Southern Folks.[96] According to New York World reporter Bob Sisk, "For the part, [the sketches] were serious efforts. Comedy was present, of course, but it was secondary" (5).

By the late 1910s, Wilson was a family man with a wife and son. From 1917-20, he studied acting in segregated classes at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts (Sisk,5).

[96] When the acting company at the Lincoln moved to the Lafayette Theatre in 1916, Wilson countinued to write sketches for the group until c. 1923.

He continued to write plays and perform with little black theatre groups until cast in the role of Jim Harris in All God's Chillun Got Wings at the Provincetown Theatre in 1924. This role led to others in The Emporer Jones (revival) and The Dreamy Kid before being cast as the lead in Paul Green's Pulitzer Prize winning play, In Abraham's Bosom, in 1926 (Parker, 1471).

Also in 1926, Wilson's Sugar Cain received first place honors in the Opportunity competition. The journal published the play in its June 1926 issue. According to scholar John Monroe, Sugar Cain was to have been produced on Broadway, but the project failed to materialize (134).[97]

After he won the Opportunity award, Wilson wrote at least three other plays. In 1928, Wilson's Meek Mose was only the third drama by a black to be performed on Broadway. Produced by journalist and Crisis drama judge Lester Walton, the premiere of the play was a much heralded event. The New York Times reported that many influential guests were expected to attend the opening. The guest list included New York City Mayor Jimmie Walker and the Theatre Guild's Otto Kahn and Rouben Mamoulian. According to the Times article, "If the play is successful, the organization producing Meek Mose will be incorporated under the name of

[97] The cast would have included Abbie Mitchell, Rose McClendon, Evelyn Ellis, Ida Anderson, and Barrington Carter. See Monroe, 134.

Negro Theatre-=which would be a Negro repertory company producing plays on Negro life" ("Mayor," 7). Nevertheless, the play failed to interest enough people to last beyond twenty-four performances. Six years later, a revised version of the play, Brother Mose, toured New York area theatres (Woll, 104-05).

In 1929, it was reported that Wilson's The Wall Between "was being readied by [commercial theatre] producer Jack Goldberg." However, the play did not open (Monroe, 228). Like Zora Neale Hurston, Wilson was a playwright for the Federal Theatre Project at the Lafayette Theatre. In 1936, Unit Direction John Houseman chose Wilson's Walk Together Chillun! as the unit's first major production. Houseman selected this work because:

> Wilson was one of America's best-known black actors, the creator of Porgy, a church member and a man whose voluble sincerity had won him the patronizing approval of most organized sections of the community. I chose his play for tactical reasons, fully aware of its weaknesses but equally aware of its advantages for our opening show. My assignment, as head of the project, was not, primarily, the production of masterpieces. I had been instructed to find suitable theatrical activity for the hundreds of needy men and women on our payroll and to find it quickly. Walk Together Chillun! seemed to meet this requirement. (186-87)

Chillun opened on 5 February 1936 and ran for twenty-four performances (Woll, 175). According to Houseman, "Its reception was cordial but not enthusiastic" (187). Sugar Cain was also submitted as a possible Federal Theatre Project production. It received mixed reviews from

playreaders and was never produced.

Despite his playwriting efforts, Wilson is best remembered for his acting. In 1927, he was cast in the title role of the play, Porgy. He appeared in over 850 performances of this Theatre Guild production on Broadway and in London (Parker, 1471). Through 1953, he had roles in such plays as We the People, South Pacific, Anna Lucasta, and Take a Giant Step. He also appeared in such movies as The Green Pastures and Watch on the Rhine and the acclaimed television program, Studio One. He died at the age of seventy in Jamaica, New York (Mapp, 398-99).

Summary

The biographies reveal many similarities between the lives and playwriting careers of these authors. Eight of the dramatists were born in the South,[98] five in the North,[99] and one--Spence--in the West Indies. However, at the time of the Opportunity and Crisis competitions, only three writers--Lipscomb, Matheus, and Shelton--were based in the South. Four others--Bonner, Johnson, Miller, and Richardson--lived in Washington, D.C., three more--Hurston, Spence, and Wilson--in New York, and the remaining five in other

[98] Edmonds, Hurston, Johnson, Livingston, Matheus, Richardson, Shelton, and Thompson.

[99] Bonner, Jackson, Lipscomb, Miller, and Wilson. McDonald lived in Philadelphia at the time of the literary competitions; however no information could be found indentifying his place of birth.

places across the U.S.[100]

The ages of the writers at the time that they first won an Opportunity or Crisis playwriting award ranges from age twenty-three to fifty-three.[101] The average age of the prize winners is thirty-four.

Only Richardson and Wilson did not attend college or obtain teacher's training through a normal course.[102] By the time of the literary contests, seven of the dramatists had at least earned a B.A.[103] and three others--Hurston, Livingston, and Spence--were awarded the degree after the competitions had ended. Five of the playwrights had attended Howard University.[104]

Some of the playwrights were acquainted with a few of the literary contest judges and the Crisis and Opportunity editors. While at Howard, Hurston and Miller personally knew Opportunity and Crisis judge Montgomery Gregory. Spence met Du Bois and Crisis drama judge Charles Burroughs through her association with the Harlem based Krigwa Players. The Washington, D.C based literary club, the

[100] Edmonds, Jackson, Livingston, McDonald, and Thompson in Oberlin (Ohio), Monclair (New Jersey), Greeley (Colorado), Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, respectively.

[101] The birthdates of Jackson and McDonald are not known.

[102] No information could be found concerning McDonald's educational background.

[103] Bonner, Edmonds, Jackson, Lipscomb, Matheus, Miller, and Thompson.

[104] Hurston, Jackson, Livingston, Miller, and Thompson.

"Saturday Nighters," provided opportunities for Bonner, Hurston, Johnson, Miller, and Richardson to have others critique their works. Undoubtedly, frequent visits to their meetings by Du Bois and Alain Locke gave these writers an advantage not available to other playwrighting entrants. Furthermore, Opportunity and Crisis were used to promote the playwriting careers of Thompson and Richardson, even before the first contest winners were announced.

The literary contests appear to have at least indirectly encouraged these blacks to write more plays and become more involved in the theatre. Before the competitions, only five of the playwrights had plays produced[105] and only one--Richardson--had a drama published. However, after the contests, sixty-six plays by these writers were published. If one includes published and unpublished texts, the prize winners wrote over two hundred plays of which thirty-five were full-length works.

There is evidence of at least one hundred and twenty productions of works by these dramatists. However, the actual number of productions is probably much higher since it is believed that many theatre groups performed these plays without obtaining permission from the authors.

With only a few exceptions, the authors wrote plays for black community and educational theatres. These groups

[105] Richardson, Shelton, Spence, Thompson, and Wilson.

welcomed works by black writers for they helped to alleviate a need for drama which more deftly depicted the lives of Afro-Americans. At least nine writers attempted to reach a more general audience by submitting plays to the Federal Theatre Project.[106] However, only Wilson's Walk Together Chillun! was produced.

Furthermore, after the competitions, nine of the writers served in some capacity with the black community theatre,[107] six in educational theatre,[108] and two--Hurston and Wilson--in commercial theatre. However, playwriting was never a primary source of income for any of the authors. Instead, most served as educators at some time in their lives.[109] One of the specialties of five of these teachers concerned the theatre.[110]

Undoubtedly, Edmonds and Richardson have had the greatest influence on the development of the black theatre than have the other prize winning writers combined. Nearly half of the plays ever written by the award winners were authored by Edmonds and Richardson. Edmonds edited three

[106] Edmonds, Hurston, Johnson, Lipscomb, Matheus, McDonald, Shelton, and Wilson.

[107] Bonner, Johnson, Matheus, Miller, Richardson, Shelton, Spence, Thompson, and Wilson.

[108] Edmonds, Hurston, Lipscomb, Miller, and Spence.

[109] Bonner, Edmonds, Hurston, Johnson, Lipscomb, Livingston, Matheus, Miller, Shelton, Thompson, and Spence.

[110] Edmonds, Hurston, Lipscomb, Miller, and Spence.

volumes of his plays and Richardson edited two collections of works by black dramatists and one volume of his own children's plays. Both men have also written articles on the black theatre. Moreover, Edmonds greatly affected the growth of the black educational theatre, especially in the South.

Most of the other prize winning authors are better known today for other pursuits. For example, Hurston received greater acclaim for her folklore studies, as did Wilson for acting and Miller and Johnson for poetry. Nevertheless, these dramatists also made contributions to the black theatre. These well-educated blacks attempted to fulfill a desire for more plays by Afro-Americans depicting black lifestyles, attitudes, and relationships and issues affecting this race. Their works have been published in journals and general literature and drama anthologies. Moreover, these plays were produced in black community and educational theatres across the U.S.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Opportunity and Crisis literary competitions of the late 1920s offered prizes for black dramas written by Afro-Americans. However, the two editors of these magazines held differing expectations for the playwriting division. Opportunity editor Charles Johnson wanted works which could affect the racial opinions of the day. His target audience was not blacks, but whites. It was this latter group whom he believed should be made aware of the problems faced by blacks, as well as, the contributions which Afro-Americans could make to society if given the opportunity. In contrast, Crisis editor W.E.B. Du Bois encouraged the writing of plays by blacks for their own race. While he championed black drama by whites on the Broadway stage, Du Bois did not believe that a black author could be successful in the commercial theatre and still write a play true to black life. The Crisis editor contended that black drama by Afro-Americans should be written and performed by black little theatre groups.

Undoubtedly, Du Bois's objectives for the playwriting division were more reasonable than those held by Johnson. The commercial theatre, where one expects whites to frequent,

was still not hospitable to blacks. Before the literary competitions, only one of the award winning playwrights had written a drama which was performed on Broadway. However, this play along with two others on the bill failed to attract enough audience members to make the production commercially successful. Nevertheless, most of the prize winning dramatists had experience with the black community and educational theatre. Thus, at the time of the contests, black authors were better able to write for black little theatre groups than for the commercial theatre, because they were much more familiar with the former type's plays, structure, resources, and audience.

Accordingly, the prize winning dramatist wrote plays of greater interest to black audiences tastes and needs than those of whites. While some of these award winning plays were published in anthologies and journals with a predominately white readership, there is no evidence of the production of any of these works by predmoniately white theatre groups. In contrast, eleven of the award winning plays were produced by black community and educational orgainizations across the U.S.

The award winning plays concerned subjects ranging from racial injustice to domestic issues which were familiar to Afro-Americans. Most of the prize winners required little technical expertise to produce. Furthermore, some utilized song, music and dance which probably appealed to the black audience of the day who were more used to the

conventions of the black musical theatre.

After the competitions, playwriting remained only an avocation for the award winning dramatists. Two writers, Edmonds and Richardson, greatly affected the development of the black theatre. Others achieved much greater fame by pursuing other interests. However, these award winning authors contributed plays to black dramatic literature for use for production by black theatre groups and study by those who have access to these works in libraries, journals, and general literature and drama anthologies.

Opportunity and Crisis published seven of the prize winning plays and probably encouraged these dramatists to write more plays and become more involved in the theatre. The journals' awards were certainly not taken lightly by the prize winning writers. Most of these authors' biographies mention the Opportunity and Crisis awards even among other achievements which may seem far more noteworthy.

This research has revealed areas for further publication and study. Only four of the plays are in anthologies currently in print.[111] Another anthology should be compiled and published which includes other prize winners and selected

[111] Plays in texts currently in print: The Church Fight, 'Cruiter, and The Purple Flower in James Hatch, ed., Black Theater USA (New York: Free Press, 1974) and Plumes in Judith Barlow, ed., Plays by American Women, 1900-1930 (New York: Applause, 1985).

non-award winning works by these authors. This collection would make these plays more accessible to the general public.

Furthermore, histories of the black theatre have focused primarily on New York theatrical activities. However, this dissertation has shown that only three of the fifteen playwrights were based in New York. The other dramatists lived in other cities across the U.S., most importantly, Washington, D.C. which appears to be more influential in the development of early black drama than New York. Future studies should more fully investigate theatrical activities of blacks in major metropolitan areas outside of New York and test the latter claim of Washington, D.C.'s affect on black drama of the period. This research may better reveal the extent to which the works of the prize winning authors were utilized throughout the U.S. It may also make known other black wirters who, within their own regions of the country, had a greater impact on black drama than the award winning playwrights.

These are just a few examples of areas still worthy of investigation. Black theatre scholarship has many other gaps which should be eliminated before a more accurate and complete history of this theatre can be written. Ultimately, this information can be mainstreamed into American theatre history texts to reveal black theatre's affect on and contributions to the American theatre, in general.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PLAYS AND SELECTED ARTICLES BY OPPORTUNITY AND CRISIS PRIZE WINNING PLAYWRIGHTS

The bibliography includes a list of published and unpublished plays by the fifteen award winning dramatists. Script sources and selected theatre articles by the playwrights are noted, as well as, productions cited by various reference books and journals discovered during the course of research for this dissertation. An asterisk denotes full-length works, otherwise, all other plays are one acts. The following is a key to abbreviations and books cited in this section.

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HURST COL. Hurston Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts. U of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL.

JAMES. James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of American Literature. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Yale University, New Haven, CT.

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MOOR. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Library, Washington, D.C.

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Marita Bonner

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Award:
1927 Crisis contest--First Prize
Script Source:
Crisis 36 (Oct 1929) 335-36, 352.

The Pot Maker (1927)
Script Source:
Opportunity 2 (Feb 1927) 43-46.

The Purple Flower (1927)
Award:
1927 Crisis contest--First Prize
Script Source:
Crisis 35 (Jan 1928) 9-11, 28, 30.
Hatch.

Randolph Edmonds

Plays:

Bad Man (1932)
Script Source:
Brown.
Edmonds, Six Plays.
Hatch.
Production:
Morgan Players of Baltimore in tournament of the Negro Intercollegiate Dramatic Association, 1932 (Hicklin, 518).

Bleeding Hearts (1927)
Award:
1927 Opportunity contest--Honorable Mention

Script Source:
Edmonds, Six Plays.
Production:
Drama festival, Columbus, Ohio--April 1935 (Hicklin, 518).

The Call of Jubah (1935)

Career of College (1956)

Christmas Gift (1923)

Climbing Jacob's Ladder (1967)

Denmark Vesey (1929)

The Devil's Price* (1930)
Script Source:
Edmonds, Shades and Shadows.

Doom (1924)

Down in the Everglades (1964)

EAMU's Objective IV

Earth and Stars (1946; rev. in 1963 as a full-length play)
Production:
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Script Source:
Turner.

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Script Source:
Edmonds, Shades and Shadows.

For Fatherlands (1934)

G. I. Rhapsody* (with Wilbur Strickland; 1943)
Production:
Special Service Division, Fort Huachuca, Arizona--1943 (Hatch, 82).

Gangsters Over Harlem (1939)
Script Source:
Edmonds, Land of Cotton.
Production:
Dillard University Player's Guild, New Orleans, 1939 (Hicklin, 519).

* Full-length play

Hewers of Wood (1930)
Script Source:
Edmonds, Shades and Shadows.

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Script Source:
Edmonds, Land of Cotton.
Production:
Dillard University Player's Guild, New Orleans, 1939 (Gicklin, 519).

The Highwayman (1925)

Illicit Love* (1926)
Award:
1926 Crisis contest--Honorable Mention

Job Hunting (1922)

The Land of Cotton* (1941)
Script Source:
Edmonds, Land of Cotton.
Production:
People's Community Theatre of New Orleans, Longshoreman's Hall, 20-21 March 1941 (Hicklin, 519).

The Man of God* (1931)

A Merchant in Dixie (1923)

Nat Turner (1934)
Script Source:
Edmonds, Six Plays.
Richardson, Negro History.
Production:
Morgan Players of Baltimore in tournament of the Negro Intercollegiate Dramatic Association, Petersburg, VA (Hicklin, 519).
Drama festival in Columbus, Ohio--April 1935 (Hicklin, 519).

The New Window (1934)
Script Source:
Edmonds, Six Plays.

Old Man Pete (1934; a rev. version of Peter Stith)
Script Source:
Dreer.
Edmonds, Six Plays.

One Side of Harlem* (1928)

The Outer Room (1935)

Peter Stith (1926; rev. as Old Man Pete)
Award:
1926 Crisis contest--Honorable Mention
Production:
Dunbar Forum, Oberlin College, 1927 (Hicklin, 520).

The Phantom Treasure (1930)
Script Source:
Edmonds, Shades and Shadows.

Prometheus and the Atom* (1955)
Production:
Florida A&M University Players, Tallahassee, 1955 (Hatch, 80).

Rocky Roads* (1926)

Shades and Shadows (1930)
Script Source:
Edmonds, Shades and Shadows.

The Shadow Across the Path (1943)

The Shape of Wars to Come (1943)

Sharecroppers (1937)
Production:
Civic Theatre Guild of the Spring Street YMCA, Ogden Theatre, Columbus, Ohio--29 May 1937 (Hicklin, 520).

Silas Brown (1927)
Script Source:
Edmonds, Land of Cotton.
Production:
Dunbar Forum, Oberlin College, 5 March 1927 (Hicklin, 520).

Simon in Cyrene* (1939)
Production:
Dillard University Players, New Orleans, 1943 (Hatch, 81).

Sirlock Bones (1928)
Production:
Morgan Players of Baltimore, Apollo Theatre, New York, 1928 (Hatch, 81).

Stock Exchange* (1927)

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Production:
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The Tribal Chief (1930)
Script Source:
Edmonds, Shades and Shadows.

A Virginia Politician (1927)

Whatever the Battle Be* (1947)
Production:
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Wives and Blues* (1938)

Yellow Death
Script Source:
Edmonds, Land of Cotton.
Production:
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Plays:
Color Struck (1925; rev. in 1926--same title)
Award:
1925 Opportunity contest--Second Prize
Color Struck (rev. version; 1926)
Script Source:
Fire!! 1.1 (1926) 7-14.
Award:
1926 Opportunity contest--Honorable Mention

Fast and Furious* (1931; one of fifteen authors)
Production:
Opened 15 Sept 1931 on Broadway at the New Yorker Theatre (Woll, 62).

The Fiery Chariot (1933)
Script Source:
Typescript. HURST COL.

The First One (1926)
Award:
1926 Opportunity contest--Honorable Mention
Script Source:
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From Sun to Sun* (1933; a rev. version of Great Day)
Production:
Staged by Hurston, the show toured Florida in 1933 (Hemenway, 184-85).

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Production:
Staged by Hurston at the John Golden Theater, New York, 10 Jan 1932 (Hemenway, 182).
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Script Source:
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Script Source:
Typescript. JAMES.
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Singing Steel* (1934; rev. version of Great Day)
Production:
Staged by Hurston at the Chicago South Parkway YMCA, 23-24 Nov 1934 (Hemenway, 204-05).

Spears (1925)
Award:
1925 Opportunity contest--Honorable Mention

William Jackson

Plays:

Four Eleven (1927)
Award:
1927 Opportunity contest--Third Prize
Production:
Bank Street Players at the Robert Treat School in Newark, NJ--29 April 1927 (Monroe, 232-33).

Burning the Mortgage (1931)
Production:
Harlem Players, New York--2, 6, 9 Feb 1931 (Hicklin, 528).

Georgia Douglas Johnson

Plays:

And Still They Passed

A Bill to Be Passed

Blue Blood (1926)
Award:
1926 Opportunity contest--Honorable Mention
Script Source:
Shay.

Production:
Krigwa Players, Harlem--20, 25, 27 April 1927 (Hicklin, 528).
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Blue Eyed Black Boy

Camel Legs

Frederick Douglas (1935)
Script Source:
Richardson, Negro History.

Heritage

Jungle Love

Little Blue Pigeon

Midnight and Dawn

Miss Bliss

Money Wagon

The New Day

One Cross Enough

Plumes (1927)
Award:
1927 Opportunity contest--First Prize
Script Source:
Barlow.
Calverton.
Johnson, Georgia.
Locke, Plays.
Opportunity 5 (July 1927) 200-01, 217-18.
Peolow.
Serna.
Productions:
Negro Experimental Theatre, Inc. of Harlem at the Cubbe Theatre, Chicago, 1928 (Hicklin, 529).
Negro Experimental Theatre, Harlem, 1929 (Kellner, 263).

Popoplikahu (with Bruce Negent; 1926)

Red Shoes

Safe
Script Source:
Typescript. FTP.

Scapegoat

The Starting Point
Script Source:
Typescript. JAMES.

Sue Bailey

A Sunday Morning in the South: With Negro Church Background (1925)
Script Source:
Hatch.

A Sunday Morning in the South: With White Church Background

Well-Diggers

William and Ellen Craft (1935)
Script Source:
Richardson, Negro History.

George Dewey Lipscomb

Plays:
Frances (1925)
Award:
1925 Opportunity contest--First Prize
Script Source:
Opportunity 3 (May 1925) 148-53.

Daniel
Script Source:
Typescript. SCHOM.

Myrtle Smith Livingston

Plays:
For Unborn Children (1925)
Award:
1925 Crisis Contest--Third Prize
Script Source:
Crisis 32 (July 1926) 122-25.
Hatch.

John Matheus

Plays:
Black Damp (1929)
Script Source:
Carolina Magazine 59 (April 1929) 26-34.

'Cruiter (1926)
Award:
1926 Opportunity contest--Second Prize
Script Sources:
Calverton.
Cromwell.
Hatch.
Locke, Plays.
Miller, Ruth.

Ouanga* (Libretto; music by Clarence Cameron; 1932)
Script Source:
Matheus.
Production:
H.T. Burleigh Music Association, Central High School, South Bend. IN--10-11 June 1949 (Kellner, 274).
Dra-Mu (a black opera company), Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 1950 (Kellner, 274).

Tambour (1929)
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.
Production:
Allied Art Players, Boston, Oct 1929 (Hatch, 159).

Ti Yette (1928)
Script Source:
Richardson, Plays and Pageants.
Production:
Krigwa Players, Garnet-Patterson Aud., Washington, D.C.--11 Jan 1928 (Program. MAY).

Articles:
"Lady Windemere's Fan," "Dramatic Personae." Crisis 34 (Marcy 1927) 11-12.

Warren McDonald

Plays:
Blood (1926)
Award:
1926 Opportunity contest--Third Prize

Humble Instrument (1925)
Award:
1925 Opportunity contest--Second Prize

May Miller

Plays:
The Bog Guide (1925)
Award:
1925 Opportunity contest--Third Prize
Script Source:
Typescript. MAY.

Christophe's Daughters (1935)
Script Source:
Richardson, Negro History.

The Cuss'd Thing (1926)
Award:
1926 Opportunity contest--Honorable Mention

Freedom's Children on the March (1943)
Production:
Students at Frederick Douglass High School, Commencement, Baltimore, June 1943 (Hatch, 163).

Graven Images (1930)
Script Source:
Hatch.
Richardson, Plays and Pageants.

Harriet Tubman (1935)
Script Source:
Richardson, Negro History.
Production:
Dillard University Players, New Orleans--1935-36 season (Program. MAY).

Nails and Thorns (1933)
Award:
1933 Southern University Contest--Third Prize
Script Source:
Typescript. MAY.

Pandora's Box (1914)
Script Source:
Act I. School Progress for Teachers, Parents and Pupils. July 1914.
Act II. School Progress for Teachers, Parents and Pupils. January 1915.

Riding the Goat (1928)
Script Source:
Richardson, Plays and Pageants.
Productions:
St. Augustine College Players of Raleigh, North Carolina at the Eighth Annual Festival of the Carolian Dramatic Association, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill--28 March 1928 (Program. MAY).
St. Augustine College Players, Commencement, St. Augustine College, Raleigh, NC--25 May 1931 (Program. MAY).
Krigwa Players, Albert Aud., Baltimore--16 Feb 1932 (Program. MAY).

Samory (1935)
Script Source:
Richardson, Negro History.

Scratches (1929)
Script Source:
Carolina Magazine 59 (April 1929) 36-44.

Sojourner Truth (1035)
Script Source:
Richardson, Negro History.

Stragglers in the Dust
Script Source:
Typescript. MAY.

Within the Shadow (1920)
Award:
1920 Howard University Drama Award--First Prize
Production:
Students at Howard University, Commencement, Washington, D.C., 1920 (Hatch, 164).

Willis Richardson

Plays:
The Amateur Prostitute*
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

Antonio Maceo (1935)
Script Source:
Richardson, Negro History.

Attucks the Martyr (1935)
Script Source:
Richardson, Negro History.

The Black Horseman (1930)
Script Source:
Richardson, Plays and Pageants.
Production:
Shaw Jr. High School, 6 June 1931 (Hicklin, 536).
Playground Athletic League, Baltimore, 12 Oct 1931 (Hicklin, 536).

Bold Lover
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.
The Bootblack Lover* (1926)
Award:
1926 Crisis contest--First Prize
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

The Broken Banjo (1925; rev. in 1965 as a full-length play)
Award:
1925 Crisis contest--First Prize
Script Source:
Barksdale.
Cromwell.
Locke, Plays.
Part 1. Crisis 31 (Feb 1926) 167-71.
Part 2. Crisis 31 (March 1926) 225-28.
Production:
Krigwa Players, 135th Street Library, Harlem--3, 10, 17 May 1926 (Du Bois, 136).
Krigwa Players, Garnet-Patterson Aud., Washington, D.C.--11 Jan 1928 (Program. MAY).
Krigwa Players, Hampton Institute, Hampton, VA--24 March 1930 (Hicklin, 536).
Dixwell House Players, Yale University Theatre--27 March 1928 (Hicklin, 536).

Clark University, Atlanta--10 April 1930 (Hicklin, 536).
Shaw University Players, Raleigh, NC--12 Oct 1931 (Hicklin, 536).
Bishop College, Marshall, TX--14 Jan 1932 (Hicklin, 536).
Dramatic Club, Los Angeles--8 March 1933 (Hicklin, 536).
Florida A&M University, Tallahassee--27 March 1933 (Hicklin, 536).
St. Phillip's Jr. College, San Antonio--16 March 1934 (Hicklin, 536).
Atlanta University, Summer 1934 (Hicklin, 155).

The Broken Banjo* (1965; rev. version of one act play of the same title)
Scrip Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL..

The Brown Boy
Script Source:
Typescript. SCHOM.

Chasm (with E.C. Williams)
Production:
Krigwa Players, Dunbar High School, Washington, D.C.--15 Feb nyg. (Program. MAY).

The Chip Woman's Fortune (1923; rev. in the same year as a full-length play)
Script Source:
Patterson.
Shay.
Turner.
Production:
Ethiopian Art Players, Chicago--29 Jan 1923 (Hicklin, 536).
Ethiopian Art Players, Washington, D.C.--23 April 1923 (Hicklin, 536).
Ethiopian Art Players, Frazee Theatre on Broadway--opened 7 May 1923 (Hicklin, 536).
Dixwell House Players, New Haven, 1927 (Hicklin, 536).
Morgan Players, Morgan College, Baltimore--18 April 1930 ("Morgan")

The Chip Woman's Fortune* (1923; rev. version of one act play of the same title.

The Compromise
Script Source:
Locke, New Negro.
Ujsag (Vasarnap, Hungary) 5 April 1931.
Production:
Gilpin Players, Cleveland--25 Feb 1925 (Hatch, 191).
Krigwa Players, 135th Street Library, Harlem--3, 10, and 17 May 1926 (Du Bois, 136).
Krigwa Players, Washington, D.C.--27 Jan 1932 (Hicklen, 536).
Howard University Players, Washington, D.C.--8 April 1936 (Hicklin, 536).

Krigwa Players, Washington, D.C.--15 Feb nyg. (Program. MAY).

The Curse of the Shell Road Witch
Script Source:
Typescript. SCHOM.

The Dark Haven
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

The Deacon's Awakening (1920)
Script Source:
Crisis 21 (Nov 1920) 10-15.
Production:
St. Paul Players, St. Paul, MN, 1921 (Hatch, 192).

The Dragon's Tooth (1956)
Script Source:
Richardson, King's Dilemma.

The Elder Duman (1935)
Script Source:
Richardson, Negro History.

Fall of the Conjurer (1925)
Award:
1925 Opportunity contest--Honorable Mention.

Family Discord*
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

The Flight of the Natives (1927; rev. in 1963 as a full-length play)
Script Source:
Hatch.
Locke, Plays.
Production:
Krigwa Players, Washington, D.C.--7 May 1927 (Peterson, 122).
Krigwa Players, Armstrong Aud., Washington, D.C.--11 Feb 1928 (Program. MAY).
Krigwa Players, Douglass High School Auditorium, Baltimore--2 May 1930 (Williams, 132).

The Flight of the Natives* (1963; rev. version of one act play of the same title)
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

The Gypsy's Finger Ring (1956)
Script Source:
Richardson, King's Dilemma.

Hope of the Lowly*
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

The House of Sham (1930)
Script Source:
Dreer.
Richardson, Plays and Pageants.
Production:
Performed by "many high schools during the thirties" (Hicklin, 537).

The Idle Head (1929)
Script Source:
Carolina Magazine 59 (April 1929) 16-25.
Hatch.

Imp of the Devil
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

In Menelik's Court (1935)
Script Source:
Richardson, Negro History.

The Jail Bird
Script Source:
Typescript. SCHOM.

Joy Rider*
Script Source:
Typescript. SCHOM..

The King's Dilemma (1926)
Award:
Public School Prize Plan, Washington, D.C.--21 May 1926 (Hicklin, 537).
Script Source:
Richardson, Plays and Pageants.

The Man of Magic (1956)
Script Source:
Richardson's, King's Dilemma.

The Man Who Married A Young Wife
Script Source:
Typescript. SCHOM.

Miss of Mrs. (1941)
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.
Production:
Bureau of Engraving Dramatic Club, Washington, D.C.--5 May 1941 (Hicklin, 537).

Mortgaged (1923)
Script Source:
Cromwell.
Peplow.
Production:
Howard University Players, Washington, D.C.--29 March 1924 (Hicklin, 537).
Dunbar Dramatic Club, drama tournament, Plainfield, NJ, May 1925 (Hicklin, 537).
Krigwa Players, Armstrong Aud., Washington, D.C.--7 May 1927 (Program. MAY).
Morgan Players, Morgan College, Baltimore--8 April 1930 ("Morgan")
Bishop College, Marshall, TX--14 Jan 1932 (Hicklin, 537).
Florida A&M University, Tallahassee--27 April 1933 (Hicklin, 537).
Douglass High School Players, Baltimore--9 Feb 1934 (Hicklin, 537).

Near Calvary (1935)
Script Source:
Richardson, King's Dilemma.
---, Negro History.

The New Lodgers (c. 1926)

The New Santa Claus (1956)
Script Source:
Richardson, King's Dilemma.

The Nude Siren
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

The Peacock's Feathers (1928)
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.
Typescript. SCHOM.
Production:
Krigwa Players, Garnet-Patterson Aud., Washington, D.C.--11 Jan 1928 (Program. MAY).

A Pillar of the Church
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

Rooms for Rent (1926)
Script Source:
Typescript. SCHOM.
Production:
Negro Art Players, Harlem, Dec 1926 (Peterson, 121).

A Stranger from Beyond
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

Victims
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

The Visiting Lady* (1967)
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

The Wine Sellers*
Script Source:
Typescript. HAT-BIL.

Articles:

"Characters." Opportunity 3 (June 1925) 183.

"The Hope of Negro Drama." Crisis 19 (Nov 1919) 338-39.

"The Negro and Stage." Opportunity 2 (Oct 1924) 310.

"The Negro Audience." Opportunity 3 (April) 123.

"Propaganda in the Theatre." Messenger 6 (Nov 1924) 342-43.

"The Unpleasant Play." Opportunity 3 (Sept 1925) 282.

Ruth Gaines Shelton

Plays:
Aunt Hagar's Children

The Church Fight (1925)
Award:
1925 Crisis contest--Second Prize
Script Source:
Crisis 32 (May 1926) 17-21.
Hatch.
Production:
Krigwa Players, 135th Street Library, Harlem--3, 10 and 17 May 1926 (Du Bois, 136).
Black Literature Program--"A Celebration of Black Women Writers." Performed by students at Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI--11-13 Feb 1985.

The Church Mouse

Gena, the Lost Child

Lord Earlington's Broken Vow

Mr. Church

Parson Dewdrop's Bride

Eulalie Spence

Plays:
Being Forty (1924)
Production:
National Ethiopian Art Players, Lafayette Theatre, Harlem--15 Oct 1924 (Monroe, 222).

Bank Street Players of the Robert Treat School, Newark, NJ--29 April 1927 (Monroe, 232-33).

Brothers and Sisters of the Church Council (c. 1920)

La Divina Pastora (1929)
Production:
Lighthouse Players, New York Association for the Blind, Booth Theatre, New York, March 1929 (Hicklin, 172).

The Episode (1928)
Script Source:
The Archive 40.7 (1928) 3-8, 35-36, 38, 40.

Fool's Errand (1927)
Award:
Samuel French Prize for original playwriting, National Little Theatre Tournament, New York, 1927.
Script Source:
Spence.
Production:
Krigwa Players, National Little Theatre Tournament, New York--7 May 1927 (Monroe, 226).

Foreign Mail (1926)
Award:
1926 Crisis contest--Second Prize
Production:
Krigwa Players, International House, Crisis Literary Awards Dinner, New York--25 Oct 1926 ("Krigwa," 71).
Krigwa Players, 135th Street Library, Harlem--17, 19 and 24 Jan 1927 ("Dramatis," 12).
Krigwa Players, Armstrong Aud., Washington, D.C.--7 May 1927 (Program. MAY).

Help Wanted (1929)
Script Source:
Saturday Evening Quill (April 1929).

Her (1927)
Production:
Krigwa Players, 135th Street Library, Harlem--17, 19, and 24 Jan 1927 ("Dramatis," 12).

Hot Stuff (1927)
Award:
1927 Crisis contest--Third Prize

The Hunch (1927)
Award:
1927 Opportunitu contest--Second Prize
Script Source:
Carolina Magazine 57 (May 1927) 21-30.
Production:
Krigwa Players, Armstrong Aud., Washington, D.C.--11 Feb 1928 (Program. MAY).

The Starter (1927)
Award:
1927 Opportunity contest--Third Prize
Script Source:
Locke, Plays

The Undertow (1927)
Script Source:
Carolina Magazine 59 (April 1929) 5-15.

The Whipping* (1932)

Articles:

"A Criticism of the Negro Drama." Opportunity 6 (June 1928) 180.

"Negro Art Players in Harlem." Opportunity 6 (Dec 1928) 381.

Eloise Bibb Thompson

Plays:
Africannus (1922)
Production:
Frank Egan Dramatic School, Grand Theatre, Los Angeles, 1922 ("Playwright," 63).

Caught (1920)
Production:
The Playcrafters, Gamut Club, Los Angeles, 1920 ("Playwright," 63).

Cooped Up (1924)
Award:
1925 Opportunity Contest--Honorable Mention
Production:
National Ethiopian Art Players, Lafayette Theatre, Harlem--15 Oct 1924 (Schuyler, 342).
Ethiopian Art Theatre, Chicago, 1925 (Hicklin, 196).
Intercollegiate Association, Imperial Elks Aud., Harlem--5 May 1926 (Monroe, 230-31).
New Negro Art Theatre, Lincoln Theatre, Harlem, Nov 1928 (Monroe, 192-93).

A Friend of Democracy (1920)

Frank Wilson

Plays:
Back Home Again (c. 1914-23)
Production:
Performed at the Lincoln or Lafayette Theatres, c. 1914-23 (Sisk, 5).

Brother Mose* (rev. version of Meek Mose; 1934)
Script Source:
Typescript. FTP.
Production:
Toured New york area theathres beginning 25 July 1934 (Belcher, 229).

Color Worship (1926)
Production:
Aldridge Players, 135th Street Library, Harlem--12 July 1926 (Monroe, 231).

Colored Americans (c. 1914-23)
Production:
Performed at the Lincoln or Lafayette Theatres, c. 1914-23 (Sisk, 5).

Confidence (1920)
Production:
Players' Guild, YMCA, Harlem--3 Jan 1920 (Monroe, 158).
Lafayette Theatre, Harlem--22 Nov 1920 (Monroe, 220).
Acme Players, Lafayette Theatre, Harlem--12 May 1922 (Monroe, 161).

The Flash (c. 1914-23)
Production:
Performed at the Lincoln or Lafayette Theatres, c. 1914-23 (Sisk, 5).

Flies (1926)
Production:
Aldridge Players, 135th Street Library, Harlem--12 July 1926 (Monroe, 231).

The Frisco Kid (c. 1914-23)
Production:
Performed at the Lincoln or Lafayette Theatres, c. 1914-23 (Sisk, 5).

The Good Sister Jones (c. 1914-23)
Performed at the Lincoln or Lafayette Theatres, c. 1914-23 (Sisk, 5).

Happy Southern Folks (c. 1914-23)
Production:
Performed at the Lincoln or Lafayette Theatres, c. 1914-23 (Sisk, 5).

The Heartbreaker (1921)
Production:
Lafayette Theatre, Harlem--10 Jan 1921 (Monroe, 220).
Acme Players, YMCA, Harlem--25 May 1923 (Monroe, 163-64).

Meek Mose* (1928; rev. in 1934 as Brother Mose)
Production:
Princess Theatre on Broadway, opened 6 Feb 1928 (Woll, 104).

Pa Williams' Gal (1923)
Production:
Lafayette Theatre, Harlem--10 Sept 1923 (Monroe, 222).

The Prison Life (c. 1914-23)
Production:
Performed at the Lincoln or Lafayette Theatres, c. 1914-23 (Sisk, 5).

Race Pride (c. 1914-23)
Production:
Performed at the Lincoln or Lafayette Theatres, c. 1914-23 (Sisk, 5).

Roxanna (c. 1914-23)
Production:
Performed at the Lincoln or Lafayette Theatres, c. 1914-23 (Sisk, 5).

Sugar Cain (1926; rev. in 1927 as Sugar Cane)
Award:
1926 Opportunity contest--First Prize
Script Source:
Opportunity 4 (June 1926) 181-84, 201-03.
Production:
Aldridge Players, 135th Street Library, Harlem--12 July 1926 (Monroe, 231).

Sugar Cane (rev. version of Sugar Cain; 1927)
Script Source:
Locke, Plays.

A Train North (1923)
Production:
Acme Players, YMCA, Harlem--25 May 1923 (Monroe, 163-64).

Walk Together Chillun!* (1936)
Script Source:
Typescript. FTP.
Typescript. PAL.
Production:
Federal Theatre Project, Lafayette Theatre, Harlem--opened 5 Feb 1936 (Houseman, 187).

The Wall Between* (c. 1929)

Articles:

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